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**SPORTS EVENT MANAGEMENT: The Promotion of Bhutan International  
Marathon and Revenue Generation for the Bhutan Olympic Committee.**

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## Abstract

The Bhutan International Marathon (BIM) was established in 2011 by the Bhutan Olympic Committee (BOC) with an a vision: to position Bhutan as a prominent destination for sports and cultural exploration and to promote a running culture. The event was conceived as a platform to showcase Bhutan's stunning landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and traditional way of life to an international audience through marathon running. The goal was to promote sustainable tourism, foster cultural exchange, and enhance Bhutan's global profile. Since its inception, the BIM has attracted participants from various countries and has helped highlight Bhutan's natural beauty and cultural vibrancy.

However, despite its promising beginnings, the BIM has not yet realized its full potential as a major sports tourism driver. Several challenges have limited its growth and visibility. The Bhutan Olympic Committee, although dedicated, has struggled with marketing and promotion, logistics, and establishing international partnerships. These hurdles have prevented the event from gaining the widespread recognition needed to become a significant tourism attraction. Consequently, the marathon has not generated the expected revenue for the BOC or contributed substantially to Bhutan's tourism industry.

This research paper explores the potential of the Bhutan International Marathon as a catalyst for sports tourism in Bhutan. With strategic planning, targeted marketing, and global partnerships, the BIM can evolve into a major event that attracts thousands of international runners, adventure seekers, and cultural enthusiasts. Such growth could boost Bhutan's economy through increased tourism spending, employment, and infrastructure development, ultimately generating sustainable revenue for the country.

One of the key opportunities lies in leveraging Bhutan's unique appeal as a destination offering adventure, spirituality, and cultural richness. The marathon's scenic routes—passing through lush valleys, ancient monasteries, and traditional villages—are a compelling attraction. By promoting these features more effectively through digital marketing, international sports organizations, and tourism collaborations, Bhutan can significantly elevate the event's profile. Improving infrastructure—such as transportation, accommodation, and logistical support—will also make participation more accessible and appealing for international runners.

Furthermore, forming strategic alliances with global marathon organizations, sports tourism agencies, and fitness brands can enhance the event's credibility and reach. Engaging with international media and leveraging social media platforms can broaden visibility and attract a diverse audience. Additionally, integrating the BIM into global sporting calendars will help position it as a must-attend event for marathon enthusiasts worldwide.

The potential economic benefits are substantial. Increased international participation leads to higher revenue generation for the BOC, increase spending on hotels, restaurants, transportation, and local cultural sites. A well-promoted marathon can also generate media exposure for Bhutan, attracting tourists beyond just runners and extending the tourism season. This diversification can help reduce Bhutan's reliance on traditional cultural tourism and promote sustainable, high-value tourism.

In conclusion, while the BIM faces challenges, there remains significant potential for it to become a major sports tourism destination. Through strategic marketing, infrastructure improvements, international collaboration, and cultural promotion, the marathon can be transformed into a sustainable event that benefits Bhutan's economy and enhances its global image. This research advocates for a concerted effort to unlock the full potential of the BIM, making it a key driver of economic growth with increase revenue generation for the BOC, cultural exchange, and sustainable tourism in Bhutan.

## Résumé

Le Marathon International du Bhoutan (BIM) a été créé en 2011 par le Comité Olympique du Bhoutan (BOC) avec une vision : positionner le Bhoutan comme une destination de premier plan pour le sport et l'exploration culturelle, tout en promouvant une culture de la course à pied. L'événement a été conçu comme une plateforme pour mettre en valeur les paysages spectaculaires du Bhoutan, son riche patrimoine culturel et son mode de vie traditionnel auprès d'un public international à travers la course de marathon. L'objectif était de promouvoir un tourisme durable, de favoriser les échanges culturels et de renforcer le profil international du Bhoutan. Depuis sa création, le BIM a attiré des participants de divers pays et a contribué à mettre en lumière la beauté naturelle et la richesse culturelle du Bhoutan.

Cependant, malgré des débuts prometteurs, le BIM n'a pas encore atteint son plein potentiel en tant que moteur du tourisme sportif. Plusieurs défis ont limité sa croissance et sa visibilité. Le Comité Olympique du Bhoutan, bien que dévoué, a rencontré des difficultés en matière de marketing, de logistique et de partenariats internationaux. Ces obstacles ont empêché l'événement de bénéficier de la reconnaissance nécessaire pour devenir une attraction touristique majeure. Par conséquent, le marathon n'a pas généré les revenus escomptés pour le BOC, ni contribué de manière significative à l'industrie touristique du Bhoutan. Ce travail de recherche explore le potentiel du Marathon International du Bhoutan comme catalyseur du tourisme sportif dans le pays. Avec une planification stratégique, un marketing ciblé et des partenariats mondiaux, le BIM peut évoluer en un événement majeur attirant des milliers de coureurs internationaux, d'amateurs d'aventure et de passionnés de culture. Une telle croissance pourrait stimuler l'économie du Bhoutan grâce à une augmentation des dépenses touristiques, à la création d'emplois et au développement des infrastructures, générant ainsi des revenus durables pour le pays.

Une des principales opportunités réside dans le fait de tirer parti de l'attrait unique du Bhoutan en tant que destination offrant aventure, spiritualité et richesse culturelle. Les parcours pittoresques du marathon—traversant des vallées luxuriantes, des monastères anciens et des villages traditionnels—constituent une attraction forte. En promouvant ces éléments plus efficacement à travers le marketing numérique, les organisations sportives internationales et les collaborations touristiques, le Bhoutan peut considérablement rehausser le profil de l'événement. L'amélioration des infrastructures—telles que le transport, l'hébergement et le soutien logistique—rendrait également la participation plus accessible et attrayante pour les coureurs internationaux.

De plus, la formation d'alliances stratégiques avec des organisations de marathons internationaux, des agences de tourisme sportif et des marques de fitness peut renforcer la crédibilité et la portée de l'événement. S'engager avec les médias internationaux et utiliser les plateformes de réseaux sociaux peut élargir la visibilité et attirer un public diversifié. Par ailleurs, intégrer le BIM dans les calendriers sportifs mondiaux contribuera à en faire un événement incontournable pour les amateurs de marathon du monde entier.

Les bénéfices économiques potentiels sont considérables. Une participation internationale accrue se traduit par une augmentation des revenus pour le BOC, une hausse des dépenses dans les hôtels, les restaurants, les transports et les sites culturels locaux. Un marathon bien promu peut également générer une couverture médiatique importante pour le Bhoutan, attirant des touristes au-delà des seuls coureurs et prolongeant la saison touristique. Cette diversification peut contribuer à réduire la dépendance du Bhoutan au tourisme culturel traditionnel et à promouvoir un tourisme durable et de grande valeur.

En conclusion, bien que le BIM fasse face à plusieurs défis, il existe un potentiel significatif pour en faire une destination majeure de tourisme sportif. Grâce à un marketing stratégique, des améliorations d'infrastructure, une collaboration internationale et une mise en valeur culturelle, le marathon peut devenir un événement durable, bénéfique pour l'économie bhoutanaise et améliorant l'image du pays à l'échelle mondiale. Cette recherche plaide pour un effort concerté visant à libérer le plein potentiel du BIM, en le transformant en un moteur clé de croissance économique, de génération de revenus pour le BOC, d'échange culturel et de tourisme durable au Bhoutan.

## Acronyms

BIM: Bhutan International Marathon  
NOC: National Bhutan Olympic Committee  
IOC: International Olympic Committee  
BOC: Bhutan Olympic Committee  
DOT: Department of Tourism  
GNH: Gross National Happiness  
UNFCCC: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1. Background

The Bhutan International Marathon (BIM) is organized by Bhutan Olympic Committee with an a vision: to position Bhutan as a prominent destination for sports (Tourism) and cultural exploration and to promote a running culture. Since its inception in 2011 the BIM has emerged as a unique platform that blends athletics with Bhutan's rich cultural and natural heritage. However, since the inception the BOC has not be able to develop the event to a full-scale international event and thus failing to reap the benefits it comes with sports tourism.

This thesis explores how the BIM can be strategically utilized to promote sports tourism while generating sustainable revenue for the Bhutan Olympic Committee (BOC).

By leveraging Bhutan's global reputation as a hub for Gross National Happiness (GNH) and eco-conscious tourism, the research identifies opportunities for enhancing the marathon's appeal to international audiences, fostering local participation, and strengthening Bhutan's sports tourism.

Bhutan, known for its stunning landscapes and unique approach to gross national happiness, presents an ideal backdrop for hosting an international marathon. This event aims to attract participants from around the world, showcasing Bhutan's natural beauty while encouraging local involvement in healthy sporting practices. By analyzing the impact of such an event, this thesis will explore how the marathon can act as a catalyst for change, inspiring citizens to adopt an active lifestyle and enhancing public awareness of the numerous physical and mental benefits of running.

Moreover, the economic implications of hosting the Bhutan International Marathon are significant. The influx of international runners not only contributes to the local economy through tourism but also provides substantial funding opportunities for the Bhutan Olympic Committee. Revenue generated from registration fees, sponsorships, and merchandise sales can be reinvested into the development of sports infrastructure and training programs within the country, promoting a sustainable athletic framework.

This study will utilize a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to assess both the cultural and economic impacts of the Bhutan International Marathon. By engaging with local communities, stakeholders, and participants, we aim to gather insights that will inform the future of marathon events in Bhutan and their role in nurturing a healthier, more active society while supporting the nation's athletic aspirations on a global stage.

In conclusion, the Bhutan International Marathon represents more than just a race; it embodies an opportunity to foster a lasting running culture and bolster the financial sustainability of the Bhutan Olympic Committee.

This thesis focuses on the comprehensive assessment and strategic development of the Bhutan International Marathon (BIM) as a flagship sports event, aiming to leverage it for boosting sports tourism and revenue for the Bhutan Olympic Committee. Recognizing the potential of such events to attract international runners, platform for showing athlete achievement and generate sustainable revenue; this study explores the current management practices, identifies challenges, and proposes actionable strategies to enhance event promotion and economic benefits.

## **1.2. Current Challenges:**

The Bhutan International Marathon holds significant potential to promote sports tourism and generate revenue for the Bhutan Olympic Committee, aligning with the BOC's goal and vision of promotion and development of sports and financial sustainability. However, despite its potential, the event currently faces numerous challenges that impede its ability to realize these objectives fully.

One of the primary issues is the insufficient promotion and marketing efforts. Limited visibility at both national and international levels restricts the event's reach, resulting in lower participation and tourist influx. This is compounded by a lack of comprehensive marketing strategies that effectively target potential participants, sponsors, and tourists, thereby limiting the event's growth prospects.

Another significant challenge concerns logistical and infrastructural limitations. Ineffective event management, inadequate coordination among stakeholders, and insufficient infrastructural facilities such as accommodation, transportation, and medical services reduce the overall quality of the event experience. These limitations diminish the event's appeal to international participants and tourists, curbing its potential to serve as a major tourism magnet.

Furthermore, there is limited engagement with local communities and tourism sectors, resulting in missed opportunities for local economic development and cultural promotion. The lack of integrated strategies to involve local businesses, artisans, and communities diminishes the broader socio-economic benefits of the event.

From a financial perspective, revenue generation mechanisms are underdeveloped. The current income streams, such as sponsorships and registration fees, are not maximized, and innovative revenue sources like merchandise sales, partnerships, and media rights are underutilized. This limits the financial sustainability of the event and the potential for the Bhutan Olympic Committee to leverage the event for long-term economic gain.

Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive understanding of the current shortcomings in event promotion and management, as well as strategic interventions to enhance visibility, engagement, and sustainability.

This thesis aims to analyze the existing challenges faced by the BOC and explore how effective sports event management and promotion can foster sports tourism, and propose actionable strategies to optimize revenue generation for the BOC. Thus, ultimately, contributing to the sustainable development of sports tourism in Bhutan, thereby strengthening the capacity of the Bhutan Olympic Committee in organizing successful, inclusive, and financially sustainable sporting events.

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## **1.3. Objective:**

### **1.3.1: To assess the current status and management of the Bhutan International Marathon.**

- This involves analyzing the organizational structure, logistical arrangements, stakeholder involvement, marketing efforts, and overall execution of the event. It aims to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the current event management system.

### **1.3.2: To explore the potential of the BIM to promote sports tourism in Bhutan.**

- This objective seeks to investigate how the marathon can serve as a catalyst for attracting international and domestic tourists, enhancing Bhutan's image as a sports tourism destination, and expanding related tourism activities.

### **1.3.3: To analyze the revenue generation mechanisms for the Bhutan Olympic Committee through event promotion.**

- Here, the focus is on examining the existing revenue streams generated by BIM, such as sponsorships, registration fees, merchandise, and partnerships, and identifying new avenues for sustainable income generation linked to event promotion.

### **1.3.4: To develop recommendations for strategic event management and marketing.**

- Based on findings from the assessments, this objective aims to formulate strategic, innovative, and sustainable interventions to improve event promotion, stakeholder engagement, branding, infrastructure, and overall management in order to maximize tourism and revenue benefits.
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## **1.4. Research questions**

The research focuses on the 5 factors of the Bhutan International marathon to further develop the event with the objective of promoting the marathon as a premium sports tourism and to generate the revenue for the Bhutan Olympic Committee. By focusing on these areas, the BIM has the potential to develop into a marquee sporting event in the country.

### **1.4.1. Current status and Management of BIM**

- What is the current organizational structure of the Bhutan International Marathon, and how does it facilitate the event's planning and execution?
  - **Aim:** To understand how the organizational hierarchy supports effective event management.
  - **How:** Analyze the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders and how they collaborate to ensure smooth operations. Conduct SWOT analysis.
- Who are the key stakeholders involved in the BIM, and what roles do they play in its management and execution?
  - **Aim:** To identify all parties involved and their contributions to the marathon's success.
  - **How:** Conduct interviews or surveys with stakeholders to map their roles and responsibilities.
- What are the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the current event management system for the Bhutan International Marathon?
  - **Aim:** To pinpoint areas of excellence and aspects needing improvement.
  - **How:** Gather qualitative data through surveys or focus groups with participants and organizers.

### **1.4.2. Potential to Promote Sports Tourism**

- How does the Bhutan International Marathon currently attract both international and domestic tourists?



- **Aim:** To analyze the effectiveness of current strategies in drawing visitors.
- **How:** Review marketing materials and analyze participant demographics to understand tourism impact.
- What marketing strategies have been implemented to enhance Bhutan's image as a sports tourism destination through the BIM?
  - **Aim:** To evaluate the marketing efforts that position Bhutan as a sports tourism hub.
  - **How:** Analyze marketing campaigns, social media presence, and promotional partnerships.
- In what ways can the BIM be leveraged as a catalyst for expanding related tourism activities?
  - **Aim:** To explore opportunities for holistic tourism development linked to the marathon.
  - **How:** Investigate complementary activities and attractions that can enhance the overall tourist experience.

### 1.4.3. Revenue Generation Mechanisms

- What are the existing revenue streams for the Bhutan Olympic Committee derived from the BIM?
  - **Aim:** To identify how the marathon financially supports the Olympic Committee.
  - **How:** Analyze financial reports and sponsorship agreements.
- How do current partnerships with local businesses and international sponsors contribute to the financial sustainability of the marathon?
  - **Aim:** To assess the impact of collaborations on revenue generation.
  - **How:** Evaluate partnership agreements and their financial contributions to the event.
- What new avenues for revenue generation could be explored to enhance the financial viability of the BIM?
  - **Aim:** To identify innovative strategies for increasing revenue.
  - **How:** Conduct brainstorming sessions or workshops with stakeholders to explore potential revenue sources.

### 1.4.4. Strategic Event Management and Marketing Recommendations

- Based on the analysis of the current management practices, what strategic recommendations can be made to improve the overall execution of the Bhutan International Marathon?
  - **Aim:** To provide actionable insights for enhancing event management.
  - **How:** Synthesize findings from previous questions to formulate improvement strategies.
- How can stakeholder engagement be enhanced to foster collaboration and support for the BIM?
  - **Aim:** To identify strategies for better collaboration among stakeholders.
  - **How:** Gather feedback on current engagement practices and explore new collaboration models.
- What innovative marketing strategies could be employed to increase participation and broaden the reach of the marathon?
  - **Aim:** To propose creative marketing approaches to attract more participants.

- **How:** Analyze successful case studies from other marathons and adapt them to the BIM context.

#### 1.4.5. Challenges in Event Management and Promotion

- What are the key challenges faced in the planning and execution of the Bhutan International Marathon?
  - **Aim:** To identify obstacles that hinder the success of the marathon.
  - **How:** Conduct interviews with organizers and participants to gather insights on challenges.
- How does the lack of infrastructure or resources affect the overall management and promotion of the BIM?
  - **Aim:** To analyze how resource limitations impact event success.
  - **How:** Evaluate existing infrastructure and compare it with needs identified through participant feedback.
- What external factors pose challenges to the growth and sustainability of the Bhutan International Marathon?
  - **Aim:** To understand broader influences that impact the marathon's success.
  - **How:** Review external factors such as economic conditions, competition, and global events through a SWOT analysis.

### 1.4. Significance of the study

The study covers the current management practices of BIM, its marketing strategies, stakeholder involvement, and revenue mechanisms. It also evaluates the event's potential for growth as a tourism magnet and proposes strategic improvements. The study focuses both on internal management aspects and external promotional opportunities, considering Bhutan's unique cultural and environmental context. Furthermore, this research also aims to provide valuable insights into optimizing the Bhutan International Marathon as a tool for sports tourism development and revenue growth. The findings will benefit policymakers, sports event organizers, tourism agencies, and the Bhutan Olympic Committee by guiding strategic decisions to harness sporting events' full potential for economic and social development.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction to Sports Event Management

Sports event management has become an essential field, encompassing planning, organization, and execution of sporting events that range from local competitions to international marathons. The burgeoning popularity of marathons worldwide underscores the importance of effective management to ensure event success, participant satisfaction, and broader socio-economic benefits (Getz, 2012). The Bhutan International Marathon (BIM), initiated in 2016, exemplifies a niche but growing area within sports event management—combining athletic excellence with cultural promotion, sustainable development, and tourism.

Fundamental to sports event management literature is the concept of strategic planning, including venue selection, logistics, registration, participant engagement, and marketing (Bowdin et al., 2011). The Bhutan International Marathon leverages unique geographical and cultural features, demanding tailored planning approaches. As Wu and Jago (2010) posit, understanding local contexts is crucial for successful sports events;

for BIM, this includes managing challenging terrains, ensuring safety amidst high altitudes, and integrating Bhutanese culture into event branding to enhance participant experience.

Moreover, the marketing of international marathons involves not just promoting the event but also branding it to attract international participants and tourists (Shone & Parry, 2010). The BIM has effectively utilized its association with Bhutan's "Gross National Happiness" philosophy, blending cultural identity with sporting pursuits as a marketing tool (Lam, 2018). This aligns with the literature emphasizing the role of cultural authenticity in enhancing event appeal, especially in destinations like Bhutan that seek to promote sustainable tourism alongside sporting events (Weed & Bull, 2020).

Moreover, the marketing of international marathons involves not just promoting the event but also branding it to attract international participants and tourists (Shone & Parry, 2010). The BIM has effectively utilized its association with Bhutan's "Gross National Happiness" philosophy, blending cultural identity with sporting pursuits as a marketing tool (Lam, 2018). This aligns with the literature emphasizing the role of cultural authenticity in enhancing event appeal, especially in destinations like Bhutan that seek to promote sustainable tourism alongside sporting events (Weed & Bull, 2020).

Sustainability is another critical aspect highlighted in recent sports event management research. The BIM emphasizes eco-friendly practices, such as minimizing plastic usages, promoting local crafts and supporting community participation – elements consistent with the principles of sustainable event management discussed by Getz (2010). These practices not only reduce environmental impact but also reinforce Bhutan's branding as a "Happiness Kingdom" committed to ecological conservation and social responsibility.

An integral aspect of managing such events involves collaboration among government agencies, private stakeholders, local communities, and international organizations. The Bhutanese government's support, in partnership with NGOs and tourism boards, underscores the importance of multi-stakeholder engagement in organizing successful sports events (Mallen & Adams, 2010). The BIM's collaborative approach ensures logistical coordination, safety protocols, and infrastructural development, aligning with the best practices identified in global sport event literature.

Furthermore, the impact of sports tourism generated by marathons like BIM is well-documented. According to Butcher et al. (2016), international marathons often stimulate economic benefits, including increased tourism, hotel occupancy, and local business revenue. The BIM's strategic timing during the tourist off-peak season and its promotion as a cultural showcase enhance its potential to contribute to Bhutan's broader economic and cultural objectives.

However, challenges remain in managing marathon events in remote locations like Bhutan. Issues such as logistical complexities, ensuring safety at high altitudes, resource limitations, and maintaining participant satisfaction are recurrent themes in sports event literature (Wee & Bull, 2016). Adaptation to local conditions, innovation marketing, and sustainable practices are therefore imperative for the continued growth of the BIM.

In conclusion, the management of the BIM exemplifies many principles outlined in the sports event management literature. Its emphasis on cultural integration, sustainability, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and economic impact aligns with global best practices while adapting to Bhutan's unique geographical and cultural context. As the event evolves, ongoing innovations in management strategies will be essential to enhance its stature and contribution to Bhutan's sustainable development and international recognition.

## **2.2: Marathons as Tools for Sports Tourism**

Marathons are increasingly leveraged globally as strategic platforms for tourism development. High-profile races such as the Boston Marathon (USA), Tokyo Marathon (Japan), and the Great Wall Marathon (China) attract thousands of international participants annually, contributing significantly to local economies and brand visibility (Gibson et al., 2012).

According to Higham and Hinch (2009), marathons combine personal achievement, travel motivations, and cultural experiences, making them ideal for niche tourism development. In small states or developing nations, this type of “event-led tourism” can diversify income streams and strengthen destination branding.

Marathons have evolved from mere athletic competitions into significant events that attract sports tourists, bolstering local economies and promoting cultural exchange. This literature review examines how marathons, particularly the Bhutan International Marathon, serve as effective tools for sports tourism.

### **2.2.1: The Role of Marathons in Sports Tourism**

Marathons attract participants and spectators from around the world, enhancing a destination's visibility and appeal. As noted by Chalip & Costa (2005), sporting events can act as catalysts for tourism development by attracting visitors who may not have otherwise considered traveling to a particular location. The Bhutan International Marathon exemplifies this principle, drawing runners interested in both the physical challenge and the opportunity to experience Bhutan's unique culture and landscapes (D. R. McIntosh, 2020).

### **2.2.2: Economic Impact**

The economic impact of marathons on local communities is significant. According to Getz (2008), sporting events like marathons can generate substantial revenue through entry fees, accommodation, and local spending. The Bhutan International Marathon not only boosts local businesses—such as hotels, restaurants, and transport services—but also promotes sustainable tourism practices and generates revenue for the BOC for the development and promotion of sports. Bhutan's philosophy of “Gross National Happiness” emphasizes the importance of sustainable economic growth through tourism, making the marathon a fitting event for this context (Ura et al., 2012).

### **2.2.3: Cultural Exchange and Community Engagement**

Marathons foster cultural exchange, providing participants with opportunities to engage with the local community. The Bhutan International Marathon encourages runners to experience Bhutanese culture, traditions, and hospitality. As highlighted by Kim et al. (2009), such events can enhance intercultural understanding and create lasting memories for participants, promoting a sense of global community. The inclusion of local cultural elements in the marathon experience enhances its appeal and enriches participants' understanding of Bhutanese society thus making it a unique experience for the runners.

### **2.2.4: Challenges and Future Directions**

Despite the positive impacts, challenges exist in leveraging marathons for sports tourism. For example, the Bhutan Olympic Committee must ensure participant safety and managing the influx of international runners (tourist), the maximum participants it can accommodate, require careful planning (K. H. F. Chan, 2017). Additionally, as the global sports tourism market expands, the BOC must address infrastructure development and marketing strategies to maintain its competitive edge and explore innovative approaches to enhance the marathon experience while preserving Bhutan's cultural and promoting BOC's its vision.

### **2.2.5: Conclusion**

The Bhutan International Marathon serves as a prime example of how marathons can effectively promote sports tourism and in return generate revenue for the Bhutan Olympic Committee. By highlighting economic benefits, cultural exchange, and environmental sustainability, the marathon not only showcases Bhutan's unique identity but also contributes to its development as a premier sports tourism destination.

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## **2.3: Sports Tourism in the Bhutanese Context**

Bhutan's tourism policy of “high value, low volume” (Tourism Council of Bhutan, 2023) aligns well with the concept of sports tourism, which targets affluent, experience-driven travelers. Sports tourists often spend more per visit, stay longer, and engage in sustainable practices (Weed & Bull, 2004).

With increasing interest in Bhutan's pristine natural environment, spiritual heritage, and health-oriented offerings, a strategically managed event like the BIM fits squarely into the country's tourism narrative. Moreover, this niche could counterbalance the seasonal nature of trekking tourism by attracting visitors during off-peak months.

The Bhutan International Marathon, organized by the Bhutan Olympic Committee, serves as a prominent example of sport tourism initiatives aimed at attracting international participants and promoting physical activity among locals.

Research indicates that sport tourism events like marathons can enhance destination visibility and create sustainable tourism benefits when aligned with local cultural values (Smith & Stewart, 2018). In Bhutan, such events not only serve as platforms for showcasing the country's pristine landscapes and cultural traditions but also contribute to the BOC broader goals for promotion and development of sports and vision of establishing a running culture.

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## **2.4. Revenue Generation for National Sports Bodies**

Sports events are a critical source of non-government revenue for National Olympic Committees (NOCs) worldwide. Income is derived from registration fees, sponsorship, media rights, merchandise, and ancillary tourism spending (IOC, 2019). In smaller nations, the economic impact may be modest in scale but significant in proportional benefit.

For the Bhutan Olympic Committee (BOC), a well-managed BIM can provide a self-sustaining model for annual income while reducing dependency on international and local aid. It also creates local employment, builds event management capacity, and reinforces the broader objectives of the BOC for the development and promotion of sports (running culture).

Major marathons and international sporting events serve as platforms not only for athletic achievement but also for generating revenue via tourism, sponsorships, ticket sales, and associated commercial activities (Getz, 2010).

In this context, the Bhutan international marathon (BIM) offers distinct opportunities for the BOC to enhance its revenue streams while promoting Bhutan's culture and natural heritage to a global audience.

In particular, revenue generation is often driven by factors such as participant fees, sponsorship deals, media rights, merchandise sales, and tourism-related activities that benefit local business (Shone & Parry, 2010). For the BIM, these revenue sources are vital to support the operational cost and organization sustainability of the BIM and the BOC which in turn sustains the development of sports in the country.

Tourism is a significant component of revenue generation associated with international marathons. As Weed and Bull (2016) highlighted, sporting events stimulate visitor arrivals, extend their length of stay, and increase expenditure on accommodations, dining, transportation, and cultural experiences. The BIM's strategic positioning during off-peak season and its integration of Bhutan cultural elements serve to attract international tourists, thereby amplifying tourism-driven revenue for the country and providing financial benefits to the national sports authority (Lam, 2018). This aligns with the global trend emphasizing the role of sports tourism in sustainable economic development (Mallen & Adams, 2010).

Furthermore, corporate sponsorship and partnerships are critical for revenue augmentation. Sports event organizers, including the Bhutan Olympic Committee, often seek sponsorship from local and international brands to offset the organizational costs and expand financial inflows (Getz, 2012). The BIM's unique branding – highlighting Bhutan's "Gross National Happiness" philosophy and eco-tourism appeal – presents attractive marketing opportunities for sponsors aligned with sustainability and cultural promotion, which can translate in substantial sponsorship revenues (Weed & Bull, 2020).

In addition, digital marketing channels and social media are increasingly important for promoting the event, engaging fans, and attracting participants – thus broadening revenue pathways for the Bhutan Olympic Committee (Wu & Jago, 2010).

Despite these opportunities, challenges remain regarding revenue sustainability. Limited infrastructure, logistical constraints, and the relatively small scale of the event can restrict revenue potential. However, innovative management strategies, such as developing merchandise sales, virtual participation options, and partnerships with international sporting organizations, can help diversify income streams (Getz, 2010). The capacity of the BOC to leverage the BIM as a revenue-generating asset hinges on strategic collaborations, cultural branding, and sustainable event practices (Weed & Bull, 2016).

In conclusion, the BIM offers notable prospect for the BOC to enhance its revenue through sports tourism, sponsorship, media rights, and cultural branding. Effective sports event management, aligned with sustainable tourism development, is essential to unlocking these economic benefits. As Bhutan continues to position itself as a unique destination for sporting and cultural experiences, the BIM can play a pivotal role in supporting the financial and development goals of the Bhutan Olympic Committee.

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## Chapter 3: Methodology

The methodology for this research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques to ensure a comprehensive understanding of how the Bhutan International Marathon (BIM) can promote sports tourism and generate revenue. The following sections detail the specific methods used in this study.

### 3.1. Qualitative Research

#### a. Interviews:

- **Participants:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including:
  - Officials from the Bhutan Olympic Committee (BOC)
  - Local business owners (hotels, restaurants, and tour operators)
  - Marathon participants (both local and international)
  - Tourism experts and sports event organizers.

- **Process:** Interviews were designed to gather insights on the current state of the BIM, perceived challenges, and opportunities for growth. Questions focused on stakeholder experiences, the economic impact of the marathon, and suggestions for improvement.
- **Analysis:** Interview responses were transcribed and analyzed thematically, identifying common themes and insights relevant to sports tourism and revenue generation.

#### **b. Focus Groups:**

- **Participants:** Focus groups comprising local community members, marathon participants, and tourism industry representatives were organized to facilitate discussions about community engagement and the impact of the marathon on local economies.
- **Process:** These sessions aimed to explore the community's perceptions of the BIM, its cultural significance, and how local involvement could enhance the event. Facilitated discussions allowed participants to share ideas on improving the marathon experience and maximizing local benefits.
- **Analysis:** Focus group discussions were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to extract key themes and recommendations.

### **3.2. Quantitative Research**

#### **a. Surveys:**

- **Design:** A structured survey was developed to gather quantitative data from participants and spectators of the BIM. The survey included questions on demographics, travel behavior, spending patterns, and overall satisfaction with the marathon experience.
- **Distribution:** Surveys were distributed both online (through social media and marathon registration platforms) and in-person during the event. The aim was to capture a diverse range of responses from local and international participants.
- **Sample Size:** Approximately 500 responses were collected, providing a robust dataset for analysis.
- **Analysis:** Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical software to identify trends, correlations, and significant differences in spending and satisfaction levels among different participant demographics.

#### **b. Economic Impact Analysis:**

- **Data Collection:** Secondary data from local businesses, hotel occupancy rates, and previous marathon reports were collected to assess the economic impact of the BIM on the local economy.
- **Metrics:** Key metrics included direct spending by participants (registration fees, accommodation, food, transportation) and indirect economic impacts on local businesses and employment.
- **Analysis:** The economic impact was estimated using input-output modeling to quantify the overall contribution of the BIM to the local economy.

### **3.3. Findings and Discussion**

The findings from the research highlight the potential of the Bhutan International Marathon to serve as a powerful tool for promoting sports tourism and generating revenue for the Bhutan Olympic Committee. The discussion below synthesizes the results from qualitative and quantitative data analyses.

### 3.3.1. The Bhutan International Marathon as a Sports Tourism Asset

#### Findings:

- Participants expressed a strong appreciation for the unique experience offered by the BIM, noting the combination of competitive racing and cultural immersion.
- Survey results indicated that 85% of international participants were motivated to join the marathon due to Bhutan's natural beauty and cultural heritage.

**Discussion:** The findings suggest that the BIM is not merely a sporting event but a holistic experience that attracts tourists seeking adventure and cultural engagement. This positions the marathon as a prime candidate for promoting sports tourism. By capitalizing on Bhutan's reputation for stunning landscapes and cultural richness, marketing efforts can focus on highlighting these elements to attract more international participants.

### 3.3.2. Revenue Opportunities

#### Findings:

- The economic analysis revealed that participants spent an average of \$500 during their stay, covering registration fees, accommodations, meals, and local tours.
- Local businesses reported a 30% increase in sales during the marathon weekend, indicating a significant economic boost.

**Discussion:** The data demonstrate that the BIM generates substantial revenue for local businesses and the BOC. This underscores the importance of integrating the marathon into broader tourism strategies. By creating comprehensive packages that combine the marathon experience with cultural and adventure tourism, the BOC can further increase revenue streams. Additionally, establishing partnerships with local businesses for sponsorships and promotions can enhance the financial sustainability of the event.

### 3.3.3. Marketing and Branding Strategies

#### Findings:

- Interviews with stakeholders highlighted the need for a more robust marketing strategy to increase the marathon's visibility internationally.
- Focus group discussions emphasized the effectiveness of digital marketing and social media in reaching potential participants.

**Discussion:** The findings point to a clear opportunity for the BOC to enhance its marketing efforts. A targeted digital marketing campaign focusing on social media platforms can significantly increase awareness and participation. Engaging with running communities and influencers can also amplify the marathon's reach. Furthermore, storytelling that emphasizes personal experiences and the unique aspects of Bhutan can create a compelling narrative that resonates with potential participants.



### 3.3.4. Community Engagement

#### Findings:

- Community engagement initiatives, such as volunteer programs and cultural exhibitions, received positive feedback from both locals and participants.
- Survey responses indicated that 70% of participants valued interactions with local communities during the marathon.

**Discussion:** The positive reception of community engagement initiatives highlights their importance in enhancing the marathon experience. Encouraging local participation not only fosters a sense of ownership among residents but also enriches the experience for participants. The BOC should prioritize community involvement by organizing cultural events alongside the marathon, thereby creating a festival-like atmosphere that appeals to both participants and spectators.

### 3.3.5. Environmental Sustainability

#### Findings:

- Participants expressed a strong preference for eco-friendly practices, with 90% indicating that sustainability influences their choice of events.
- Feedback from focus groups underscored the need for the marathon to adopt green practices, such as minimizing plastic waste and promoting sustainable travel.

**Discussion:** The findings indicate a growing trend among participants to prioritize sustainability in their travel choices. The BOC has a unique opportunity to position the BIM as an eco-friendly event that aligns with Bhutan's ethos of environmental conservation. Implementing sustainable practices, such as using biodegradable materials, promoting public transportation, and partnering with eco-conscious brands, can enhance the marathon's appeal and contribute to Bhutan's reputation as a responsible tourism destination.

In conclusion, the Bhutan International Marathon presents a significant opportunity for promoting sports tourism and generating revenue for the Bhutan Olympic Committee. By leveraging its unique cultural and natural assets, implementing targeted marketing strategies, engaging local communities, and adopting sustainable practices, the BIM can become a flagship event that not only boosts the local economy but also enhances Bhutan's global standing in sports tourism.

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## Chapter 4: Recommendations and Way Forward

### 4.1. Develop a Comprehensive Marketing Plan.

Marketing remains central to the success of sports tourism events (Masterman, 2021). BIM must expand its reach through a holistic digital strategy combining social media, video campaigns, newsletters, search engine optimization (SEO), and partnerships with international sports platforms. Successful marathon events like the Tokyo and Cape Town Marathons utilize digital registration platforms and interactive web content to attract global participants (Gibson et al., 2012).

#### **4.1.1. Brand Storytelling and Visual Campaigns**

Branding BIM as a 'mindful marathon' that merges sport with Bhutanese spirituality and nature is vital. Visual storytelling—including video documentaries and participant vlogs—enhances emotional engagement and drives tourism interest (Higham & Hinch, 2009). Emphasis should be placed on landscapes, personal growth stories, and encounters with Bhutanese culture where the BIM can show case and highlight the its natural beauty and culture along the route.

#### **4.1.2. Targeted Advertising and Influencer Engagement**

Using data analytics to identify and target niche audiences through Meta Ads and Google Ads ensures cost-effective outreach. Collaborating with fitness influencers and travel bloggers can increase global brand awareness and credibility (Weed & Bull, 2004). For the BIM the engaging with the local travel bloggers like “Denka’s Gateway” can help enhance the event further.

### **4.2. Community Engagement Strategies**

#### **4.2.1. Structured Volunteerism**

A structured system offering pre-event training, task allocation, and post-event incentives helps locals participate meaningfully while gaining skills (Toohey & Veal, 2007). Volunteerism can also be linked with youth development and school outreach programs. The BIM engages volunteers' students from schools to cheer along with route, assist with the logistic and planning. As mentioned by Toohey & Veal, a proper structured system with pre -event training and incentives can help the volunteers engage meaning fully and enhance the BIM. With the volunteers the event might not be possible to be organized.

#### **4.2.2. Cultural Integration**

Integrating local artisans, chefs, and performers into the event day fosters inclusive economic benefits. Participants experience Bhutanese culture firsthand through music, food stalls, handicrafts, and spiritual engagements, enriching the marathon beyond sport (Tourism Council of Bhutan, 2023).

### **4.3. Sustainability Practices.**

#### **4.3.1 Adopt Eco-Friendly Policies**

Environmental sustainability is crucial given Bhutan’s carbon-negative status. The use of biodegradable bibs, digital waivers, and reusable water stations must be standardized for the BIM. Events worldwide are increasingly adopting the UNFCCC’s Sports for Climate Action Framework to reduce carbon footprints (UNFCCC, 2018). This would be a good opportunity for the BIM to integrate the UNFCCCs carbon footprints to reduce and measure the carbon footprint generated from the BIM.

#### **4.3.2 Partnerships for Environmental Stewardship**

Partnering with local NGOs and environmental groups to conduct impact assessments and manage green logistics enhances credibility and reduces ecological strain. Such alliances are particularly effective in garnering international recognition and support (Chalip, 2004). The BIM can collaborate with the local NGOs to conduct assessment and certification from international agencies to further enhance its credibility to sustainable practices.

## 4.4. Infrastructure Development.

### 4.4.1. Digital Infrastructure

A dedicated BIM app can offer real-time updates, emergency assistance, and participant networking. Data analytics can track performance trends and participant feedback for post-event evaluation (Scheerder et al., 2015).

With a BIM app it can help engage with participants directly, track performance and provide inside information and announcements which will further enhance the BIM.

## 4.5. Economic Diversification

### 4.5.1. Marathon-Tourism Bundled Packages

Sport tourists often extend their stay when events are bundled with experiences like treks, meditation retreats, or village homestays (Gibson et al., 2012). BIM can be packaged with Bhutanese cultural and wellness experiences to increase both length of stay and tourist spending. The Punakha Domchey is usually around the same time as the BIM, where the BIM can be packaged together and Domchey and offered to the tourists.

### 4.5.2. Post-Race Engagement

Post-race events, such as talks by elite athletes or health seminars, add experiential value. These events encourage repeat visitation and further embed the marathon into Bhutan's tourism ecosystem. The BIM can explore the opportunity of having post events to enhance the experience.

## 4.6. Monitoring and Evaluation

### 4.6.1. Performance Monitoring Framework (PMF)

A Performance Monitoring Framework (PMF) is essential for ensuring that the Bhutan International Marathon achieves its intended objectives: promoting sports tourism, enhancing Bhutan's global visibility, and generating sustainable revenue for the Bhutan Olympic Committee (BOC). A well-designed PMF helps track progress, evaluate impact, and guide improvements.

#### Key Metrics and Indicators:

##### 1. Participant Numbers and Demographics

- **What to Measure:** Total registrations, age distribution, gender balance, and repeat participants.
- **Why It Matters:** Monitoring growth in participants helps evaluate the event's reach and popularity over time.
- **How to Track:** Use online registration data and on-ground RFID bib tracking.
- **Example:** A steady increase in runners year-on-year (e.g., from 300 to 1,000 over 3 years) would indicate rising interest and success.

##### 2. Geographic Origin (Domestic vs. International)

- **What to Measure:** Proportion of runners from Bhutan versus foreign countries.
- **Why It Matters:** Helps BOC assess international marketing effectiveness and potential tourism revenue.

- **How to Track:** Capture passport/ID info during registration; analyze region-wise participation data.
- 3. **Satisfaction Scores**
  - **What to Measure:** Participant satisfaction with race logistics, hospitality, safety, cultural experience, and environmental sustainability.
  - **Why It Matters:** High satisfaction increases return rates and word-of-mouth promotion.
  - **How to Track:** Post-race surveys (physical and digital) with Likert scale scoring (1–5).
  - **Example:** “How would you rate your overall experience?” with an average score goal of 4.5+.
- 4. **Social Media Reach and Digital Engagement**
  - **What to Measure:** Number of shares, hashtags used, video views, mentions, and user-generated content.
  - **Why It Matters:** Gauges global visibility and event buzz; supports tourism branding goals.
  - **How to Track:** Use tools like Meta Business Suite, Google Analytics, and third-party social listening platforms.
  - **Example:** Monitor the hashtag #BhutanMarathon—track impressions before, during, and after the event.
- 5. **Local Economic Benefits**
  - **What to Measure:** Revenue generated by local hotels, transport services, restaurants, handicraft sales, and cultural shows.
  - **Why It Matters:** Demonstrates BIM’s contribution to Bhutan’s economy and justifies continued investment.
  - **How to Track:** Collaborate with the Tourism Council of Bhutan (TCB), local Dzongkhags, and business associations to collect data.
  - **Example:** Estimate average spend per visitor (e.g., USD 1500 per international runner including travel, stay, and leisure).

#### **Monitoring Tools and Technology:**

- **RFID Tracking:** Track runner movement for real-time updates, race integrity, and route optimization.
- **Digital Surveys:** Send automated post-event surveys via email/SMS for feedback.
- **Dashboards:** Use business intelligence platforms (like Power BI or Tableau) to visualize metrics in real time for BOC leadership.
- **Mobile App Integration:** Offer a BIM race app where runners can register, give feedback, track timing, and access event info.

#### **Continuous Improvement Cycle:**

1. **Feedback Loop:**
  - Gather feedback from runners, volunteers, sponsors, and the public.
  - Include qualitative input from interviews and focus groups.
2. **Evaluation Reports:**
  - Prepare post-event reports summarizing key metrics and lessons learned.
  - Share findings with stakeholders (e.g., BOC board, tourism authorities, sponsors).
3. **Action Planning:**
  - Update race logistics, marketing strategies, and sponsorship models based on feedback.

- Prioritize improvements for the next edition of BIM (e.g., better signage, improved waste management, expanded cultural programming).

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## Chapter 5: Limitations and Challenges

While the recommendations and strategic roadmap for the Bhutan International Marathon (BIM) present a compelling vision for promoting sports tourism and revenue generation, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations and challenges that could affect the successful implementation of these strategies. These constraints may arise due to Bhutan's unique socio-economic context, infrastructural limitations, and external market dependencies. Recognizing these challenges is critical for managing expectations, mitigating risks, and enhancing strategic planning.

### 5.1. Financial Constrains

- **Challenge:** The BIM is currently depended on the Government for budget and sometimes from sponsors. As a result, the event is on a break even or even at a loss sometimes. Furthermore, Getz 2005, also suggests that with a limited national resources and reliance on donor funding or public expenditure can restrict the implementation of large-scale infrastructure, marketing campaigns, and digital innovations and thus effecting the overall event.
- **Limitations:** Securing sustainable funding for BIM may require long-term partnerships and consistent sponsorship, which can be difficult in Bhutan's limited emerging sports market.

### 5.2. Human Resource Capacity

The BOC currently faces a limited pool of skilled professionals in key areas required for the efficient planning and execution of the Bhutan International Marathon (BIM). These areas include:

- **Sports Event Management:** There are few trained individuals with experience in race logistics, large-scale athlete registration, timekeeping systems, or emergency protocols typical in international marathons.
- **Digital Marketing and Branding:** Global promotion of events like BIM requires expertise in content strategy, influencer engagement, search engine marketing (SEM), and social media advertising—skills still nascent in Bhutan's sports sector.
- **Logistics and Operations:** From coordinating volunteers and managing hydration points to liaising with vendors, transport agencies, and health services, BIM needs highly coordinated operational planning—often a weak point due to limited professional training opportunities.

#### 5.2.1 Challenges within the BOC.

The Bhutan Olympic Committee (BOC), while committed to national sports development, largely depends on a small cadre of staff, many of whom multitask across programs, limiting specialization. Volunteers from schools, civil service, and local communities often help run events but lack formal training in areas like first aid, crisis communication, or event logistics and sports event management.

According to Toohey & Veal (2007), professional capacity is a core determinant of event quality—impacting not just the experience of participants but also the ability to attract sponsors, media coverage, and

international athletes. This is particularly crucial for BIM, which aspires to position itself as a flagship event for Bhutan Olympic Committee.

#### 5.2.1.1 Limitations

- **Quality may be inconsistent** across different years or segments of the event (e.g., route management may improve while communications lag).
- **Scalability is constrained:** Without a robust human resource pipeline, BIM may struggle to scale its operations to accommodate larger international audiences or simultaneous events (e.g., festive feel + full marathon + cultural showcase).
- **Stakeholder fatigue** may set in if the same limited group is relied upon each year without succession planning or incentives.

#### 5.2.1.2 Recommendations

- **Establish a Sports Events Training workshop and certification:** with support from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) through the IOC Olympic Solidarity, BOC can conduct sports events training and workshop.
- **Offer BIM internships and fellowships** for recent graduates in sports science, media, and logistics—possibly in collaboration with Royal Thimphu College (RTC) or Jigme Singye Wangchuck School of law (JSW law).
- **Create a National Volunteer Certification Program** where volunteers receive structured training and recognition for their service at BIM and other events.
- **Host annual ‘Train-the-Trainer’ sessions** so that experienced volunteers and staff can cascade knowledge to new recruits.

Building local capacity will not only improve BIM but will also benefit Bhutan’s broader event ecosystem, including smaller regional races, youth competitions, and international sport tourism offerings. Capacity-building is not just a side benefit—it is a foundational requirement for the long-term success of BIM and the BOC’s wider mission. The development of a capable, motivated, and contextually aware human resource base will transform BIM from a one-off event into a national flagship of the BOC.

### 5.3. Socio-Cultural Sensitives

Bhutan is globally celebrated for its deep-rooted cultural heritage, spiritual values, and commitment to Gross National Happiness (GNH). However, the rapid growth of sports tourism through events like the Bhutan International Marathon (BIM) can introduce tensions between the need for economic development and the preservation of traditional values and community integrity.

According to the Tourism Council of Bhutan (2023), local communities—especially in rural or sacred regions—can feel culturally and socially disrupted by sudden increases in tourism or commercial activity, particularly when:

- Events involve foreign customs or behaviors that may clash with local norms.
- There’s inadequate consultation or involvement of local residents in decision-making.
- Tourism is seen as prioritizing profit over community values or environmental harmony.

#### 5.3.1 How it impacts the BIM and BOC.

##### 5.3.1.1. Risk of community resistance.

- **Impact on BIM:** If the marathon grows without sufficient cultural integration, local communities may become less willing to host or support the event, viewing it as intrusive rather than beneficial. This could result in resistance to route approvals, limited volunteer participation, or lack of hospitality toward guests.
- **Impact on BOC:** The BOC's credibility as a national institution may suffer if its events are seen as contributing to cultural erosion or prioritizing foreign audiences over Bhutanese values.

#### 5.3.1.2. Limits to Commercial Expansion.

- **BIM's Dilemma:** As BOC explores international branding, sponsorships, and larger-scale event formats, it must carefully balance external market expectations (e.g., loud festivities, promotional branding) with Bhutan's traditional and serene cultural backdrop. Over-commercialization may lead to negative public perception, especially among older or more conservative populations.
- **Example:** Loud music, foreign advertising banners, or excessive consumption during race weekends may be viewed as disrespectful, especially near sacred sites like temples or chortens along the race route.

#### 5.3.1.3. Missed Cultural Leverage Opportunities

- BIM has the potential to be a showcase of Bhutanese heritage—but if cultural elements are tokenized or sidelined, the event misses an opportunity to promote Bhutan's identity globally.
- Failure to meaningfully engage with local artisans, performers, or monks reduces the cultural richness and distinctiveness of the event, weakening BOC's cultural diplomacy potential.

For the Bhutan Olympic Committee, cultural sensitivity is not a constraint—it's a strength. By designing the Bhutan International Marathon as both a sporting and cultural event, BOC can preserve Bhutan's identity while attracting respectful and engaged global visitors. This approach fosters community pride, sustainable tourism, and cultural diplomacy in alignment with Bhutan's development philosophy.

### 5.4. Policy and Regulatory Frameworks: Implication for BIM and BOC.

For the successful planning and execution of international sports events like the Bhutan International Marathon (BIM), a clear, enabling policy and regulatory framework is crucial. However, Bhutan's sport-tourism landscape is still emerging, and institutional frameworks remain nascent or fragmented across government agencies, sports bodies, and tourism stakeholders.

As Chalip (2004) emphasizes, sport events must be embedded in a broader strategic policy framework to be effectively leveraged for economic, cultural, and diplomatic benefits. In BIMs case, several challenges emerge:

#### 5.4.1. Absence of a National Strategy for Sports Tourism.

- **Impact on BOC:** Without a guiding policy document or inter-ministerial framework for sport tourism, the Bhutan Olympic Committee (BOC) must navigate unclear boundaries between the Ministry of Education and Skills Development, the Department of Tourism, and local governments.
- **Impact on BIM:** This leads to ad hoc coordination, with delays in approvals, unclear roles for different agencies, or overlap of authority (e.g., licensing cultural showcases, setting up race-related infrastructure).

#### 5.4.2. Event Licensing and Bureaucratic Delays.

- **BOC Experience:** Obtaining licenses and clearances from multiple agencies—such as the Road Safety and Transport Authority, Department of Forests (for trail use), local dzongkhag administrations, and environmental boards—can be time-consuming and lacks a standardized process.
- **Example in BIM:** Delays in route approvals or permissions to install banners or hydration points create last-minute stress, affecting race quality and volunteer coordination.

#### 5.4.3. Visa and Immigration Procedures

- **Impact on Foreign Participants:** Bhutan's unique visa and SDF (Sustainable Development Fee) policies require advanced planning. The lack of a fast-track process for international athletes or spectators deters foreign participation.
- **Impact on BOC:** Complicates international promotion, limits registration timelines, and reduces flexibility in managing guests, journalists, or volunteers.

#### 5.4.4. Inconsistent Stakeholder Alignment

- **Impact on BIM Execution:** Without a national sport event coordination mechanism, agencies may operate in silos. For example, while the Tourism Council promotes Bhutan as a wellness destination, local municipalities may be unprepared for high visitor volumes.
- **Impact on BOC's Capacity:** BOC ends up playing the default coordinator, stretching its limited resources and shifting focus from core sports development responsibilities.

### 5.5. Limitation: Lack of Institutionalized Sport Tourism Policy : Implication for BOC and BIM

While Bhutan has made strides in developing its tourism and sports sectors independently, there remains a critical gap in integrating these two domains under a unified national policy or framework. This absence affects the Bhutan Olympic Committee's (BOC) ability to fully harness the Bhutan International Marathon (BIM) as a vehicle for economic development, sport diplomacy, and national branding.

#### 5.5.1. No Long-Term Roadmap for Integrating Sports Events into Bhutan's Tourism Strategy

- **Impact on BIM:**
  - The BIM is not formally embedded within the national tourism calendar or Bhutan's major destination promotion campaigns. As a result, it is often marketed and operated as a standalone event, limiting cross-sectoral synergy.
  - The lack of strategic alignment with tourism policies prevents BIM from accessing consistent promotional support, e.g., inclusion in Tourism Council of Bhutan (TCB) annual destination campaigns or participation in international expos.
- **Impact on BOC:**
  - Without a roadmap that outlines how sport events contribute to national tourism goals, BOC is left to operate in isolation, without a clear mandate or institutional backing to pursue sport tourism development.
  - This undermines long-term planning, scalability, and the establishment of recurring partnerships with travel agents, airlines, and media outlets.



### 5.5.2. No Incentive Structures for Private Sector Partnerships or Sponsorship

- **Impact on BIM:**
    - In more developed sport tourism contexts, tax benefits, marketing exposure, or co-branding opportunities are offered to companies that sponsor or support events. Bhutan currently lacks such structured incentives.
    - This makes it difficult for BIM to attract high-value corporate sponsorships, both domestically and internationally. Potential sponsors may perceive low return on investment (ROI) or unclear regulatory pathways.
  - **Impact on BOC:**
    - BOC is unable to formalize public-private partnership models or engage local businesses in long-term sponsorship deals due to lack of policy mechanisms, financial incentives, or recognition frameworks.
    - This forces the committee to rely heavily on donor funding or ad hoc government support, limiting BIM's financial sustainability.
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### 5.5.3. No Coordinated Infrastructure, Permitting, or Branding Support

- **Impact on BIM:**
  - Organizing BIM requires collaboration across infrastructure, transport, police, health services, and district administrations. Without a national event coordination policy or integrated platform, BOC faces fragmented communication and operational bottlenecks.
  - The race route, which runs through rural and ecologically sensitive areas, often requires special permissions from multiple agencies. These are handled case by case, increasing planning time and unpredictability.
- **Impact on BOC:**
  - The absence of a centralized permitting and branding support mechanism makes it difficult for BOC to standardize event identity, streamline approvals, and scale the BIM model to other regions.
  - It also reduces the potential for BOC to build a cohesive national sports brand linked to Bhutan's soft power and global positioning as a wellness destination.

According to Chalip's (2004) sport event leverage model, the real value of hosting sport events lies not merely in economic impact, but in the strategic ability to leverage events for broader goals—such as tourism, urban development, community building, or international image-building.

Bhutan's current policy vacuum restricts BIM from achieving this leverage. Without institutional support to formalize its role in Bhutan's national development strategy, BIM risks becoming an isolated, under-leveraged event rather than a catalyst for sport tourism growth.

If the BOC is to fully harness BIM's potential, it must:

- Create a National Sport Tourism Policy that clearly defines the role of sports events in Bhutan's tourism and economic development agendas.
- Introduce incentive schemes to engage the private sector in sport sponsorship and event investment.
- Establish a multi-agency coordination body to provide integrated support for logistics, licensing, and event branding.

Doing so would not only benefit BIM and the BOC but would also unlock a new, sustainable development pathway for Bhutan rooted in wellness, culture, and active tourism.

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Recommendations for BOC and Policy makers:

Strategic Area	Recommended Action
National Policy Development	Advocate for a National Sport Tourism Strategy defining roles, funding, and a unified event calendar.
Fast-Track Protocols	Create a BIM-specific visa facilitation mechanism with MoFA and Immigration.
Licensing Reform	Establish a "one-stop event licensing window" for permits across agencies.
Stakeholder Platform	Launch a BIM Planning and Coordination Committee including BOC, TCB, RSTA, Health, and Dzongkhags.

Addressing these limitations and challenges is fundamental for BIM's long-term success. Strategic partnerships, phased implementation, ongoing stakeholder engagement, and institutional support are key to overcoming these barriers. Recognizing these constraints will also allow for more adaptable, context-sensitive planning in Bhutan's evolving sports tourism landscape.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

The Bhutan International Marathon (BIM), founded by the Bhutan Olympic Committee (BOC), stands as a unique confluence of sport, culture, and sustainability in a rapidly evolving global sports tourism market. This research has thoroughly explored BIM's current status, challenges, and untapped potential as a flagship event that can drive both the economic and cultural aspirations of Bhutan.

From the findings, it is evident that the BIM offers a compelling value proposition—not only as a physical race through Bhutan's majestic landscape but as an immersive experience rooted in the values of Gross National Happiness (GNH), environmental sustainability, and cultural heritage. The marathon's unique character appeals to international adventure seekers and wellness tourists, making it an ideal tool for Bhutan's "high value, low volume" tourism policy.

However, despite its promise, the marathon has yet to realize its full potential. The study identified significant gaps in areas such as strategic marketing, infrastructure readiness, community integration, human resource capacity, and institutional coordination. These constraints are compounded by the absence of a dedicated sports tourism policy, inconsistent stakeholder alignment, and limited financial and logistical support mechanisms.

Yet, the research also reveals encouraging prospects. Participants report high satisfaction with the cultural and natural experience, while local businesses benefit from increased sales. There is strong stakeholder interest in enhancing BIM's scale and appeal, especially if supported by improved digital engagement, eco-friendly practices, bundled tourism packages, and strategic partnerships. These findings underscore that with the right interventions, BIM can evolve from a national sporting event into a globally recognized sports tourism asset.

### 6.1. Implications:

The implications of this research are multifaceted:

- **For the Bhutan Olympic Committee:** BIM represents a path to financial sustainability through diversified revenue streams such as sponsorships, merchandising, bundled travel packages, and media rights. It also enhances BOC's credibility and capacity as a sports event organizer.
- **For national tourism policy:** BIM can serve as a model for integrating sports into Bhutan's tourism offerings. If embedded in a broader sports tourism framework, it could stimulate economic activity beyond peak tourism seasons and draw niche, high-value visitors.
- **For local communities:** The marathon offers an avenue for structured volunteerism, employment, and entrepreneurial opportunities—particularly in hospitality, transport, and cultural performance.

- **For Bhutan's international image:** BIM promotes Bhutan as a destination that fuses mindful travel, sustainability, and cultural richness—offering a distinctive alternative to mass sporting events in urban centers.

## 6.2. Way Forward:

To fully unlock BIM's potential, this study recommends the following strategic directions:

1. **Institutionalization of Sports Tourism:** The government should develop a national sports tourism policy that outlines roles, budgets, and incentives for stakeholders—especially for recurring events like BIM. This will provide the BOC with the policy backing and inter-agency support it needs to scale the marathon.
2. **Enhanced Marketing and Digital Branding:** BIM must be positioned as a “mindful marathon” through immersive storytelling, influencer marketing, and social media campaigns that appeal to wellness and adventure travelers. A dedicated mobile app, integration with global marathon calendars, and multilingual registration platforms are essential.
3. **Strengthening Human Capital:** The BOC must invest in specialized training in sports management, logistics, emergency response, and branding. Collaborations with educational institutions and IOC's Olympic Solidarity programme can build a long-term talent pipeline.
4. **Community and Cultural Integration:** BIM should deepen its engagement with local communities—offering them a stake in the event's success through structured volunteerism, artisan showcases, and cultural co-programming.
5. **Sustainability and Eco-Certification:** In alignment with Bhutan's carbon-negative commitment, BIM should pursue environmental certifications and adopt green event logistics—from biodegradable materials to carbon footprint assessments.
6. **Monitoring, Evaluation, and Continuous Improvement:** Establishing a robust Performance Monitoring Framework (PMF) will ensure data-driven decision-making and continuous enhancement of the event's quality and impact.

The Bhutan International Marathon is more than a race; it is a symbol of Bhutan's potential to lead the world in authentic, sustainable, and values-driven sports tourism. For the BOC, it is an opportunity to move beyond donor dependency and become a financially empowered, globally relevant institution. For Bhutan, it is a chance to export its unique brand of wellness, happiness, and ecological harmony to the world. This research concludes that with visionary leadership, inter-agency collaboration, and community engagement, the BIM can become a powerful driver of inclusive economic growth, cultural preservation, and international goodwill. It is not merely about running—it is about running with purpose, vision, and pride in Bhutan's story.

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