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Transforming Event Experiences: The Role of Application Technology in Shaping Behavioral Intentions and Attachment to Places

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ABSTRACT

This study develops an integrated model that investigates the impact of app technology on event experiences and subsequent consumer behaviors—place attachment, affective commitment, and behavioral intentions. In the context of sports tourism events, data were collected from 219 international participants during the 12th Transpyr race in 2022. Results suggest that perceived usefulness, information value, and perceived enjoyment are drivers of users' app satisfaction, though perceived ease of use did not directly impact app satisfaction. App satisfaction positively impacted event experiences, fostering place attachment, behavioral intention (intention to participate, word-of-mouth, electronic word-of-mouth), and affective commitment. Affective commitment also influenced behavioral intentions positively, unlike place attachment. This study extends the tourism and consumer behaviors literature. It also presents a new perspective on the TAM model by measuring the users' online experience and its impact on the event experience. Additionally, it provides event organizers with guidelines for building successful experiences.

1 | Introduction

In the last decade, technology has significantly altered how events are organized and experienced (Ramessur and Bekaroo 2020). The increasing ubiquity of mobile devices and the exponential growth of app technology have created a new paradigm for event organizers who are leveraging these tools to provide attendees with more engaging and interactive experiences. The global event apps market size is forecasted to grow to 2.64 billion dollars by 2028 (The Insight Partners 2023), reaching a growth rate of 14% from 2022. Parallelly, the sports events industry is expected to reach a volume of 32.26 billion dollars by 2027, resulting in an annual growth of 2.72% (Statista Market Insights 2023).

In line with this, the sports event industry has embraced this technological shift, with event apps playing an increasingly prominent role in enhancing the participants' experiences. The

mobile apps' use during events is becoming popular, as they offer a convenient platform for participants to access information, engage with other users and the event itself, and participate in various activities. These apps also allow event organizers to collect data on participants, enabling them to tailor their services to meet their audience's needs and preferences. In doing so, event apps can help organizers create memorable experiences for attendees while increasing their overall satisfaction and loyalty (Li et al. 2019). Furthermore, integrating social support mechanisms through these apps can promote innovativeness and subjective happiness among participants, thereby enhancing their overall event experience (Lee et al. 2023).

Despite the benefits of mobile technology in shaping event experiences, little is known about its significance in the sports industry, specifically in the context of events. The existing literature on this topic still reveals various gaps that must be addressed. First, previous studies focused mainly on measuring the impact

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of sports app features on improving users' performance (Liu et al. 2023) instead of capturing the impact on the overall experience and behavioral responses. Second, they investigated the effect of app technology from a wearable' perspective, focusing mainly on device technology and how it drives specific behaviors (Liu et al. 2023). Finally, the rest of the studies explored the effect of experiences from a design features' level on specific behavioral outcomes such as destination image (Xia, Zhang, and Zhang 2018) and users' continuance intention (Song et al. 2021), ignoring other potential consequences of the event itself. Therefore, previous scholarly works have predominantly focused on either investigating the influence of app technology on behavioral outcomes in the context of sports or exploring the impact of experiences on these outcomes independently, without considering their potential interconnectedness. Funk (2017) has pinpointed that future research needs to study the experience provided by the sports organization as a multitude of two-way interactions along the entire sports consumer journey rather than being solely transactional.

In response to these gaps, this paper proposes a comprehensive research model connecting the app technology literature to the event experience one. More specifically, this study aims to respond to the central question of how the technological characteristics of an event-related mobile app can be leveraged to optimize the participants' experience during an event and, in turn, to drive favorable outcomes. To accomplish this, on the one hand, this paper aims to investigate the determinant factors influencing the users' app satisfaction during a sports event, by extending the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) model to include not only the ease of use and perceived usefulness but also the information value and the enjoyment of the app, considering the nature of sports events. On the other hand, it seeks to uncover the influence of this satisfaction on driving an effective event experience that could be translated into more positive behavioral-related outcomes such as affective commitment (Allen and Meyer 1990), behavioral intentions (Matute, Polo-Redondo, and Utrillas 2016), and place attachment (Palau-Saumell et al. 2019). The study contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the importance of event apps in the sports tourism industry and by providing insights into how these apps impact users' experiences with physical events. This will contribute to extending the consumer behaviors research and validating the role of the extended TAM model in sports tourism literature. The practical findings of this study also have important implications for event organizers by informing the selection of their future event apps designed to enhance their participants' experiences.

2 | Theoretical Background

2.1 | Event Experience

Event experiences refer to the extraordinary experiences created and curated during events and festivals (De Geus, Richards, and Toepoel 2016). According to previous studies, events are acknowledged as a significant motivator of tourism attraction. Consequently, event and tourism experiences entail comparable encounters and sensations. They encompass more than the core activity to include the overall feelings and perceptions that individuals have during a specific event, such as a sports event or

a festival (Getz 2005), resulting in their deliberate engagement with the planned activities (Chen et al. 2014). This suggests that event experiences are characterized by their focus on creating unique, memorable, and personal experiences that engage participants in a multisensory and emotional way (Richards 2017). Driven by their inherent uniqueness, these experiences hold a magnetic appeal that distinguishes them from traditional attractions, offering attendees a sense of escape from their routines (Getz 2005). For this reason, scholars have characterized these experiences as transformative, as it implies the participants' transition to unlocking new dimensions of behaviors and emotions that take them away from their daily lives (Getz 2005). This immersive setting creates a shared bond with the event (Morgan 2008), leading to various outcomes that profoundly and emotionally affect the participants (Kirillova, Lehto, and Cai 2017).

The sports experience, as a subset of the event experience, incorporates diverse interactions between the sport consumer and the event (Funk 2017). Therefore, researchers need to investigate this interaction and its impact on driving specific actions such as affective commitment toward the event, attachment to the place, and behavioral intentions. For this reason, this study measures the event experience using Kang and Gretzel's (2012) conceptualization of experience composed of three main dimensions: learning, enjoyment, and escape (Forgas-Coll et al. 2017). Accordingly, learning refers to acquiring new knowledge, skills, or insights through participating in an event (Pearce 2005). Enjoyment of the experience refers to the pleasure and fun individuals derive from participating in an event (Davis, Bagozzi, and Warshaw 1992); this includes positive emotions such as happiness, excitement, and joy. Furthermore, escape refers to seeking relief from daily life difficulties by retreating into an immersive environment (Pearce 2005).

2.2 | The Interplay Between Satisfaction With an Event Mobile Application and Event Experience

The events industry has gained a distinguished reputation for its ability to adapt effectively to dynamic environmental changes. This adaptability consistently aims to exceed attendees' expectations by creating memorable and engaging experiences (Neuhofer, Celuch, and To 2020). A pivotal approach in accomplishing this objective involves adopting and integrating emerging technologies such as event mobile apps (Solaris 2018). In this sense, event technologies refer to the use of technology, encompassing both hardware and software, within the context of a live event (Solaris 2018). These technologies play a facilitative role in engaging attendees, planning the event, and delivering successful experiences (Solaris 2018). Given this consideration, the event landscape offers many examples demonstrating how event organizers leverage event apps to elevate attendees' experiences (Larson 2023). Extant scholarly literature has also corroborated the correlation between event technologies and event experiences. For example, Van Winkle et al. (2016) found that using mobiles can enhance the participants' festival experiences. Martin and Cazarré (2016) probed that effectively leveraging technology can make an event experience more remarkable, personal, and memorable, leading to higher satisfaction and loyalty (Tung and Ritchie 2011). In this sense, the concept of

technology satisfaction can be considered as the emotional state that results from how users cognitively assess the difference between their expectations and a technology's performance, which can lead to either positive or negative feelings toward the technology (Bhattacherjee 2001). Coherently, authors such as Chang (2015) defined customer app satisfaction as users' overall perception while using mobile applications. This perception is influenced by various factors such as utility, hedonism, or social factors and measures how users perceive the system based on their experience with it (Lin and Wang 2006).

Prior studies suggest that app satisfaction increases participants' assessment of an event (Li et al. 2019; Talantis, Shin, and Severt 2020). A well-designed app that answers the users' needs and expectations can enhance their overall experience with the event (Luxford and Dickinson 2015). For instance, Luxford and Dickinson (2015) highlighted the integral role of mobile apps in enhancing the users' event experience during music festivals. They found a positive correlation between the overall users' satisfaction with the event's official app and their experience. Similarly, Li et al. (2019) found that the emotional response elicited from using a festival app enhanced the perceived quality of their festival experience. Additionally, Talantis, Shin, and Severt (2020) observed that the perceived usefulness of a conference mobile app not only influenced users' attitudes toward the app but also significantly affected their overall conference satisfaction. This relationship has also been corroborated in the context of sports marketing (Lopez et al. 2021). Consequently, it is expected that in the context of this study, participants' satisfaction with an event mobile app will increase their assessment of the event experience. In line with this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1. *The participants' satisfaction with using an event-related mobile application will positively and significantly affect their event experience.*

2.3 | Drivers of Satisfaction With an Event-Related Mobile Application

2.3.1 | The Technology Acceptance Model

The TAM is a recognized framework for understanding user acceptance and technology usage in information systems (Davis 1989). TAM emphasizes the importance of perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) in influencing user decisions to adopt and use technology. PU refers to users' beliefs that technology will enhance their performance, while PEOU reflects users' perception of how effortless it is to use the technology (Davis 1989). Previous research has applied TAM to various sectors, including the MICE industry, hotel services, and branded sports apps (Talantis, Shin, and Severt 2020; Won, Chiu, and Byun 2023). However, more research needs to be conducted on using events mobile applications. To address this gap, this study employs TAM to investigate users' app satisfaction and the impact of app technology on event experiences in a sports event context.

In the context of mobile apps in sports events, PEOU refers to participants' overall perception of using the app effortlessly

throughout the event. When users perceive technology as easy to use, it enhances their confidence and perception of usefulness (Venkatesh, Thong, and Xu 2012). A user-friendly interface and clear instructions can enhance users' evaluation of the technology. In a sports event where the app plays a crucial role, participants expect certain features to be intuitive, increasing satisfaction with the app (Matos and Madeira 2005). Similarly, PU is defined as participants' overall perception of the app's effectiveness and usefulness, which influences their evaluation of the app. In the context of sports mobile apps, users perceive the app as useful when it provides practical features and valuable information that enhance their experience and performance. Users are more likely to engage and be satisfied with the app when they perceive its usefulness. Thus, increased PU significantly impacts users' satisfaction with the app.

In summary, this study builds on the TAM framework to examine users' app satisfaction in the context of a sports event. It explores the influence of app technology on event experiences. It hypothesizes that participants' PEOU and PU of the mobile app will increase their assessment of the app. Consistent with the original TAM model, it is expected that PEOU will increase PU. This relationship will be included as a structural control parameter in the model without being explicitly hypothesized. Therefore, the proposed hypotheses are as follows:

H2. *The participants' perception of the ease of use of an event-related mobile application will positively and significantly affect their satisfaction with the app.*

H3. *The participants' perception of the usefulness of an event-related mobile application will positively and significantly affect their satisfaction with the app.*

2.3.2 | Extended TAM: Enjoyment and Information Value

2.3.2.1 | Information Value (IV) and App Satisfaction.
Information value (IV) refers to the advantages of obtaining information from a system. To assess the value and quality of perceived information, three elements should be considered: usefulness, relevance, and helpfulness (Li and Zeng 2011). Users are more likely to perceive information as valuable if it is helpful for problem-solving, contributes to informed decision-making, and provides new learnings (Singh and Singh 2018). Information relevant to users' objectives and presented engagingly is also considered highly valuable (Singh and Singh 2018). Previous research has shown a positive correlation between information value and PU (Seddon and Kiew 1996; Ghasemaghaei and Hassanein 2016). In this sense, high-quality information and ease of use (EOU) significantly impact PU, leading to continuous intention to use online services (Ghasemaghaei and Hassanein 2016). IV is also crucial in determining users' satisfaction with the application (Alshibly 2015; Yang and Peterson 2004). Users who perceive high information value are more likely to be satisfied with the app (Alshibly 2015; Yang and Peterson 2004). In this study, IV is measured by evaluating the app's information as valuable and useful in enhancing the event experience. This includes features such as route information, weather conditions, points of interest,

accuracy, relevance, and timeliness. When users perceive this information as accurate, relevant, and timely, it increases their comfort, confidence, and preparedness for the event, ultimately enhancing their satisfaction. Clear guidance, route alerts, personalized recommendations, and tracking progress could also increase users' satisfaction. Previous research supports that IV influences app satisfaction (Cho 2019; Kim, Wang, and Roh 2021). Accordingly, it is expected that IV will increase the app's PU and users' satisfaction by contributing to fostering positive user experiences. Therefore, it is hypothesized that information value will increase satisfaction. The model includes its effect on PU as a control structural relationship. Consequently,

H4. *The participant perception of the information value of an event-related mobile application will positively and significantly affect their satisfaction with the app.*

2.3.2.2 | Perceived Enjoyment and Satisfaction With the Mobile App. Perceived enjoyment (PENJ) is a variable typically used in the technology acceptance literature that refers to the pleasurable and fun experiences that individuals perceive when interacting with technology (Venkatesh, Thong, and Xu 2012). It represents the hedonic motivation for using technology and is separate from practical benefits. In this study, PENJ refers to the positive emotions and feelings that users experience while using the app during the event.

Previous literature emphasized the importance of intrinsic motivations in explaining technology adoption and usage, leading to higher satisfaction levels (Davis, Bagozzi, and Warshaw 1992). In this sense, technologies frequently include hedonic features that stimulate individuals' intentions to adopt and use these systems (Chiu and Cho 2021; Won, Chiu, and Byun 2023). These features lead to the users' enjoyment, and in turn, to their satisfaction with the technology (Hsiao, Chang, and Tang 2016). For example, Lee and Shim (2006) found that PENJ, representing hedonism, substantially impacts satisfaction with mobile business applications. This was explained by the hedonic nature of satisfaction in IS reflecting the feeling of pleasure or displeasure that a user experiences (Lee and Shim 2006), aligned with the hedonic nature of PENJ. Similarly, Won, Chiu, and Byun (2023) affirmed that apps should integrate beneficial and well-designed features to enhance users' experiences in the branded sports apps context. These technical features strongly impact the enjoyment of the app and satisfaction. Therefore, we posit the following:

H5. *The participants' PENJ of an event-related mobile application will positively and significantly affect their satisfaction with the app.*

2.4 | Consequences of Event Experiences

2.4.1 | Behavioral Intentions

The impact of event experience on participants' behavioral intentions has garnered substantial scholarly interest during the past years. Behavioral intentions refer to an individual's intentions to engage in a particular behavior, such as purchasing a product or using a service (Warshaw and Davis 1985). In the field of marketing and consumer behaviors, understanding the factors that shape an individual's behavioral intentions is essential to predict and influence their actions. It has been expressed in various ways, such as repurchase/revisit intentions, word-of-mouth, e-word-of-mouth, and loyalty (Matute, Polo-Redondo, and Utrillas 2016; Meeprom and Silanoi 2020; Palau-Saumell et al. 2019). The present study uses behavioral intentions as a higher-order construct composed of the intention to participate in the event in the future, the word-of-mouth, and the e-word-of-mouth.

Word-of-mouth refers to information about a product or service communicated between consumers through personal conversations, phone calls, or other interpersonal communication (Moliner-Tena et al. 2023). E-word-of-mouth refers to exchanging information about products or services through online platforms, such as social media, forums, and review websites (Matute, Polo-Redondo, and Utrillas 2016). Positive event experiences can strongly affect participants' behavioral intentions, as indicated by their inclination to engage in follow-up activities. Participants who have had a pleasant experience during a specific event may feel motivated to share their experiences online, resulting in positive e-word-of-mouth. This, in turn, can influence potential participants' decision-making processes and drive their inclination to engage in similar activities. A satisfying event experience can encourage participants to recommend the event to others directly. Furthermore, participants with a positive and engaging event experience are likelier to join future editions, building a sense of loyalty and dedication to the event (Ding and Hung 2021). Therefore, based on previous evidence, it is expected that event experience will enhance the participants' behavioral intentions toward the event, leading to the following hypothesis:

H6. *The participants' event experience will positively and significantly impact their behavioral intentions toward the event.*

2.4.2 | Place Attachment

2.4.2.1 | Place Attachment and Event Experience. Place attachment theory is a concept in psychology that refers to individuals' emotional bond or connection with a particular physical location (Hidalgo and Hernandez 2001). This theory is rooted in the idea that individuals develop a sense of identity (1), which refers to a symbolic attachment to a place, and a sense of dependency (2) which refers to a functional attachment to a place through their experiences and memories (Williams and Vaske 2003).

Place attachment theory suggests that people form attachments to places through repeated exposure, positive experiences, and the formation of personal meanings and memories associated with the place (Manzo 2005). It also suggests that this bond is formed as a result of the goods and services that the place has to offer (Pai et al. 2023). In this sense, events organized in a specific destination can significantly impact place attachment by altering the meaning and emotions associated with a place. For example, events can positively impact place attachment by increasing feelings of community, promoting local pride, and providing opportunities for social

interactions (Scannell and Gifford 2010). Therefore, a successful event can enhance an individual's attachment to a place by providing positive memories and experiences that are associated with the place. This will create a lasting impression and an emotional connection to the location, generating an affinity for the place and a desire to revisit it in the future. In this line, Vada, Prentice, and Hsiao (2019) found that memorable tourism experiences significantly influence place attachment. Thus, it is expected that:

H7. *The participants' event experience will significantly and positively impact their attachment to the place of the event.*

2.4.2.2 | Place Attachment and Behavioral Intentions. According to Palau-Saumell et al. (2019), place attachment is pivotal in driving behavioral outcomes during events, such as participants' inclination to revisit, recommend, and engage in positive word-of-mouth communications about a recreational site. When individuals form a strong connection with a place, they are more likely to return and actively plan to participate in the event again. Place attachment also leads to increased recommendations and favorable reviews, as participants who have a deep attachment to the event's location are more inclined to share their positive experiences offline and online (Palau-Saumell et al. 2019). Furthermore, this emotional bond may stimulate the participants' intention to engage in future editions of the event and stay connected with the community, driven by a strong sense of identity and emotional dependency associated with the place (Loureiro 2014). Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

H8. *The participants' place attachment will positively and significantly impact their behavioral intentions toward the event.*

2.4.3 | Affective Commitment

2.4.3.1 | Affective Commitment and Event Experience. Drawing on organizational behavior research (Allen and Meyer 1990), marketing literature has defined commitment as the desire to maintain a relationship that binds an individual to an organization (Shen et al. 2018). Allen and Meyer (1990) conceptualized commitment in three dimensions: calculative, affective, and normative. Specifically, affective commitment is an emotional factor that develops through personal involvement between a customer and an organization, resulting in a higher level of commitment (Guftansson, Johnson, and Ross 2005). The current research focuses on affective commitment as a determinant of customer retention (Fullerton 2003), showing more favorable correlations with organizations (Meyer et al. 2002) and validation in sports organizations (Rocha and Chelladurai 2011).

Event experience is essential for developing affective commitment in participants and can be explained by the affective events theory (AET) (Weiss and Cropanzano 1996). AET suggests that emotions are the main determinants of individuals' attitudes and behaviors in response to events. Various sources, such as the event environment, interactions with others, and personal experiences, elicit these emotions. They can influence individuals' behaviors by creating an emotional bond by

accumulating positive experiences, leading to outcomes such as satisfaction and commitment (Weiss and Cropanzano 1996). Customer experiences with brands have contributed to creating affective commitment toward the brand in different product categories (Iglesias, Singh, and Batista-Foguet 2011). Similarly, Ok et al. (2020) affirmed that participants' satisfaction with a community running event positively impacts their affective commitment to the event, increasing the likelihood of sustaining their relationship. Therefore, it is likely that the positive experiences participants undergo throughout an event will lead to increased affective commitment toward the organization:

H9. *The event experience will significantly and positively impact participants' affective commitment toward the event.*

2.4.3.2 | Affective Commitment and Behavioral Intentions. Previous studies indicate that individuals with a high level of affective commitment exhibit positive behavioral intentions toward the event (Maduku et al. 2023; Ryu and Park 2020). First, regarding word-of-mouth, when individuals develop a strong emotional bond and a deep sense of loyalty toward an event, it acts as a powerful motivator for them to engage in positive communications, both online and offline (Maduku et al. 2023; Ryu and Park 2020). Second, regarding the intention to participate in future editions, participants with a robust affective commitment may develop more loyalty toward the event, serving as a strong driver to continue their involvement. Although little is known about this relationship in the sports context, it has been proven in brand communities that consumers with a strong commitment to the brand are more likely to support its products and engage with its community (Muniz Jr and O'guinn 2001) Additionally, this commitment predicts their purchase intention and willingness to spend more money on the brand's products (Dijkmans, Kerkhof, and Beukeboom 2015). In line with this, it is predicted that participants who share an affective bond with a sporting event are more likely to engage in communication activities with the event's environment and participate in future editions. Therefore, we hypothesize that

H10. *Participants' affective commitment toward the event will positively and significantly impact their behavioral intentions toward the event.*

The hypotheses proposed above are presented in Figure 1.

3 | Methodology

3.1 | Research Context

The research model was tested in the context of using mobile apps within sports events. More specifically, the app selected for this study was the official route sponsor of the event, Komoot. Komoot is a popular outdoor navigation and planning application for cycling, hiking, and other outdoor activities. This app was used by all the participants during the Transpyr race that took place in June 2022. Transpyr is an annual sporting event in the Pyrenees Mountains, between the south of France and the north of Catalunya. It is a competition that covers ~800 km and is considered one of the most challenging
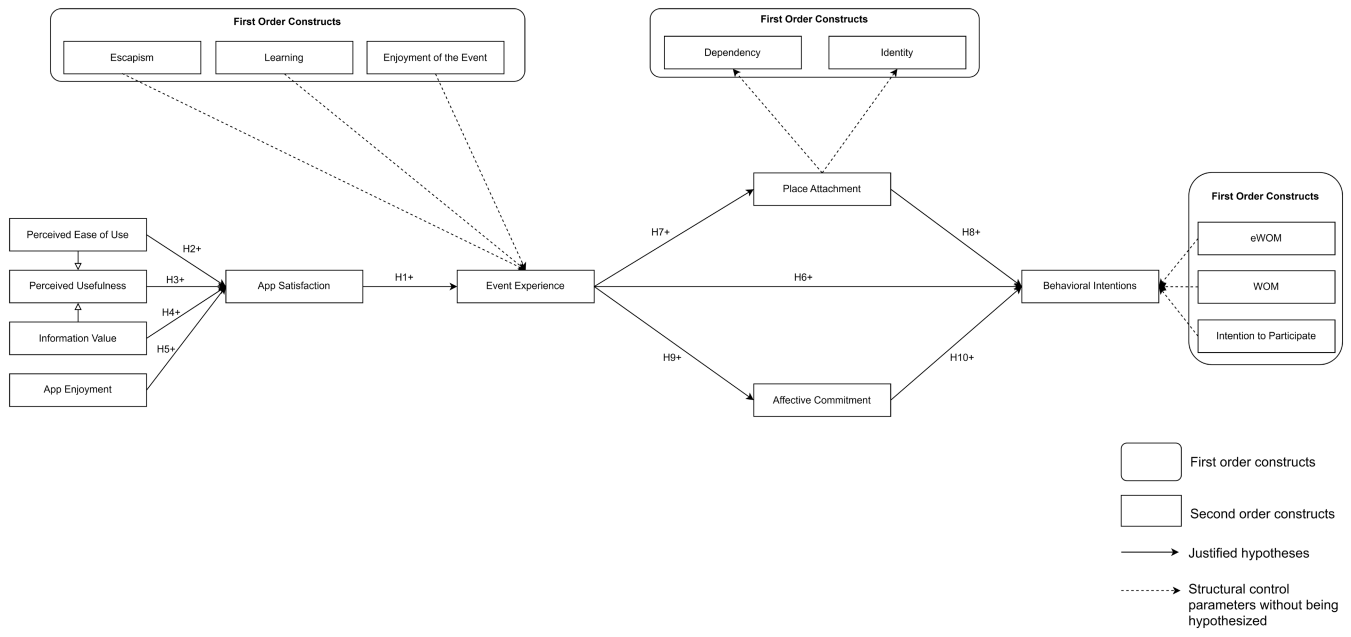
FIGURE 1 | The research model.

cycling races in the world. The event attracts amateur and professional cyclists and takes place over seven stages, passing through historic villages, and crossing high mountain passes. The race is designed to offer a comprehensive experience for participants, including support services such as mechanics, medical teams, and feeding stations along the route. Komoot was used during Transpyr to plan the routes for the participants and provide them with personalized, turn-by-turn voice navigation, detailed topographic maps, and insights into elevation changes, surface types, difficulty level, and more, online and offline.

3.2 | Procedure

The data was collected using a printed survey targeting all the Transpyr participants from June 12 to 17, 2022. The collection was done in person, and the questionnaire was developed in English. English-to-French and English-to-Spanish translations were also available to ensure that all respondents understood the content of this study, despite language-specific differences (e.g., interpretation and nuance). The appendix (Appendix A) provides a copy of the questionnaire. After data screening, incomplete and nonvalid questionnaires were removed, and 219 answers were considered valid. Most respondents (37.9%) were between 46 and 55 years old and were men (91.3%). Most respondents used the app for more than 2 years (57.5%) and around three times a week (39.7%).

3.3 | Questionnaire Design and Measurement

The study used seven-point Likert scales (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) derived from validated instruments from prior studies. Behavioral intentions were conceptualized as a second-order construct composed of three first-order latent variables: word-of-mouth measured by the Sisson

and Whalen (2022) scale, electronic word-of-mouth measured by Serra-Cantallops, Ramon-Cardona, and Salvi (2018) scale, and intention to participate measured by Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Herrmann (2005) scale. Attachment to place was also measured as a second-order construct, consisting of two dimensions, specifically dependence, and identity, following Palau-Saumell et al. (2019) proposal. EOU and PU were measured by items adapted from Kim, Chan, and Gupta (2007) and Davis (1989). Additionally, the Li and Zeng (2011) scale evaluated information value. The event experience was assessed as a second-order construct composed by learning, enjoyment, and escape, using the Kang and Gretzel (2012) scale. Furthermore, app satisfaction was measured using items adapted from Li et al. (2019). Finally, three items were adapted from Sisson and Whalen (2022) to measure affective commitment.

3.4 | Common Method Bias Assessment

The present study relied on collecting data from a one-time survey. Therefore, the common method bias had to be addressed on a procedural and statistical basis (Podsakoff et al. 2003). First, all participants were given the voluntary option to participate in the study and were assured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of their data. This lessens the likelihood of dishonesty or artificial answers from the respondents (Podsakoff et al. 2003). Second, the dependent and independent variables were randomly presented to prevent the respondents from drawing the cause-and-effect links between the constructs. Third, since the data collection was in person, participants were guided and had their questions and doubts answered, contributing to filling out the questionnaire thoughtfully and thoroughly and finishing it completely. Fourth, a full collinearity test based on variance inflation factors (VIF) was held to discard any possible bias. The analysis revealed that the VIF values ranged between 1.309 and 4.268, all lower than 5, which indicates the absence of common method bias (Hair et al. 2017).

4 | Results

The partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) technique with the software SmartPLS 4.0 was used to test the proposed research model. Specifically, PLS was chosen for the following reasons. First, PLS is more suitable for conceptual models that include both formative and reflective variables, which is the case of this study (Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt 2011). Second, it is more appropriate when the sample size is lower than 250 (Reinartz, Haenlein, and Henseler 2009). Third, PLS provides first-order latent variable scores for follow-up analyses, which was needed in this study (Hair et al. 2019).

4.1 | Measurement Model Assessment

To test the proposed model, a two-stage approach took place to estimate the second-order constructs (Wetzels, Odekerken-Schröder, and Van Oppen 2009). During the preliminary first-order estimation stage, the first-order latent variables were assessed as reflective mode-A. As a result of this process, one

item was removed from the e-word-of-mouth scale. In the second stage, after obtaining the latent variable scores for the first-order constructs, the second-order final measurement model was analyzed. Table 1 shows the results of the second-stage estimation for the reflective constructs. Again, all the outer loadings were above the recommended threshold of 0.70, therefore, verifying the existence of individual reliability and the latent variable composite reliability for reflective constructs. Additionally, the Average variance extracted (AVE) indicators were above the critical threshold of 0.5, meaning the research model guarantees internal consistency and convergent validity (Hair et al. 2019). The Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios of the second-order model were below 0.85 (Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt 2015), therefore confirming the existence of discriminant validity (Table 2).

Regarding the mode-B estimated constructs, the VIFs were examined with full collinearity (Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt 2011). As Table 3 shows, the resulting VIFs range from VIFs 1.309 to 2.181, thus suggesting that formative indicators for the second-order constructs do not have multicollinearity issues. In addition, external validity was analyzed by assessing the indicators' weights. Indicators have external validity when they have statistically

TABLE 1 | Reflective measurement model—Stage II.

Constructs	Items	Standardized loading (SD)	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Perceived ease of use (EOU)	EOU1	0.895	0.936	0.830
	EOU2	0.911		
	EOU3	0.926		
Perceived usefulness (PU)	PU1	0.928	0.956	0.844
	PU2	0.931		
	PU3	0.888		
	PU4	0.926		
Information value (IV)	IV1	0.861	0.926	0.759
	IV2	0.889		
	IV3	0.843		
	IV4	0.892		
App enjoyment (ENJ_APP)	ENJ_APP1	0.897	0.921	0.745
	ENJ_APP2	0.818		
	ENJ_APP3	0.901		
	ENJ_APP4	0.834		
App satisfaction (SAT_APP)	SAT_APP1	0.933	0.947	0.856
	SAT_APP2	0.939		
	SAT_APP3	0.903		
Affective commitment (COM)	COM1	0.890	0.937	0.832
	COM2	0.921		
	COM3	0.925		
Place attachment (ATT)	DEP	0.870	0.899	0.817
	ID	0.936		

TABLE 2 | Discriminant validity analysis—Stage II.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. ATT	**0.904**	0.174	0.178	0.209	0.421	0.117	0.201
2. COM	0.147	**0.912**	0.279	0.400	0.558	0.640	0.635
3. ENJ_APP	0.141	0.275	**0.863**	0.295	0.362	0.285	0.681
4. EOU	0.173	0.359	0.293	**0.911**	0.582	0.607	0.518
5. IV	0.351	0.507	0.353	0.517	**0.871**	0.526	0.622
6. PU	0.092	0.589	0.285	0.558	0.488	**0.919**	0.551
7. SAT_APP	0.172	0.579	0.639	0.470	0.569	0.512	**0.925**

Note: See Table 1 for acronyms. Values in the diagonal represent the root square of the AVE values; values below the diagonal indicate constructs' correlations; Values above the diagonal are the HTMT ratios.

TABLE 3 | Formative measurement model—Stage II.

Constructs	Items	Weights	*t* values	VIF
Event experience (EV_EXP)	LEAR	0.414	4.389	1.786
	ENJ_EV	0.298	3.018	1.630
	ESC	0.486	3.978	1.498
Behavioral intentions (BI)	INT	0.684	3.982	1.309
	WOM	0.492	4.393	1.976
	eWOM	0.020	0.152	2.181

Abbreviation: VIF: variance inflation factor.

significant weight. If an indicator's weight is not significant, but the corresponding loading is high (i.e., above 0.50), then the indicator has external validity and should be retained (Hair et al. 2017). In this study, the variable "eWOM" of the behavioral intentions construct exhibited an insignificant weight of 0.020 but a high outer loading of 0.694, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.50. Therefore, this dimension was retained.

4.2 | Structural Model Assessment

After validating the measurement model, the structural model was tested using a bootstrapping procedure with 8.000 subsamples (Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt 2011). Results revealed that SAT_APP had a positive and significant impact on EV_EXP, supporting H1 ($\beta = 0.511$, $t = 5.724$). Additionally, contrary to initial expectations, results showed that the direct effect of EOU on SAT_APP was positive but not significant, therefore, rejecting H2 ($\beta = 0.084$, $t = 1.151$). However, when mediated by PU, this relationship becomes significant ($\beta = 0.086$, $t = 2.368$). This result indicates that PU fully mediates the influence of EOU on SAT_APP. Furthermore, the findings confirmed the positive and significant effect of PU, IV, and ENJ_APP on SAT_APP, thus supporting H3 ($\beta = 0.206$, $t = 2.575$), H4 ($\beta = 0.262$, $t = 3.676$), and H5 ($\beta = 0.464$, $t = 11.114$). Moreover, the data revealed a positive and significant effect of EV_EXP on BI, ATT, and COM, supporting H6 ($\beta = 0.335$, $t = 3.449$), H7 ($\beta = 0.522$, $t = 5.705$), and H9 ($\beta = 0.356$, $t = 5.215$) respectively. In addition, ATT does not positively and significantly impact BI, resulting in rejecting H8 ($\beta = -0.026$, $t = 0.330$). However, COM impacts BI positively and significantly, supporting H10 ($\beta = 0.592$, $t = 6.066$) (Table 4).

5 | Discussion and Implications

5.1 | Theoretical Implications

First, contrary to the existing literature, our study reveals a non-significant relationship between EOU and app satisfaction. This unexpected finding suggests that factors beyond usability play a more significant role in determining the participants' satisfaction with the event app. While the platform's EOU is an essential factor to consider, as suggested by previous studies (Chen et al. 2022; Rezvani et al. 2022), users participating in a sports event may have additional specific expectations from the app. For example, if the app lacks essential functionalities or fails to provide the needed information to facilitate the participants' journeys during the competition, they might not be satisfied. Similarly, if the app is slow or experiences technical issues, this might lead to the users' disengagement and dissatisfaction. Additionally, even if the app is easy to navigate, a poorly designed interface can negatively impact the overall user experience, leading to their dissatisfaction with the app. In conclusion, while an easy-to-use app is vital, other elements such as functionality, performance, design, content quality, and overall value all play a pivotal role in app satisfaction. They should all be considered holistically to guarantee a great user experience.

Second, our study reaffirms previous research, demonstrating the positive and significant relationships between PU, IV, and app enjoyment with app satisfaction (Hsiao, Chang, and Tang 2016; Kim, Wang, and Roh 2021; Rezvani et al. 2022). Participants' perceptions of the app's utility, information value, and user experience are crucial to overall satisfaction. Those who find the app helpful in accessing event-related information, facilitating

TABLE 4 | Structural model results.

Structural parameter	β	t values	Hypothesis testing
EOU ➔ PU	0.417	4.004***	Yes
IV ➔ PU	0.272	2.666**	Yes
H1: SAT_APP ➔ EV_EXP	0.511	5.724***	Yes
H2: EOU ➔ SAT_APP	0.084	1.151	No
H3: PU ➔ SAT_APP	0.206	2.575*	Yes
H4: IV ➔ SAT_APP	0.262	3.676***	Yes
H5: ENJ_APP ➔ SAT_APP	0.464	11.114***	Yes
H6: EV_EXP ➔ BI	0.335	3.449**	Yes
H7: EV_EXP ➔ ATT	0.522	5.705***	Yes
H8: ATT ➔ BI	−0.026	0.330	No
H9: EV_EXP ➔ COM	0.356	5.215***	Yes
H10: COM ➔ BI	0.592	6.066***	Yes

Note: See acronyms in Tables 1 and 3.
*$p < 0.01$, **$p < 0.05$, ***$p < 0.001$.

interactions, and providing relevant content are more likely to be satisfied (Kim, Wang, and Roh 2021; Rezvani et al. 2022). Similarly, higher app satisfaction is reported by participants who find the app enjoyable, engaging, and user-friendly (Won, Chiu, and Byun 2023). In the context of sports events, participants expect interactive features for tracking distances, elevation, and route mapping, promoting their engagement and enjoyment. Real-time updates and personalized content are also pivotal for their experience. Failure to meet these expectations may lead to participant dissatisfaction.

Third, one of the most significant contributions of this research lies in the positive and significant impact of app satisfaction on participants' event experiences. Consistent with prior studies, a satisfying app experience enhances participants' overall engagement and enjoyment during the event (Li et al. 2019). When satisfied with the app technology, participants are more likely to undergo favorable event experiences (Talantis, Shin, and Severt 2020). For example, a well-designed app that provides accurate route planning, turn-by-turn navigation, and offline accessibility will allow its users to confidently plan their itineraries and explore points of interest on the way. Additionally, if the app tracks the users' progress and speed and allows them to monitor their performance, then they are more likely to meet their goals successfully, leading to a sense of accomplishment. All these functionalities will contribute to a seamless app experience, leading to the enjoyment of the event and, ultimately, a satisfying event experience for the participants.

Fourth, our study reveals that a positive event experience affects participants' behavioral outcomes. Participants with a positive event experience develop a stronger sense of place attachment, exhibit higher BI, and demonstrate greater affective commitment toward the event. These findings suggest that creating memorable and satisfying event experiences fosters participants' engagement and commitment. A positive event experience, facilitated by a satisfying app, can evoke emotional connections with the event space, enhance participants' sense of belonging and identification with the event, and motivate them to engage in positive behaviors such as attending future editions and sharing their experiences with others. This, in turn, can greatly raise the event destination's community's level of economic, sociocultural, and environmental benefits (Lee et al. 2023).

Fifth, we found a nonsignificant relationship between place attachment and BI. This unexpected result challenges previous findings that a strong place attachment directly translates into specific BI (Loureiro 2014; Palau-Saumell et al. 2019). This may be justified by the intense nature of the Transpyr event, where other factors may exert a more substantial influence on participants' BI, overshadowing the impact of place attachment. These other variables include the events' experience in terms of learning, escape, and enjoyment that impacted positively and significantly the behavioral outcomes. Additionally, considering the positive relation between affective commitment and behavioral responses, this indicates that even if the event is held elsewhere, participants are more likely to continue participating, regardless of location. Therefore, even if place attachment is a necessary construct to consider in the context of event experiences, its relationship with specific BI may be more complex and influenced by various factors beyond the app technology.

5.2 | Managerial Implications

This study provides practical insights for event organizers in the sports tourism industry to enhance participants' satisfaction and event experiences, and leverage app technologies effectively. First, to improve participants' satisfaction, organizers should prioritize apps with features perceived as beneficial, such as personalized route planning, obstacle information, offline navigation, and constant communication with organizers. Creating user-friendly interfaces that resonate with the participants' identity and image, visually appealing graphics, and an optimized app performance contributes to a delightful user experience. Therefore, by allowing participants to customize their profiles and app experiences to reflect their personal preferences, interests, and values, this not only meets their functional needs but also aligns with their self-concept, thereby enhancing their overall event experience and fostering a stronger affective commitment to the event (Chen, Hyun, and Lee 2022). Second, understanding the significance of successful event experiences in fostering place attachment highlights the need for strategies aimed at enhancing this emotional connection. Event organizers should prioritize creating engaging, positive experiences that emotionally resonate with participants. This can be achieved by hosting events in memorable destinations, incorporating scenic routes, organizing engaging and personalized activities, and facilitating interactions with local communities through immersive cultural experiences and community initiatives that promote

a sense of belonging and local pride. Furthermore, developing marketing campaigns that highlight authentic, emotionally engaging experiences is likely to attract repeat visitors and foster long-term loyalty. These efforts will enhance participants' enjoyment of the experience, leading to a stronger sense of attachment to the event place and a lasting emotional connection (Li, Yuan, and Zhang 2024). Third, promoting WOM and eWOM among participants is crucial for event promotion. Encouraging participants to share their journey and recommend the event through social media platforms, online communities, and testimonials helps attract more individuals to future events. Implementing a dedicated hashtag and incentivizing active hashtag users further boosts event promotion. User-generated content, like a gallery space within the app, enables participants to capture and share moments from the event, enhancing event visibility. Therefore, with the right promotional activities and distribution channels, among other marketing mix factors, organizers can ensure their events' sustainability and businesses' growth (Praesri et al. 2022). Finally, leveraging participants' positive experiences is vital to enhancing affective commitment to the event. Tailoring participant experiences through targeted content and exclusive perks based on preferences makes participants feel valued and understood. Engaging activities and memorable experiences leave a lasting impression. Building a solid event community through connectivity and interaction facilitates bonding and increases affective commitment. Furthermore, facilitating this experience by having friendly and approachable staff may increase the sentimental attachment to the organization (Sthapit et al. 2024). In addition to regular communication before and after the event, gathering feedback, providing access to photo galleries, and special aftermath gatherings that may nurture long-term engagement.

5.3 | Limitations and Further Research

This study identifies limitations and suggests prospects for future research. It primarily focuses on sports events, highlighting how distinctive elements like physical exertion, environment, and participant preferences might have affected the interplay among app technology, event experiences, and subsequent behaviors. To enhance generalizability, forthcoming studies could extend this analysis to diverse event types and industries. Researchers can also consider a comparative analysis between slow-tourism experiences (Wu, Wang, and Zhang 2024) and intensive ones. Moreover, the study relied on self-reported questionnaire data, integrating alternative methods such as observational data or qualitative interviews could offer a more comprehensive understanding of participants' behaviors and experiences. Additionally, the research focused on app technology's constructs, sidelining external variables like personal characteristics, event specifics, and social influences. Future investigations should encompass these to grasp the different dynamics shaping participants' event experiences comprehensively.

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Appendix A

Measurement Scales

Ease of Use

EOU1. I believe that using Komoot does not require a lot of mental effort.

EOU2. The interaction with Komoot is clear and understandable.

EOU3. I find Komoot easy to use.

Perceived Usefulness

PU1. Using Komoot improves my performance in the race.

PU2. Using Komoot enhances my effectiveness in the race.

PU3. Using Komoot increases my productivity in the race.

PU4. Using Komoot is useful for improving my performance in the race.

Information Value

IV1. Komoot provides comprehensive information about the race.

IV2. The information provided by Komoot about the race is relevant.

IV3. The information provided by Komoot about the race is accurate.

IV4. The information provided by Komoot about the race is helpful.

App Enjoyment

ENJ_APP1. I enjoy using Komoot very much in the Transpyr race.

ENJ_APP2. This app is fun to use in Transpyr.

ENJ_APP3. I would describe this app as very interesting to Transpyr race.

ENJ_APP4. I think this app is quite enjoyable to use during the Transpyr race.

App Satisfaction

SAT_APP1. I am satisfied with the use of Komoot in the Transpyr.

SAT_APP2. I am satisfied with using Komoot in the Transpyr.

SAT_APP3. I think it was a good decision to use Komoot in the Transpyr.

Event Experience

Escape

ESC1. While I participate in Transpyr, I feel like I was in another world.

ESC2. While I participate in Transpyr, I get away from it all.

ESC3. While I participate in Transpyr, I get so involved that I forget everything else.

Learning

LEAR1. I am expanding my understanding about Transpyr.

LEAR2. I am gaining information and knowledge about Transpyr.

LEAR3. I am learning many different things about Transpyr.

Enjoyment of the Event

ENJ_EV1. I am having fun participating in Transpyr.

ENJ_EV2. I am enjoying being in Transpyr.

ENJ_EV3. I am getting a lot of pleasure from Transpyr.

Place Attachment

Dependence

DEP1. The Pyrenees can't be substituted by other cycling destinations.

DEP2. The Pyrenees is the best cycling destination in Europe.

DEP3. The Pyrenees has sufficient cycling routes.

Place Identity

ID1. I strongly identify with the Pyrenees.

ID2. I am proud of the Pyrenees after sharing this experience with others.

ID3. To go on a cycling race through the Pyrenees says a lot about who I am.

Behavioral Intentions

eWOM

eWOM1. It is very likely that I will write positive things about Transpyr on social networks.

eWOM2. It is very likely that I will post positive reviews about the Transpyr event on websites and/or sports' events review websites.

eWOM3. It is very likely that I will upload photos and/or videos on social networks about my journey at the Transpyr event.

WOM

WOM1. I would talk positively about attending the Transpyr event to others.

WOM2. I would recommend this professional race to my colleagues.

WOM3. If my colleagues were looking for a cycling sports' event, I would tell them to attend the Transpyr one.

Intention to Participate

INT1. I have the intention to take part in the Transpyr future editions.

INT2. I intend to actively participate in the Transpyr future editions.

Affective Commitment

COM1. I would have a sense of belonging at Transpyr.

COM2. Although there are other cycling events' alternatives, I still want to go to Transpyr.

COM3. I am "emotionally attached" to attending Transpyr in the future.