

USING ZMET TO EXPLORE SPORT EVENT ATTENDANTS' CONSTRUCTION OF MEANINGS TO HOST DESTINATION

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Sport tourist, destination, sport event, qualitative, ZMET

Aim of abstract/paper - research question

Understanding meanings of host destination of sport events to sport event tourists

Theoretical background or literature review*

Spectator sports consumption studies have attracted research attention, particularly in the areas of fan loyalties (e.g., Chen, 2010; Fairley, 2006; Fink et al., 2002; Funk et al., 2007; Funk, Filo, Beaton, & Pitchard, 2009;), types of motivation (e.g., Funk, Beaton, & Alexandris, 2012; Wann, Grieve, Zapalac, & Pease, 2008), consumption categories (Holt, 1995), evaluation of event service quality (e.g., Shonk, & Chelladurai, 2008), and attendance factors (e.g., Hall, O'Mahony, & Vieceli, 2010). Consumption experiences are embedded with social, cultural, personal, or marketing communication symbols and meanings (McCracken, 1986). Consumption provides opportunities to expose, interact, interpret symbols and meanings, and eventually reinterpret to consumers' own meanings (McCracken, 1986). Based on this assumption, when sports spectators attend sport events, they to some extent will associate with the destination's social, cultural, or environmental surroundings. In other words, the host destination becomes parts of the overall sport consumption experience. For destinations marketing, it is increasingly important to recognize opportunities to leverage destination attributes to non-local visitors during the period of their attendance to sport events (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007).

This study intends to understand meanings of sport event consumption based on consumers visit the same destination, rather than same event, attempts to discover sport event experiences without presupposition of event differences. In other words, it is to discover how a destination being part of the complete sport event consumption meanings.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

Marketing research in the past two decades have called for understanding consumers from qualitative based studies as this methodology can provide more in-depth and rich data of their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors (Keller, 2006). This study uses Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) to collect data (Zaltman, 2003; Zaltman & Coulter, 1995). ZMET focus on retrieving consumer's feelings and thought via photographic images. There are six major interview steps to ZMET, and each step "provides opportunity to validate concepts presented or reveal important ideas and concepts that previous steps might have missed" (Chen, 2010). ZMET provides opportunities to discover meaning units and connections among meanings. Consumption meanings can be discovered through analyses of consumer narratives and metaphorical expressions.

This study uses criterion sampling method, sixteen research participants attended sport event in Kaohsiung during 2011-2012 were chosen. Participants are all from northern region of Taiwan, and have not been to Kaohsiung for at least five years. Data were collected based on the ZMET steps and probes in laddering. On average lasted approximately 75 minutes. Interview data were typed into transcripts. These transcripts, together with collected photographic images, were loaded into software Atlas.ti for analysis. Each participants' interview data were individually analyzed, and a consensus map was created by integration of all themes and sub-themes identified from individual analyses.

Results, discussion and implications/conclusions**

The results indicate the meanings of sport event consumption are multi-level and multi-sensory. They went beyond the sport event servicescape or interaction with social groups within the venue. The destination serves as a part of consumers' emotional, social, and psychological attachment of the overall experiences. Major findings of this study include the following: (1) Sport events serve as positive and hedonic links to destination attribute formation. (2) Sport events offer opportunities for cultural reinterpretation of a destination. In particular, they can result in the conversion of previously biased or stereotypical cognitions. (3) Sporting events serve as a means of formation of affective attachments to the destination; they strengthen the level of involvement of the destination.

Previous research have noted that it is common for sport events marketing place greater focus on participants and the physical activities surrounding of events (Green, 2001; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; 2010), and marketing destinations place greater emphasis on physical and cultural settings (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; 2010). Findings of this study indicate sport event create opportunities to positive image linkage to the destination, providing chances to reinterpret stereotypes of the destination, and initiation for future non-sport tourism opportunities. There are still limited understanding of how consumers make sense of places during their sport event visitation. Future studies can further conceptual and theoretical development to explain the relationship between context and individual behaviors.

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