
ASSESSING THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN IMAGE CONGRUENCE, TOURIST SATISFACTION, AND REVISITING INTENTION IN MARATHON TOURISM: THE CASE OF SHANGHAI INTERNATIONAL MARATHON

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Type: Scientific

Category: 13: Tourism and Leisure Sport Management

Abstract

AIM OF ABSTRACT/PAPER – RESEARCH QUESTION

Marathon has become increasingly popular since 1970s, and tourism associated with marathon events is also booming, with the rapid increase of marathon events hosted by cities, and the number of people who combine running with travelling. For destination marketers and event planners, at issue is how to integrate marathon event to destination image, and build a characteristic marathon event that fits the image of the city. Based on a case study of Shanghai International Marathon in China, this study examined how affective image congruence (AIC) and cognitive image congruence (CIC) impact tourist satisfaction and revisiting intention in marathon tourism.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND / LITERATURE REVIEW

Image congruence is the perceived similarity between event attributes and brand attributes. It can be further divided into affective image congruence (AIC), representing the “feelings about the destination”, and cognitive image congruence (CIC, Hallmann & Breuer, 2010b), representing the “knowledge and beliefs about a destination” (Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2008). The importance of congruence originates from the match-up hypothesis (Kahle & Homer 1985). The match-up hypothesis lies in advertising research that examined the impact of different types of endorsers on the endorsed brand (Lynch & Schuler 1994). It has been widely argued that products designed to enhance one's attractiveness should have a likeable endorser, endorsers of products should be perceived by the audience to have relevant expertise (Lynch & Schuler, 1994). According to the match-up hypothesis, the direction and intensity of image transfer will depend on the quality of fit between event and destination brands, and the harmony of the match between marathon event and hosting destination may be

considered as a key factor in determining the effect of hosting a marathon event (Xing & Chalip, 2006). Moreover, the importance of match-up is grounded in schema theory, which explains how visitors use schemas or preconceived ideas about destinations and marathon events to assess how well the partners match-up and to make positive/negative evaluations. As part of their event schema, visitors also acquire memory structures, containing destination categories. Thus, congruence between marathon event and destination is expected when an individual's knowledge of the destination is consistent with that of the event. Previous studies have suggested that the image of the sport event can influence the image of the destination when congruence exists between the sport event image and the destination image (Byon & Zhang, 2010; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; Xing & Chalip, 2006). To strengthen or modify the destination image, increasingly more destination marketers strategically incorporate sport events into their promotional campaigns (Brarnwell, 1997; Gibson, Qi, & Zhang, 2008). Thus, understanding how the event and destination images work together and to what extent these two image aspects are congruent is very important.

METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS

An on-site survey was administered only to non-local runners (N=254) attending the Shanghai International Marathon in December 2013. Data were collected at four locations around the starting point of the racing. A questionnaire containing (a) destination image (10 items on Likert 5-point scale), (b) marathon event image (10 items on Likert 5-point scale), (c) tourist satisfaction (8 items on Likert 5-point scale), (d) revisiting intention (1 item on "yes" / "no" response format), and (e) demographic information was developed based on previous literature (e.g., Hallmann and Breuer, 2010a).

Factor analyses were utilized to determine the dimensionality of event image, destination image and tourist satisfaction. An image congruence variable was then derived based on the Euclidean distance of destination image and event image. A series of binary logistic regression analysis were then conducted to examine the relationship between revisiting intention, satisfaction, and image congruence.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS / CONCLUSIONS

The results showed that image congruence had a positive influence on both tourist satisfaction and revisiting intention. It was also shown that tourist satisfaction not only had a direct influence on revisiting intention, but also significantly mediated the relationship between image congruence and revisiting intention. Furthermore, the results revealed that household income and past experience of marathon tourism had a significant impact on their revisiting intentions, and past experience of marathon tourism controls the relationship between the image congruence and tourist satisfaction. Findings of this study also have practical implications because a marathon event tends to be a recurring

event to the city, it is helpful for the event organizers to create a corporate identity, which could be integrated with the destination image, for the marathon events.

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