

(SP) STUDYING SPORT TOURISM EVENT AND DESTINATION IMAGES ON INTENT TO TRAVEL: A CONCEPTUAL THEORETICAL MODEL UTILIZING THE THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR

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Introduction

Hosting sport events has been at the focus of destination marketers as a strategy to enhance the image of the host community and differentiate its tourism products (Chalip & McGuirly, 2004). Sport tourism events include participation from both athletes (participants) and spectators alike. Indeed, participation in sport tourism events has increased in recent years due to peoples' desire for more active holidays, which has resulted in strong demand for sports such as cycling, golf, jogging and hiking (de Villiers, 2001) during their stay in the host community.

Literature Review

A destination's image can be influenced by the hosting of a sport tourism event and the attributes associated with this event. Sport events can add to the attractiveness of a destination for new markets and first-time visitors (Dimanche, 2003). Tourism literature has acknowledged the importance of destination image and its role on destination awareness and decision making process (e.g. Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Dann, 1996). Destinations can enhance their image by hosting sport events that attract first time and repeat sport tourists using co-branding, brand leverage and bundling techniques (Chalip & McGuirly, 2004). The problem of this research is to examine whether sport tourism event image and its link to destination image will add power in predicting intentions to return to a destination. In the field of tourism, understanding the factors that influence intentions to travel to a destination has been a key area of research. In the field of sport tourism, Cunningham and Kwon (2003) focused on spectators' intentions to attend a sporting event in the future utilizing the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991). The TPB is a well established theory of behavioral intentions that aims to understand actions that are mainly under the volitional control of the individual and to account for those behaviors that are not under the volitional control by including the concept of perceived behavioral control in the theory. In short, the theory suggests that intentions to engage in a behavior mediate the impact of attitudes, subjective norms (SN) and perceived behavioral control (PBC) on actual behavior. In the context of recreation and leisure, two studies (Ajzen & Driver, 1992; Hrubec, Ajzen & Daigle, 2001) supported the applicability of the theory of planned behavior when studying activities such as hunting, biking, jogging and boating. The study aims to apply the theory on people who travel to participate actively in organized sport tourism events such as bike tours, running, walking, skiing, kayaking, and rafting where there may be some type of competition. For this market segment, there is lack of studies that present a clear theoretical framework that captures the factors that influence participants' intentions to return to the destination. Research has shown that some of these factors involve destination image and experience, past experience with events and destinations, subjective norms (Hagger, Chatzisarantis & Biddle, 2002), and

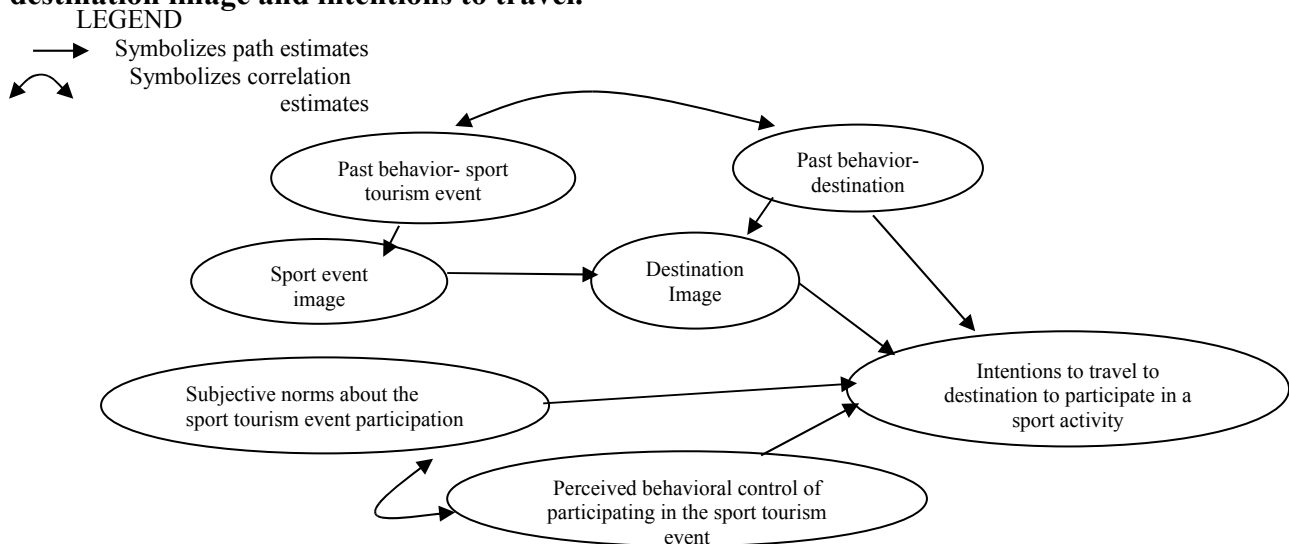
also past behavior with the event and destination (Kozak, 2001; Mazursky, 1989; Weed & Bull, 2004).

The concepts of destination image and event image as attitudinal constructs. Keller (1993) proposed that brand image consists of attributes, benefits and attitudes, which can be viewed as favorable (or unfavorable), strong (or weak) and unique (or common). This conceptualization is very similar to that of destination image proposed by Echtner and Ritchie (1991). The sport tourism event image and destination image are conceptualized as attitudinal constructs and incorporate elements proposed by Keller (1993). They replace attitudes in the original model of the TPB. Figure 1 depicts the proposed model that will be tested in this study based on the TPB. The model incorporates the relationship between event and destination images, SN, PBC, past behavior, and their impact on intentions to travel to the destination.

Methodology-Results

The target sample for this study was bicyclists who participated in an annual sport tourism event in the state of Michigan (Michigander) in 2005. A questionnaire was designed and mailed to the sample based on Dillman's (2000) tailored design approach. The sample consisted of 720 people. The effective sample was 704 because there were 4 bad addressed, and 12 incompletes. The response rate was 70% (495 people). Structural equation modeling techniques were used to test the model proposed in this study.

Figure 1. Conceptual model of the impact of a sport tourism event's image on destination image and intentions to travel.



The software utilized for the analysis was EQS 6.1. The initial results revealed that the model fit the data satisfactorily. The goodness of fit indices were acceptable (NFI=.84, NNFI=.92, CFI=.93, RMSEA=.04 with a confidence interval between .02 and .05). Path and correlation estimates will be presented analytically during the conference presentation due to limited abstract space. However, it should be mentioned that the standardized path estimate from event image to destination image was high and significant (beta= 0.58) which communicates the positive impact of sport event image on destination images and reinforces the power of sport events as marketing tools for destinations.

Discussion & Implications

The study benefits sport and tourism managers because it provides insight into “how various entities should be best combined” (Keller, 2003) to better market the destination, create awareness for their “product” and increase visitation. The results of this study can help the improvement of marketing practices such as co-branding techniques, brand leveraging approaches, and the development of more effective destination positioning strategies.

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