

Image Fit between Sport Event and Destination: The Case of Two Marathon and Cycling Events

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Abstract

Introduction

Sport events and tourism are strongly linked since latest the ancient Olympic Games 776 BC. Nowadays sport events have emerged to a central part in our culture and society and on the one hand the number of events is increasing steadily [1]. On the other hand there are more and more cities and regions bidding to become the host of a major sport event. Destinations are competing on the tourism market trying to differentiate using unique selling propositions in order to become attractive for tourists. The familiarity and the image of a destination are emphasized in tourism marketing. Sport events are regarded as an adequate instrument to achieve this target [2].

Theoretical Background

Sport events are ascribed many implications and they have become an integrative part of the tourism marketing mix [3]. Synergies between sport events and destinations have been studied and it was shown that destinations can enhance their image by hosting a major sport event through techniques such as bundling, co-branding and brand leverage [4]. Consequently, it is suggested that images play a significant role in sport tourism marketing: Firstly for destinations in bidding for a sport event and secondly for sport events in attracting participants and spectators. However these effects are only rudimentarily researched. In particular the image fit between sport event and destination has been neglected. Image fit and image transfer has been studied in sponsoring literature [5] but not with respect to sport events and their hosts. The focus of this paper lies on the image fit between sport event and its host. The current image of both will be measured. A model was developed including elements such as affective, cognitive and conative factors, psychological and socio-demographic components as well as specific location factors for the sport event and the destination.

Methodology

Empirical research at four different sport events throughout Germany with a sample size of n=300 was carried out. Out of the two events per sports one took place in a major metropolis and one in a rural region. A questionnaire containing all elements of the above mentioned model excluding specific location factors was distributed to

participants and spectators of two marathon and two cycling events. Questions included top of mind awareness regarding the type of event, the event itself and the destination, travel motive, and future behaviour towards event and destination. Moreover affective items such as emotion (five-point scale) and preference (seven items on a five-point semantic differential) were included. Cognitive items like positioning (ranking on a six-point scale containing school marks), familiarity (previous experience) and perception (three event and five destination items on a five-point scale) were integrated, too. To analyse the specific location factors a fact sheet for event and destination was developed containing elements such as size, infrastructure, media exposure, standing in the event calendar, etc. For the statistical treatment of data, the statistical package SPSS V 16 was used.

Results

The results show differences in image between rural and urban regions, participants and spectators as well as the demographic variables of gender and age. Besides, affinity between sport event and destination with respect to the region and sport is demonstrated. These findings clearly indicate implications for communication management of both, sport event and destination marketing.

However not an image transfer is analysed as it is not possible to indicate a direction of transfer with existing events in a one-time image analysis. The affinity's potential in marketing for sport events and destinations is highlighted. The model measures the affinity bd. This is congruent with previous research in the field [6]. Possible directions of image transfer can be indicated for selected sport events and their hosts.

References

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