

The significance of media effects within impact analysis of major sports events: The case of the Bob and Skeleton World Championships 2008

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Aim of paper and research questions

From an academic point of view, this study contributes to the research on impact analysis of major sports events. It illustrates the media effects of major sports events on host regions by examining the Bob and Skeleton World Championships 2008 in Germany (henceforth BSWC 08). Predominantly, it addresses aspects of media coverage and image presentation.

Literature review

The use of major sports events as an instrument of tourism and economic development has gained worldwide momentum in the last decade. Thereby much of the research has been concerned with measuring the economic impacts of sports events (Burgan & Mules, 1992; Crompton, 1995; Foley, 1991), whereas media impacts of such events have received limited attention. Besides few studies on the connection of media coverage and image enhancement (Chalip, Green & Hill, 2003; Ritchie & Smith, 1991), the primary concerns have been quantitative media values such as the reach and frequency of destination exposure and their equivalent advertising space or time (Green, Costa & Fitzgerald, 2003; Dwyer, Mellor, Mistilis & Mules, 2000; Higham, 1999). Researchers point out the necessity for further investigations on the role of sports coverage for destination images as well as on strategies to leverage event media in tourism destination marketing (Getz, 2007; Chalip, 2005). As sports events have the ability to generate a considerable media interest, they provide opportunities to enhance the destination image and the awareness of the host region (Delphi & Li, 1997; Gelan, 2003). This may, in turn, result in an increased propensity of tourists towards visiting the host region (Hede & Jago, 2005).

Research design and data analysis

Findings are based on a content analysis of 179 newspaper articles and 32 telecasts. The volume and content of media coverage has been analysed applying a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods of content analysis. Special focus has been laid on the identification of relevant news factors in sports coverage. According to the theory of news values, these factors are coming into operation when journalists select stories and therefore must be satisfied before an event is likely to become news (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001). The news factors were determined by investigating the topics of the print and television coverage of BSWC 08. Furthermore the media image of the BSWC 08 as well as that of the host region Altenberg has been assessed using the inductive and deductive category application model of qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2004). After extracting the relevant units of investigation from the corpus, this approach involves the definition, evaluation, and aggregation of image

knots. Subsequently, the identified image knots can be used to build a semantic network and to conduct a SWOT-analysis of the mediated images.

Results

Our results provide evidence of positive media effects on the host destination Altenberg. The television coverage attained viewing figures of 19.3 Million, which correspond to a market share of 14.7 percent. Considerable attention of the sports event was also attracted by the print media reaching a total of 45 Million readers. With regard to the news factors, our findings highlight that the media coverage of the BSWC 08 is particularly determined by references to persons and to celebrities (e.g. 36.1 percent of the telecasts are personified). This is due to the entertainment value that individual people - notably famous people - achieve in media sports compared to structures or social forces. Thus, our results support the notion that entertainment is a relevant factor in sports coverage (Whitlam & Preston, 1998).

The qualitative content analysis revealed that the positive image of the BSWC 08 could be transferred to the host region Altenberg. This image transfer resulted from a collective presentation of both reference objects in the media which led to numerous shared image-knots. The BSWC 08 gained the image of an outstanding, effective and well organised sports event which offered not only sporting highlights but also a variety of cultural opportunities for different stakeholders. Accordingly, the SWOT-analysis for the host community Altenberg yielded the image of an attractive, challenging and internationally recognised world sports destination as well as an appealing tourist region. Besides the positive associations communicated by the media, few image dimensions indicated room for improvement. For example, Altenberg has come under criticism for a technical failure during the BSWC 08. This should be taken into account for the organisation of future major sports events.

Discussion and conclusion

In conclusion, the media exposure of major sports events can account for image enhancement and the promotion of host destinations to potential stakeholders of the future. As media effects provide relevant information for destination marketing strategies, they need to be taken into consideration when assessing the impacts of major sports events.

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