THE STRUCTURE AND ROLE OF THE DESTINATION IMAGE OF SPORT EVENT PARTICIPANTS

Author:
 Erika Shibata

email:
ericaspobiz@yahoo.co.jp

Co-authors:
Harada, Munehiko; Waseda University
Matsuoka, Hirotaka; Waseda Uniersity

University:
Sendai University, Japan

Faculty:
Department of Sport Science

Abstract

Background

Tourism has become an acknowledged leisure industry in Japan. According to the Japan Tourism Agency (2010), domestic travel spending has reached to 23.6 trillion yen, which exceeds other major industries, such as steel (22.5 trillion yen) and petroleum/coal (20.8 trillion yen). This expansion led to the inauguration of the Japan Tourism Agency in 2008. Among the various plans the Agency is committed to, sport tourism has gathered much interest and expectation, and the Agency's convocation of the Sport Tourism Promotion Association in May, 2010 illustrates how this field is recognized as an effective means for invigorating and promoting destinations. However, Harada (2010) states that although Japan possesses world-class, rich environmental resources, it faces many challenges in developing such resources into attractive sport tourism products. For sport destinations to be appealing to tourists, destination marketing is necessary (Takahashi et al., 2010); Tasci et al. (2007) claim that one of the important factors in this approach is destination image (DI) management, i.e. taking into account that image has a strong affect on tourist behavior (Bigne et al., 2001; Chi et al., 2001; Chen et al., 2007). Although research on DI formation of general tourists exist (Echtner et al., 1993; Walmsley et al., 1998; Baloglu et al., 1999; Beerli et al., 2004; Martin et al., 2008), it is limited in sport tourism. Therefore, a study on DI of sport tourists is critical to create and manage an appropriate DI of sport destinations for effective positioning and marketing strategy.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to reexamine the previously developed DI scale (Shibata & Harada, 2010) and its factors, and to apply a more effective model to verify the interrelation of DI, evaluation, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions of participants at a sport event, who stay at the destination for more than 24 hours.

Methodology

First, a literature review was conducted to select additional items from semantic differential scales that evaluate destinations, atmosphere, and space. Second, new items to be added into the previous scale and the possibility of a fifth factor were discussed with experts in the field of sports management. Third, questionnaires with a modified DI scale were distributed to 1,043 participants at an Ultimate Frisbee tournament held on November 6-7, 2010 at Fuji City, Japan. Then, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted with the collected data, and finally, a structural equation modeling analysis (SEM) was applied to test the interrelation between the DI, evaluation, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions of the participants.

Results

Since the tournament was a Freshman Cup for first and second year university players, the average age was 19.3 years old. 51.1% of the players had experience competing in tournaments held in Fuji City, yet only 22.0% had visited the city for purposes other than participating in a sport event. The goodness of fit for the CFA showed GFI=.944, CFI=.960, RMSEA=.075, and the path coefficient from the five factors to each corresponding observed variable ranged between .52~.92. These five factors of DI were named Feeling, Atmosphere, Space, Activity, and Access, respectively. The correlation coefficients of the five factors were from -.02 to .75, and both Atmosphere and Space showed a similar reaction to other factors, which suggests a necessity for further examination in future studies. As to the goodness of fit for the SEM, GFI=.880, CFI=.909, RMSEA=.091 indicated the effectiveness of applying the tourism model to sport event participants. Significantly, DI had a direct influence on evaluation, satisfaction, and behavioral intention, yet evaluation was the highest (.59, p<.001). Furthermore, the results spoke of a strong indirect influence of DI on behavioral intentions through evaluation (.59, p<.001) and satisfaction (.64, p<.01), rather than a direct one (.28, p<.001).

Discussion

This study reinvestigated the factors and scale for evaluating the DI of sport event participants, and how DI affects evaluation, satisfaction and behavioral intentions. From the CFA, five factors of image became apparent, and this provided an explanation as to what aspects of the destination sport event participants regard as important for building an image of the place. In addition, the SEM results revealed how DI played an important role as an antecedent to evaluation and future behavior. Since the opportunity for sport event participants to engage in various activities at the destination may be limited, understanding and managing such aspects of image will enable sport event organizers and municipalities to effectively use the destination's resources to raise evaluation and satisfaction levels in future events, attract more participants, or utilize sport events as part of their destination marketing.

References:

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