

# The Effects Of Hosting International Sporting Events On City Branding From The Viewpoint Of Host Residents

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## Aim of the research

This study aims to identify the interrelationship between sporting events and host residents' place attachment by focusing on the image perceptions of sporting events and the city as well as the impact of place attachment on positive word-of-mouth intention about the events. In addition, we explored the antecedent variables of city image and investigated what kind of city image would persuade residents to be attached to their cities.

## Literature review

Previous studies have investigated the social impact of sporting events on host residents' attitudes toward events based on social exchange theory that assumes individuals more likely to participate in an exchange if they gain benefits (Prayag et al., 2013). However, studies have paid limited attention to the issue of the residents' city image such as social impact in event impact studies (Stylidis et al., 2015). Although city image is a fundamental variable to develop city branding (e.g., Kavaratzis, 2004; Merrilees, Miller & Herington, 2013), only a few studies (e.g., Baloglu & MaCLeary, 1999; Nadeau et al., 2008) have explored the antecedents of city image. In particular, few studies have explored the influence of emotion on city image in spite of the high correlation between sporting events and emotions (e.g., Uhrich & Benkenstein, 2012). Moreover, we utilize fit as another antecedent variable useful to predict consumer attitudes (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999) by analyzing the unique relationship between "host city image and sporting events." Furthermore, since event experience could influence fit (Lacet & Close, 2013; Roy & Cornwell, 2004), we consider it a moderate variable, although few studies have examined the moderating effect of event experience on fit. The current study utilized the concept of residents' place attachment stimulating consumer attitudinal loyalty (Prayag & Ryan, 2012) and playing an important role in city branding (Kavaratzis, 2004; Merrilees et al., 2013) as a consequent variable of residents' city image and verified its impact on positive word-of-mouth intention toward the event. Further to the literature review, we developed an original theoretical model to verify these hypotheses. Furthermore, since little research has investigated what kind of images influence consumers' intentions, which could affect city image management, we investigated how each city image affected the residents' place attachment.

## Method

With the cooperation of the local city government, we distributed questionnaires to spectators living in the host city of the 2016 Tour de France Saitama Criterium, to obtain 172 usable questionnaires (valid response rate: 82.9%). Each item was adapted from previous studies: fit (four items; Speed & Thompson, 2000); affect in the event (AIE; three items; Lancet & Close, 2013); city image (six factors: urban area/convenience, sports, city atmosphere, sightseeing/entertainment, nature, and business, and 21 items; Oshimi et al., 2016); and place attachment (seven items; Hernandez et al., 2007). As for word-of-mouth intention (one item), the respondents were asked, "Would you recommend the event to others" (e.g., friends, family)? All were rated using a seven-point Likert scale. After confirming the validity and reliability of each scale — the Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for the nine constructs ranged from .75 to .97 and from .50 to .91, respectively (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) — we performed structural equation modeling to verify the theoretical model and multiple regression analysis to evaluate each image effect on place attachment.

## Results and discussion

Overall, 59.3% of the subjects were male (average age = 40.6; SD = 14.08), while the average years in the city was 22.26 (SD = 15.70); this was close to the host city population. Structural equation modeling ( $\chi^2/df = 2.14$ ; CFI = .900; RMSEA = .079) showed that the AIE (indirectly) and fit between the host city image and sporting events were the antecedent variables. Furthermore, event experience as a moderate variable strengthened the link between fit and city image. Moreover, the results showing a positive relationship between city image and place attachment ( $R^2 = .35$ ) and between place attachment and word-of-mouth intention toward the event ( $R^2 = .31$ ) indicate the possibility of residents' role as ambassador to tourists (Hudson & Hawkins 2006; Leisen 2001). Finally, multiple regression analyses showed that city atmosphere affects place attachment positively ( $R^2 = .29$ ). Considering the lack of research on the impact of sporting

events on residents' perspectives, the results shed light on residents' role in sporting events based on city branding. The practical implication of this study is that holding a sporting event and entertaining spectators by inspiring positive emotions could develop fit, city image, and word-of-mouth intention. Furthermore, event organizers could utilize residents as ambassadors to attract potential tourists to their event and contribute to city branding of the host city.

## References

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