

Sport event and destination images: Longitudinal image formation and change and its impact on sport consumer behaviors

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Abstract 162**

The impact of events on communities has been discussed in the sport management and tourism literature (e.g., Chalip, Green, & Hill, 2003; Chalip & McGuiry, 2004; Lee, Lee, & Lee, 2005). Researchers such as Ritchie and Smith (1991) in their study of the impact of the 1988 Winter Olympic Games on the hosting city of Calgary showcased through a series of data that the event impacts the destination awareness levels more positively before and during than after the event when a destination image decay happens. Although this knowledge indicates an image change, it does not denote how specific affective and cognitive characteristics (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a) of event and destination images compare during the event and how they change after the completion of the event. During a sport event, emotional involvement is expected to be higher than after the completion of the event which implies a potential higher impact on onsite image perceptions for both the event and the destination. Furthermore, direct experiences influence memory structures and schemas about the encountered product or service (Braun, 1999) creating more complex image perceptions (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). Direct experiences with sport event or destination "products" can also influence word-of-mouth activity (Westbrook, 1987) and decision making processes due to realistic and direct understanding of their components by the consumer (Gartner, 1993). The purpose of the study was therefore to understand how affective and cognitive components of both event and destination images change from the onsite experience to the post consumption experience. This process is important in order to understand the image formation process, which can be used to influence future behaviors of sport consumers (Kaplanidou & Vogt, in press). This study aims to answer the following research questions: 1. What are the differences between onsite and post event and destination images? 2. Do spectators' behavioral intentions to attend a mega sport event in the future and to re-visit the destination change between onsite and post-event consumption?

Method and data analysis: In order to examine the perceptions of the event and destination, data were collected during the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, Greece using an onsite survey at the Athens Olympic Sport Complex, where the opening and closing ceremonies and eight other major sporting events (e.g., track and field, swimming) occurred. During the onsite survey, the respondents were asked to provide their e-mail address to participate in a follow-up web survey approximately three months after the end of the event and their trip. In total, 310 English speaking Olympic travelers were intercepted from which 238 agreed to participate in the research yielding a response rate of 77%. Fourteen questionnaires were partially completed and were not included in the analysis resulting in a sample of 224 respondents. From the 224 respondents, 140 provided their e-mail address and 31 e-mail addresses were not usable (failed to be delivered) resulting in a sample of 109 usable e-mail address. Except for the first e-mail contact to ask respondents to complete the web survey, two more e-mail reminders were sent to the respondents resulting in 61 completed web surveys (56% response rate). Both the onsite and web surveys featured items such as demographics, event and destination image items and behavioral questions such as intentions to return to the destination and word-of-mouth (WOM) activity. For the affective components of event and destination images five semantic differential items (exciting/boring, pleasant/unpleasant, gloomy/cheerful, relaxing/distressing, friendly/unfriendly) were used based on previous studies (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a), which were rated on a seven-point scale. For the cognitive aspects of event and destination images, 13 seven-point likert scale items were used to evaluate aspects of the Olympic Games (e.g. personal safety, food services, good value for money, unpolluted environment) and 14 seven-point likert scale items were used to evaluate aspects of Athens as a vacation destination (e.g. good nightlife and entertainment, personal safety, hygiene and cleanliness, interesting historical attractions). The cognitive scales were also based on previous studies (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999b) and were adapted for the destination and the event image accordingly. The respondents indicated whether the event and the destination offered very little (=1) or offered very much (=7) in terms of its cognitive components. Questions about intentions asked respondents to indicate how likely they were to return to Athens and to agree/disagree with the statement "I am loyal to Athens as a tourism destination." The questions that pertained to the WOM item asked respondents to indicate how many people they told about their event and destination experiences. The data were analyzed using paired samples T-test with SPSS.

Results and discussion: The mean age of the sample was 38 years old and most of the respondents were male (62%). Spectators significantly improved their affective event image perceptions in terms of how relaxing vs. distressing the Olympic Games were after the event than during the event. There were no significant differences between onsite perceptions and post event perceptions for the affective destination (Athens) image components. For the cognitive event (Olympic Games) image perceptions, the results revealed that spectators significantly improved their perceptions after the event completion for image

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characteristics such as quality of Olympic Games infrastructure, interesting venue design, suitable seating arrangements and good value for money. For the cognitive destination (Athens) image perceptions, the results revealed that the image perceptions significantly improved in the post trip phase on characteristics such as the quality of infrastructure and great sport competitions. Comparing onsite and post event spectators' loyalty to Athens as a tourism destination and intent to revisit Athens in the future, the results revealed that there were no significant differences in the onsite and post event perceptions of spectators. However, subjects' intentions to attend the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games and to attend the 2006 Turin Winter Olympic Games were significantly different with mean scores higher in the post event phase than those during.

Looking at the WOM post consumption behavior of spectators, 97% of visitors indicated they recommended the Olympic Games as an event to attend to their friends and family (median score of people they told was 20), whereas 69% of visitors have recommended Athens as a vacation destination to their friends and family (median score of people they told was 10). The results of this study indicate that in the post event and destination consumption phase, spectators seem to have more positively dominant images about the event than the destination. Furthermore, their intentions for visiting future Olympic Games are higher in the post event phase, which raises a theoretical question regarding the value of the emotional influence of onsite experiences and also the role of selective memory recall. Additionally, this study showcases the power of word-of-mouth for the event experience since almost all of the respondents recommended to about 20 people the event experience, while more than half recommended the destination to approximately 10 people. Theoretically, this study contributes to the understanding of the image formation process for both events and destinations using longitudinal data and suggests a link between image and behavioral measures such as intentions and word-of-mouth. From a practical standpoint, this study supports the power of word-of-mouth as a marketing tool and provides sport and destination marketers a better understanding of how images are formed in the consumers' mind during and after consumption.