Introduction

The purpose of the study was to understand and describe the event image components of a mega event such as the Super Bowl from spectators as formed before attending the sport event and after. The research question of the study was: a) what are the dominant event image themes for spectator of mega events such as the Super Bowl prior to direct experience and how do these images change after the experience?

Literature review

Sport events have been used by destinations as tourism products that can boost the appeal of a destination (Getz, 2008). It is important to understand the image a sport tourist holds of a sport event or destination as it may influence their likelihood of re-visiting the host destination (Bigne, Sanchez, & Sanjez, 2001), implying economic benefits for the host community (Gratton, Shilbi, & Coleman, 2005). Sport events, similar to destinations generate images for their audiences either through the media (Chalip, Green, & Hill, 2003) or through direct experiences (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007), which can direct the image formation process toward more affective perceptions (MacKay & McVetty, 2002). Similar to destination image, event image may consist of affective, cognitive and conative characteristics (Gartner, 1993). These characteristics can entail functional, psychological, holistic or attribute based aspects. The destination image characteristics can be common or unique when compared to other destinations (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). Event imagery may vary depending on the nature or size of the sport event and the type of sport tourist (i.e., active or passive). Active sport tourists’ perceptions of event image evolve around organizational, social, physical, emotional and environmental aspects (Kaplanidou, Funk, Buta, & Goutzioupas, 2009). However, the perceptions of mega event images for spectators and how they may change after direct experiences have not been explored in the literature. Such investigation is pertinent considering the sequential process of a leisure experience discussed in the literature (Clawson & Knetisch, 1966; Crossley, Jamieson, & Brayley, 2001; O’Sullivan & Spangler, 1998) O’Sullivan & Spangler (1998) streamlined the sequential process to three stages, including pre-experience, experience and post experience. Thus, this study explores the concept of event image among spectator sport tourists of a mega event during pre-experience and post experience utilizing a qualitative and quantitative approach.

Method

In order to understand the concept of sport event image among spectator sport tourists of a mega event, data were collected using in situ research (Stewart, 1996) during the 2009 Tampa Super Bowl followed by web surveys after the event. Spectators were intercepted randomly outside the stadium during their tailgating. In total, 288 spectators were intercepted and 268 agreed to participate in the onsite study (response rate 93%). From the 268 spectators, 150 provided their e-mail addresses for a follow up after the end of the game. There were 41 undeliverable emails for a usable sample of 109 spectators. The response rate for the follow up study was 62.4% (n=68). In total, 806 words were provided for the onsite phase of the study, while 162 words were given during the follow-up phase.

The words were classified into nine aspects/themes (see results below) which were validated for content validity by three sport management researchers and two PhD students in sport and tourism. Only fifty words were deemed unclassified and were not included in the analysis. The WORDER software was used (see Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2008) to analyse open ended responses and count key words associated with the identified themes.

Results

The quantitative analysis of the onsite words revealed spectators thought Super Bowl in terms of team and sport characteristics (n=238), emotional (n=200), prestige (n=81), ritualistic (i.e., tailgating) (n=75), organizational
(n=62), social (n=55) environmental (n=15), sexual (n=15) and ethnic (e.g., American tradition) (n=11) aspects. The quantitative analysis of the post event words revealed the imageries evolved around the same themes, but focus changed from the team and sport characteristics to a more emotional approach. The frequency results in the post event phase revealed emotional (n=70), team and sport characteristics, organizational (n=22), prestige (n=11), ritualistic (10), social (n=7), environmental (n=3) and sexual (n=2).

Discussion and implications

The results of this study revealed the dynamic image formation of event imagery among spectators of a mega sport event such as the Super Bowl. In the pre event phase, spectators tend to predominantly associate the Super Bowl with their team and the sport of football and with emotional aspects. In the post event phase, this finding is reversed as potentially the anticipation about the team performance is removed from their memories since the spectators know the outcome of the game. These findings can assist sport marketers in deciding what messages to create at each phase, messages that are in tune with how the spectators perceive the event during the experience. Creating congruent messages with the state of mind of the consumer can positively influence consumer behaviours toward a sponsor (McDaniel, 1999; Misra & Beatty, 1990).

References


