Attitudes toward Attending the 2016 Olympic Games and Visiting Brazil after the Games
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Image transfer between the Olympic brand and host country brand has been reported in the sport management (Florek, Breitharth, & Conejo, 2008; Gibson, Qi, & Zhang, 2008) and tourism literature (Heslop, Nadeau, & O’Reilly, 2010; Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). Destination brand image has been defined as “an attitudinal construct consisting of an individual’s mental representation or knowledge (beliefs), feelings, and global impression about an object or destination” (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999, p. 870). One of the most important ends sought for destination branding is to promote a place as a tourism destination (Hankinson, 2005). In the current research, we use signaling theory and Keller’s branding framework to better understand consumers’ attitudes toward the Olympic Games and Brazil as a tourism destination in order to develop strategies to increase international awareness and attract tourists to Brazil for the 2016 Olympics and beyond.

Signaling theory (Spence, 1974) suggests highly reputable brands might help mitigate information asymmetries (e.g., lack of information about a tourism destination) by transmitting quality signals (Besharat, 2010). For example, the destination brand image of Brazil as the host country of the 2016 Rio Olympic Games has been interacting with the Olympic brand image in the minds of potential international tourists around the world since it was chosen to host this event, because all marketing strategies to promote the event associate the Games with its host city/country. The process of interaction between brands has been called co-branding, which is defined as “a form of cooperation of two or more brands with significant customer recognition” (Blackett & Boad, 1999, p. 7). In other words, co-branding can send positive signals about the quality of Brazil as tourism destination, based on the quality of the Olympic Games as a hallmark event. These signals should help to mitigate some possible negative attitudes international tourists may have toward Brazil.

Further, according to Keller (1993), brand images are associations held in a consumer’s memory and such associations depend on three dimensions: attributes, benefits, and attitudes. Based on Keller’s framework, we proposed two models where attributes and benefits of the (1) Olympic Games and (2) Brazil as a tourism destination were antecedents of attitudes toward (1) attending the 2016 Games and (2) visiting the country after the Games. Attributes are “descriptive features” that consumers hold in mind when they think about a good or a service. Based on previous research (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Gibson et al., 2008), we proposed two types of attributes – attractions and hospitality – to represent the descriptive features of the destination and the Olympic Games brand images. Benefits represent consumers’ perceptions about what a product “can do for them”. Previous investigations have indicated that Olympic Games tourists are mainly seeking symbolic benefits (useful to improve self-esteem, prestige, sense of exclusivity) when they decide to attend the event (Neirotti, Bosetti, & Teed, 2001). Brand attitudes are “a function of the associate attributes and benefits that are salient for the brand” (Keller, 1993, p.4). Based on Keller’s framework, we proposed a model where attributes (attractions and hospitality) and benefits of the event (the Olympic Games) are antecedents of attitudes toward attending the 2016 Games. Then, we proposed another model where attributes and benefits of Brazil as a tourism destination are antecedents of attitudes toward visiting the country after the Games. Innovative in these models is the proposition that attributes and benefits of the destination interact with attributes and benefits of the event, affecting both the attitudes toward attending the 2016 Games and attitudes toward visiting the country after the Games.

Method
A web-based survey was administered to test the proposed model with potential American tourists (n = 722) via M-Turk. The respondents were mostly female (54.8%), non-Latinos (87.3%), with college degrees (87.5%), with an average household income of $53,860 (SD = $34,540), and with an average age of 33.2 years (SD = 11.5 years). Most of the respondents (82.5%) reported that they have travelled abroad at least once in their lives. Some have travelled...
to South America (22.2%), but only a few have visited Brazil (6.8%) before. Few respondents (6.9%) reported that they have attended a previous edition of the Olympic Games.

The first section of the questionnaire was composed by three main scales: Attributes/attractions (four items), attributes/hospitality (four items) and benefits (four items) of attending the Olympic Games (adapted from Heslop et al., 2010; and Funk et al., 2009). The second section was composed by three main scales: Attributes/attractions (four items), attributes/hospitality (four items) and benefits (four items) of Brazil as a tourism destination (adapted from Baloglu and McCleary, 1999). The third and the fourth section of the questionnaire were about attitudes toward attending the 2016 Olympic Games and visiting Brazil after the Games, respectively. Because of the affective nature of the construct, attitudes have been measured on five semantic differential scales (Baloglu & Mangaloglu, 2001; Lam & Hsu, 2006).

Results

The values of the Cronbach’s alphas and composite reliability indices were all above .70 indicating good reliability of the measures (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The values of the AVE were all above .50, indicating good convergent validity. All AVE were larger than the squared correlations of this construct with all others variables, indicating discriminant validity among constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Latent variables were moderately correlated and all were significant at p < .001. The measurement model fit the data reasonably well (CFI = .964; TLI = .959; RMSEA [90% CI] = .077 [.074; .080]).

The structural model that used attitudes toward attending the 2016 Olympic Games as the endogenous variable fit the data reasonably well (CFI = .955; TLI = .941; RMSEA [90% CI] = .066 [.056; .077]). The path coefficients indicated that none of the interactions were significant in this model. The conditional effects for Olympic attractions (b = 0.695; p < .001) and Olympic hospitality (b = 0.262; p = .034) were significant.

The structural model that used attitudes toward visiting Brazil after the Games as the endogenous variable fit the data closely (CFI = .969; TLI = .959; RMSEA [90% CI] = .054 [.045; .064]). The interaction between Brazil hospitality and Olympic hospitality (b = -0.316; p = .002) was significant.

The respondents perceived the Olympic Games as a strong brand, based on its attractions (M = 5.85; SD = 0.87), hospitality (M = 5.38; SD = 1.02), and benefits (M = 5.98; SD = 1.00); and have a positive attitude toward attending the 2016 Games (M = 5.63; SD = 1.52). At the same time, they perceived Brazil attractions (M = 5.87; SD = 0.79) and benefits (M = 5.93; SD = 0.94) as positive, had a positive attitude toward visiting Brazil after the Games (M = 5.49; SD = 1.46), but did not perceive Brazil as having positive hospitality (M = 4.33; SD = 1.02).

Discussion

The results partially support the assumption that Brazil as a tourism destination will benefit from the association with the Olympics’ brand image. While the interaction between the Olympic Games and Brazil hospitality was significant, the interactions between attractions and benefits were not significant predictors of intentions to visit the country as a tourist. The current investigation extended previous findings also by testing such conditional effects. Taken together, these findings may indicate that gains from the association with the Olympics can be fewer than the expected in terms of future tourism. Previous studies (e.g., Gibson et al., 2008; Heslop et al., 2010) have not empirically tested how interactions between the Olympic brand and the host country brand images might affect tourists’ attitudes toward visiting the host country after the event. From a practical point of view, tourism authorities in Brazil should use the media exposition during the Olympic Games to reinforce the positive attributes of local tourism attractions and positive benefits of visiting the country and focus less on the association with the Olympic Games.

References
