More than Meets the Eye: Development of a Place Image and Event Stimuli Fit Scale

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Extant research shows the impact of sensory stimuli on sport fans’ satisfaction with the event experience (Lee, Heere, & Chung, 2015; Lee, Lee, Seo, & Green, 2012). In an effort to create a competitive advantage, event and facility managers are beginning to produce unique services and offerings specifically designed to stimulate or further enhance one or more of the human senses. However, it is not entirely understood how consumers perceive the different types of sensory stimuli in the event space. One of the ways in which some managers are approaching sensory marketing is to utilize inimitable region-based characteristics. Each city and/or region has its own peculiarities that influence society and culture for individuals that reside in or visit that place (Dinnie, 2011). It is not surprising, then, for event and facility managers to feature unique sensory experiences as a means to capitalize on local fans’ sense of home, and affect non-local fans’ perceptions of the event and host destination (Ballouli & Heere, 2015).

Visual designs, music, and food selections are all sensory factors that can be incorporated into the event experience, whereby features of local culture can be introduced and accentuated to old and new audiences alike. According to previous scholars who have examined the notion of image congruence (e.g., Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967; Onkvisit & Shaw, 1989; Sirgy & Samli, 1985), an individual forms positive memories of and attitudes toward a product, brand, or experience when the image they perceive at the point of consumption is congruent with preconceptions. To this end, the greater the overall perceived fit of place image and event sensory stimuli, the more likely consumers are to have favorable attitudes toward their overall event experience.

The purpose of this study was two-fold. First, we reviewed the literature on sensory marketing and proposed parameters for developing the sensory dimension to positively impact the event experience using classical and modern theoretical approaches. Second, our primary aim was to develop a reliable, valid scale for measuring place image and event stimuli fit.

The research design for developing the place image and event stimuli fit scale was based on the eight stages outlined by Churchill (1999). Qualitative exploration was first conducted to identify the dimensionality of the scale and to develop individual measurement items. Next, two sets of data were collected using several Qualtrics online panel surveys from which an exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis were performed to examine the multi-dimensionality of the scale. Five factors (sight fit, sound fit, smell fit, food fit, and beverage fit) emerged from the analyses, and the results of both factor analyses were satisfactory based on multiple criteria. The results of this study concluded the conceptualization of place image and event stimuli fit is feasible in the minds of consumers, and that the developed instrument possesses statistical reliability and appropriate conceptual nuance. Accordingly, the developed scale provides the groundwork for future investigations in measuring how sporting events effectively and ingeniously incorporate destination culture.