The Effect of the Mega-Events on Nation Image: A Case Study on the 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia

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A number of research has examined the potential impact of sport events, particularly the mega-events such as the Olympic Games and the World Cup, on the image of the host city/country (Chalip, 2004; Kim & Petrick, 2005). According to Associative Network Memory Model (ANMM), an image is made up of information nodes (i.e., brand element) and links; hosting an mega sporting event can function as a brand element that links to and thus influencing one’s perceived image of the host destination (Anderson, 1983). This mechanism has been applied to explain the “image transfer” between the sport events and associated host destinations (Kim, Kang, & Kim, 2014; Xing & Chalip, 2006). Studies have also suggested image congruence (or image fit) as a critical factor in determining the extent of image transfer as well as psychological attitude and behavioral responses of consumers (Hallmann & Breuer, 2010; Florek & Insche, 2011).

In this study, we empirically investigated the image change of Russia—the host country of the 2018 World Cup—as perceived by the US population before and after the event. In the case of the 2018 FIFA World Cup, the goal of leveraging the World Cup in promoting Russia’s image to the international community was explicitly intended by the organizers (Müller, 2017; Rosenberg, 2018). Little information, however, are known regarding the effectiveness of such initiatives. Recognizing the multidimensionality of country image, the study measured the affective, cognitive, and conative aspects of the country image of Russia, the image congruence between Russia and the World Cup, and their changes before and after the 2018 World Cup (Gartner, 1994; McCleary, 1999).

A longitudinal study was conducted with two waves of survey completed by the sampled US population using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). The two waves of data collection resulted in 402 and 257 responses, respectively. A total number of 193 valid responses (64% Male & 35% Female; Average Age = 36.58) were recorded and matched for repeated measure analysis. To test and confirm the factorial structure (validity) of this construct, both Exploratory Factor Analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analysis were performed. The final model consists of four latent variables (Affective Image, Cognitive-People, Cognitive-Culture and Politics, & Cognitive-Socioeconomics) and indicated a reasonable fit of the model (RMSEA=0.08; CFI=0.92; TLI=0.90; SRMR=0.06). The findings of the paired t-test analysis revealed an enhancement of affective feelings towards the country of Russia (MD=0.24; t=-4.402; p=0.000) and the perception of People in Russia among the respondents (MD=0.15; t=-2.125; p=0.035). It also found an increased congruence between the affective image on the World Cup and Russia (MD=0.22; t=3.531; p=0.001). However, no significant differences were found regarding the socioeconomic and political images of Russia. Variables of Event Image (F=3.912;p=0.049) and Media Consumption (F=8.556;p=0.004) were identified as significant covariates accounting for the change of affective image on Russia while Involvement (F=8.88;p=0.003), Media Consumption (F=3.826;p=0.05), and Event image (F=18.067;p=0.000) were all accountable for the change of cognitive image on People in Russia. Additional findings will be reported at the conference.