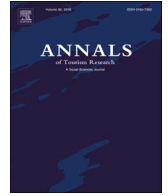


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Changing perceptions and reasoning process: Comparison of residents' pre- and post-event attitudes

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ABSTRACT

Upon a systematic assessment of how residents' trust in government(s) and attachment to a marquee event influence their evaluations of the event's impacts and subsequent attitudes towards the hosting of the event, this study further explores the dynamic nature of residents' subjective evaluations and corresponding attitudes to the event. In line with the confirmation bias theory, findings clearly demonstrate that residents' trust in government(s), attachment to the event, perceptions of the event's impacts and ultimate support to the event have changed in a predictable manner over time. Moreover, findings indicate that individuals' direct experience with the event alters the associations between their cognitive/affective evaluations and attitudes towards the event, with a shifted focus to the cognitive evaluations after the event.

Introduction

Because of the worldwide exposure of hosting a mega-event such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup, many countries compete to host mega-events as a way to gain international visibility (Cornelissen, 2007). The success of hosting a mega-event provides the hosting country and city a superb branding opportunity to achieve worldwide prominence and national prestige (Berkowitz, Gjermano, Gomez, & Schafer, 2007; Essex & Chalkley, 1998). Hosting a mega event positively influences the local community, the hosting city, and even the whole country from various aspects including economic development and social reorganization (Getz, 2005). However, the negative impact such as high costs cannot be ignored (Gursoy, Yolal, Ribeiro, & Netto, 2016). Particularly, a considerable amount of investment, including human, financial and physical resources is required to successfully host a mega-event (Crompton, Lee, & Shuster, 2001; Kasimati, 2003; Kim, Gursoy, & Lee, 2006). The possible failure of hosting a mega-event can significantly hamper the development of local community. Therefore the success of hosting a mega-event is vital for both local residents and the government(s).

The importance of community support on achieving successful hosting of a mega-event has been well documented (e.g. Gursoy & Kendall, 2006; Gursoy et al., 2016; Williams & Lawson, 2001; Zhou & Ap, 2009). Various determinants that influence the formulation of residents' supportive attitudes have also been investigated, for example, the economic impacts from the event (Prayag, Hosany, Nunkoo, & Alders, 2013), the socio-cultural impacts (Besculides, Lee, & McCormick, 2002; Brunt & Courtney, 1999; Williams & Lawson, 2001), and residents' attachment to local community (Deccio & Baloglu, 2002). Among all the antecedents, residents' perceptions of positive and negative impacts have received the most attention based on the promise of social exchange theory (SET). Residents' decisions to engage in

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supportive attitudes or behaviors to the hosting of a mega-event is a function of both positive and negative impacts. When the perceived benefits exceed the perceived costs, residents are more likely to support the hosting of a mega-event.

Central to SET is the concept of trust (Blau, 1964), which fosters the basis of ongoing social exchanges between different actors. Residents' trust in the government(s) has increased their confidence in an exchange process and inspired their willingness to participate in the exchange (Levi & Stoker, 2000). In recent years, the significant role of political trust in formulating residents' favorable responses to tourism development and hosting a mega-event has received increasing recognition (e.g. Gursoy et al., 2016; Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2016; Nunkoo, Ramkissoon, & Gursoy, 2012; Nunkoo, Ribeiro, Sunnassee, & Gursoy, 2018; Nunkoo & Smith, 2013). Particularly, given the low transparency of the government(s) and the defective legal system in Brazil (Rosenthal & Cardoso, 2015), residents' trust in the government(s) may induce even greater impacts on their perceptions and attitudes to the event.

At the same time, the understanding of event attachment's influence on perceived impacts and support to the mega-event is especially germane in the context of 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil. Brazil, known as the country of soccer, has won the World Cup for the most times (Brown, 2015). As such, there is no surprise that soccer is the most popular sport in Brazil, and is considered a crucial part of the Brazilian people's social life (Curi, 2014). Soccer-talk is intertwined in the Brazilians' daily conversations and numerous reports of soccer appear in various Medias. Thus, local residents are expected to build attachment to the World Cup due to the significance of soccer in their social life, and event attachment, in turn, influences their perceptions and attitudes toward hosting the mega-event.

Additionally, given the complexity of a mega event such as the World Cup, local residents' evaluation for the outcome of the event is dynamic, and may change with the passage of time (Kaplanidou et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2006), and consequently they may show different attitudes before and after the hosting of an event. Several tourism impact studies have empirically shown the dynamic nature of residents' perceptions or attitude towards the mega-event. For example, Hiller and Wanner (2011) find that the hosting experience has increased residents' evaluation of the event hosting being "worth it". Kaplanidou et al. (2013) further assess the varying influences of event impacts on residents' quality of life before and after the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

While prior researchers examine the pre- and post- perceived event impacts from various dimensions (e.g. Bob & Swart, 2009; Collins, Jones, & Munday, 2009; Gursoy, Chi, Ai, & Chen, 2011; Jin, Zhang, Ma, & Connaughton, 2011; Kaplanidou et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2006), the results remain inconclusive regarding the long-term impacts of the event on the host communities. Previous studies mainly utilize attribute- or factor-level descriptions and examine univariate or multivariate comparisons. Such methodological limitations may constrain the scope of conclusions generated. This study attempts to overcome the methodological limitations of prior research by focusing on the comparison of an entire process rather than on attribute- or factor-level description and investigates the pre-post event differences utilizing a systematic approach.

In addition, the inconclusiveness is possibly due to a lack of theoretical foundation in prior studies to provide a mechanism to explain the pre-post differences. This study thus aims to counteract the theoretical limitations of previous studies by incorporating the positive confirmation bias theory to explain residents' changing perceptions toward a mega-event (Johnston, 1996; Jones & Sugden, 2001; Lundgren & Prislín, 1998). Confirmation bias has been widely utilized by psychology and management scholars to explain the observed systematic inclination in individuals' judgment and decisions. Individuals tend to search evidence to confirm their initial judgments (Nickerson, 1998). Thus, this fundamental reasoning tendency for humans is expected to impose significant effects on residents' perceptions of event impacts, as well as their responses to the government and the event per se. Furthermore, with direct exposure and experience with the event, residents gain important insights and may allocate different weights to their cognitive and affective evaluations when making decisions of whether to support the event or not (Fazio, Powell, & Williams, 1989; Fazio & Zanna, 1981). The impacts of residents' cognitive and affective evaluations on their perceptions and attitudes toward the event may change over time as well.

Theoretically, this study makes crucial contributions to tourism impact studies. First, this study seeks to advance existing knowledge on the temporal characteristics of residents' response to mega-events by focusing on comparing the full attitude-formation process in addition to commonly applied comparisons between discrete variables. Second, this study empirically demonstrates that the fundamental reasoning tendency of humans can be extended to the event tourism context. The existence of confirmation propensity on individuals' decision making and judgments provides a promising theoretical framework for researchers to study residents' attitudes change. Meanwhile, this study offers insights to how direct experience of an event influences the affective evaluation-attitude association vs. the cognitive evaluation-attitude association. After directly experiencing a mega-event, residents are equipped with the competence for a complex evaluation of the event from a cognitive perspective resulting in a decreased reliance on affective evaluations.

This study also provides valuable practical insights to the development of mega-event, and for the maintenance of mega-event legacy. Residents' confirmation tendency of their attitudes towards the event underlines the vital importance of achieving residents' support at the initial stage of event planning and development. Moreover, as the findings suggest, before the hosting of an event, residents allocate substantial weights on the affective inputs when evaluating the event impacts and forming their attitudes, while after the event, they depend more on cognitive evaluations. This changing pattern of evaluative orientation offers policymakers and event organizers guidelines to tailor the communication messages along the timeline. Before the event, the delivered messages could focus on establishing positive and favorable affective evaluations of the event. While after the event, the emphasized information should shift to the benefits accomplished by the event.

In a nutshell, the purpose of this study is threefold. First, to examine the formulation of residents' support to a mega-event from the cognitive and affective perspectives by investigating the influences of their perceptions of the event's impacts, their trust in the government(s) and their attachment to the event. Second, to compare the relative influence of various antecedents on residents' support before and after the 2014 FITA World Cup in Brazil. Lastly, to assess the pre- and post-event differences in residents' trust in government(s), event attachment, event impacts and their support to the event.

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