



Research Paper

The contribution of cultural events to the formation of the cognitive and affective images of a tourist destination



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ABSTRACT

This study aims to assess the influence of cultural events, structural elements and place brand on destinations' overall image, based on an evaluation of cognitive and affective components of destination image. The conceptual model used in the research evaluates the impact of a set of tangible and intangible elements associated with two cultural events (one religious and one theatrical) on the cognitive and affective components of destinations' image and, ultimately, on the destinations' overall image. The events were the 2013 Easter celebrations in Cáceres and the Festival of Classical Theatre in Mérida, which is held annually in Spanish. A total of 611 tourists attending these events were personally questioned at the site of the events during the celebrations. The results show that cultural events serve as promoters of tourism and help to develop destination image, as well as suggesting that cognitive image contributes more to the formation of overall image than affective image. The findings also reveal that structural elements and place brand positively influence both destinations' cognitive and affective images. The event brand does not seem to influence any dimension of destination image. Since this study addresses only a part of the tourism activities held at two destinations, further research needs to be conducted in different destinations and events to confirm these findings.

1. Introduction

An event is a spatial-temporal phenomenon that can be classified or categorised in different ways based on its size, shape and content (Getz, 1997, 2008). Events can generate a variety of benefits for destinations. However, most research has until now been directed to the effects of mega-events, especially the financial impact of sport events (Knott, Fyall, & Jones, 2015; Lee & Taylor, 2005; Preuss, 2007; Xing & Chalip, 2006). Although interest in other types of events has increased (Bauer, Law, Tse, & Weber, 2008), only a few studies have addressed the impact of small-scale events and, specifically, cultural events (Gursoy, Kim, & Uysal, 2004). These smaller events, tend to be deeply connected to their location and they can provide an important basis for the development of marketing plans for destinations (Litvin & Fetter, 2006; Olsen, 2010; Ritchie, 1984). The uniqueness of a cultural event can arise from its location and, especially, the place's atmosphere (Getz, 2008). Properly planning and promoting these types of events can help to transform tourists' image of the destination, thereby increasing revenues (Liu, 2014).

Globalisation has forced cities to compete with each other to attract

tourists. The identity and uniqueness of each location's traditions can become a differentiating factor for tourists' place image of events. These aspects also can be a powerful marketing tool for managers (Herrero, Sanz, & Devesa, 2006) within a broader approach that includes all the authorities and organisations involved in marketing these destinations (Pugh & Wood, 2004).

The multiple benefits that cultural events offer destinations are analysed in most studies based on the effect of mega-events on large cities, including planning for the long-term economic benefits expected for these destinations (Getz, 2008; Lee & Taylor, 2005; Preuss, 2007). Far fewer studies have focused their research beyond the economic impact of mega-events (Gursoy et al., 2004), although recently there has been an increase in interest in gaining a wider perspective through different types of events. This includes other factors such as the improvement of infrastructure or creation of jobs (Getz, 2008), increase in knowledge about other cultures and traditions (Sdrali & Chazapi, 2007), competitive positioning (Smith, 2004), new opportunities for destinations (Litvin & Fetter, 2006) and improvement of image (Lee, Lee et al., 2005).

In this way, smaller cultural events – as compared to mega-events –

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play a relevant role in the development and marketing of many destinations (Getz & Frisby, 1988). Many small and medium-sized cities around the world organise events to attract travellers and strive to get them to return every year. This is a positioning strategy based on the power of small and medium-sized cultural events to raise awareness of, and communicate details about, local traditions. Thus, every year, cities invest in promoting events with the objective of providing new and better experiences for tourists (O'Sullivan & Jackson, 2002).

When adequately programmed, these events can help transform tourists' image of destinations, resulting in more income and benefits for the latter (Liu, 2014). The importance of destination image is widely recognised in the literature, which has found that image affects tourists' perceptions in terms of their behaviours and preferences when making decisions about where to go, thereby helping to improve destinations' tourism development and their competitiveness (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993).

Taking into account the importance of events to destination image, as well as that the majority of studies reviewed focus mainly on the effects of mega events held in big cities (Custódio & Gouveia, 2007; Lee, Lee et al., 2005; Preuss, 2007; Xing & Chalip, 2006), this study proposes a conceptual model to evaluate how different cultural events (i.e. religious traditions and classical theatre) affect the image of smaller destinations with a rich heritage. This research thus deals with understanding both the process of the formation of overall destination image based on different cognitive-affective influences and an evaluation of the degree of explanatory power of destinations' structural or permanent elements, place brand, events and event brand. To achieve this purpose, the following section reviews significant literature on the subject and presents the hypotheses included in the structural equations model this is to be empirically tested using the data from two cultural events. Subsequent sections are devoted to discuss the results and present the conclusions.

2. Conceptual framework and research hypotheses

The extant literature suggests that events can influence the image of destinations in which the events take place (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007). They can also contribute to the authorities' plans and strategies that seek to reposition these locations' images (Valle, Mendes, & Guerreiro, 2012).

To provide a theoretical foundation for the construction of destination image through cultural events in smaller heritage destinations, seven main variables were proposed in the present paper. These reflect to the dual cognitive-affective aspects of destination image, structural elements, place brand, cultural events and cultural event brand selected in the manner described below.

The selection of these variables was justified based on the cognitive-affective dichotomy of destination image, which has been used by many authors in different ways (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Chi & Qu, 2008; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Stern & Krakover, 1993) in conjunction with the importance of heritage and structural elements in cultural tourism (McKercher & Du Cross, 2002). The selection also focused on the growing interest of tourists in events that commemorate historical or cultural events (Getz, 2008) and the growing importance of event brand (Capriello & Rotherham, 2011). This offers an opportunity to create differentiation in place brands, improving the image of the places in which events take place (Lorenzini, Calzati, & Giudici, 2011).

2.1. Destination image

Destination image is often confused with destination brand (Li & Kaplanidou, 2013). However, although the two concepts clearly converge, image is only one part of the more global concept of brand, which results from the associations created with brands (Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010; Tasci & Kozak, 2006). With the increase in cultural tourism worldwide, different regions have converted their

local events into opportunities to showcase their image internationally (Lamont & Dowell, 2008). The image that consumers have of a destination is the product of their experiences of the place and the perceptions each person develops (Bigné, Sanchez, & Sanchez, 2001; San Martín & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2008). The interaction of both cognitive and affective aspects shapes a unique overall image through a comprehensive assessment of each destination, which includes tourists' overall positive or negative evaluations of the place (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Bigné et al., 2001; Nicoletta & Servidio, 2012; Stern & Krakover, 1993). The reviewed literature clearly suggests that cognitive image has a stronger impact – as compared to affective image – on overall destination image (San Martín & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2008).

In the context of cultural events, regions seek to transform or enhance their image – whether cognitive or affective – through the staging of cultural events that add competitive advantages to their cities (Evans, 2003). The expected results show that both cognitive and affective factors can significantly affect overall destination image, although cognitive aspects have a greater impact (Huh, Uysal, & McCleary, 2006). Based on these indications, the first two research hypotheses are proposed.

Hypothesis 1. In the context of cultural events, cognitive image has a positive influence on overall destination image.

Hypothesis 2. In the context of cultural events, affective image has a positive influence on overall destination image.

2.2. Structural elements

Structural elements cannot be easily changed or transferred from one location to another and result from local traditions, cultural heritage, historical sites and buildings, museums, food related heritage and other types of natural and manufactured resources permanently present in specific places. According to McKercher and Du Cross (2002), structural elements include primarily tangible assets, which result from knowledge about, for example, historical sites, although intangible assets are also produced by the experiences and feelings provoked by these places.

Cultural tourism has steadily increased its offer based on the many cultural facilities and museums offered by both large historical cities and more rural areas that showcase buildings with local artistic, religious and historical significance, as well as other distinctive facets of the ways of life of the areas concerned (McKercher & Du Cross, 2002). Therefore, a strong relationship exists between culture and destinations, since architecture, cultural facilities and cultural events are the main ingredients – promoted through publicity campaigns – of the strategies used to attract tourists and reinforce destinations' cultural identity (Vivant, 2011).

This type of tourism is based on the permanent infrastructure of destinations, in addition to events celebrated as extensions of local culture (McKercher & Du Cross, 2002). In this way, the presence of structural or permanent elements of destinations, as well as heritage, accommodations, restaurants, local cuisine, museums and leisure activities, is considered a key factor in the development of cultural tourism (Zouni & Kouremenos, 2008). Therefore, the third and fourth hypotheses focus on the influence of structural elements on cognitive and affective images.

Hypothesis 3. In the context of cultural events, structural elements have a positive influence on the cognitive image of destinations.

Hypothesis 4. In the context of cultural events, structural elements have a positive influence on the affective image of destinations.

2.3. Place brand

The marketing of places has experienced a transition from a basic approach to promoting destinations and attracting tourists to a more

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