International Journal of Sport Management, Recreation & Tourism

The Effects of City Image, Event Fit, and Word-of-mouth Intention towards the Host City of an International Sporting Event

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International Journal of Sport Management Recreation & Tourism, Vol.24, p.76-96, 2016

 ISSN: 1791-874X

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/

DOI: 10.5199/ijsmart-1791-874X-24d

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Abstract

This study (1) develops a structure of host city image, (2) verifies the antecedents and consequences of host city image, and (3) predicts spectators' positive word-of-mouth (WOM) intention towards the host city through structural equation modeling. With the cooperation of the local city government, questionnaires were distributed to spectators of the 2014 Tour de France Saitama Criterium in Japan. Convenience sampling was utilized, and 274 usable questionnaires were obtained. First, the results produced a city image scale comprised of six factors and 21 items with reliability and validity. This scale incorporates the sports image into the city image to enable a comparison between the sports image and other city images, which is original to this paper. Second, the results indicated that affect toward the event (ATE) was an antecedent variable to city image, image fit, and WOM intention as a consequent variable. Third, the theoretical model could predict positive WOM intention towards the host city with a 23% explanatory rate. These results provide evidence about the role of ATE, city image, and image fit, which is an important new contribution, as few studies have focused on city image or image fit.

Keywords: city image, event fit, affect toward event, social impact, Tour de France

The Effects of City Image, Event Fit, and Word-of-mouth Intention towards the Host City of an International Sporting Event

Introduction

Sporting events are expected to generate benefits for the host community (Gratton, Shibli, & Coleman, 2005), but they generate both positive and negative impacts to the host city, including social, economic, cultural, and environmental impacts (Fredline, 2005). Many researchers have focused on the economic impacts of sporting events because of their tangibility and visibility (Crompton, 2001), but studies on social impacts have been increasing recently (Taks, 2013). Focusing on social impacts is advantageous because validating the benefits of hosting such events (e.g., Ma, Ma, Wu, & Rotherham, 2013) encourages their success and sustainability (Bull & Lovell, 2007; Williams & Lawson, 2001). One major social impact is the improvement of the city's image such as increased recognition of the host city and improvements in its external image (e.g., Balduck, Maes, & Buelens, 2011; Kim & Petrick, 2005; Ma et al., 2013). For example, cities have long used several mega events, including sporting events, as a means of improving their image (Getz, 1991). The sporting event has been utilized as a means of city branding. City branding is used to achieve competitive advantage and increase investment and tourism (Kavaratzis, 2004). Previous studies have found that developing a city's image increases tourists' revisit intention (e.g., Kaplanidou, Jordan, Funk, & Ridinger, 2012).

How image impacts peoples' attitudes such as word-of-mouth (WOM) and revisit intention towards the host city has been clarified by utilizing variables such as destination image (e.g., Hollmann & Breuer, 2010; Kaplanidou, Jordan, Funk, & Rindinger, 2012; Papadimitriou, Kaplanidou, & Apostolopulow, 2015), but few studies have addressed the relationship between host city image and image fit. As fit is a useful variable for explaining the favorable, strong, and unique associations people make between sporting events and products (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999), it can be applied to the relationship between sporting events and city image. Furthermore, studies on city image have not included "sport" as a city/destination image. Doing so contributes significantly to sport management research. Thus, the purpose of this study is to

1. develop the structure of host city image, including sport image
2. verify the antecedents and consequences of city image by including image fit

3. predict spectators' positive WOM intention towards the host city

Literature Review

City Image/Branding

City images can be seen as the "currency of cultures," as they reflect and reinforce particular shared meanings, beliefs, and value systems (Morgan & Pritchard, 1998). Major events have become a valuable form of cultural currency, particularly in terms of their image effects, as Hall (1992, p. 14) notes: "it is apparent that major events can have the effect of a shaping an image of the host community or country, leading to its favorable perception as a potential travel destination." However, city image often consists of conflicting messages sent by the city government and is received and formed in the mind of each individual separately (Kavaratzis, 2004).Thus, we need to understand the receivers' perception of the city image.

City image and city marketing are closely related to the initial phase of a city's brand development (Kavaratzis, 2004). Thus, city image is a key variable in city marketing and branding. City image plays an important social role by attracting tourists, encouraging investors to invest in the host city, and promoting local civic pride (Bramwell & Rawding, 1996; Inoue & Harvard, 2014; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). City image has two aspects: from the tourists' point of view, and from the residents' point of view. This study focuses on the tourist's/spectator's point of view. Regarding the tourist's viewpoint, one popular study utilized city image in an examination of destination image. Destination image is described as an individual's overall perception or the total set of impressions of a place (Hunt, 1975); this comprises three separate dimensions: cognitive, affective, and overall image (Papadimitriou, 2015). Previous studies have regarded destination image as a tourism resource and have investigated the cause and effect of destination image in the context of tourism research (e.g., Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Hallmann & Breuer, 2010; Kapkanidou & Vogt, 2007). For example, the positive relationships between destination image and behavioral intention such as revisit and WOM intention towards the host city are well-known (e.g., Kaplanidou et al., 2012; Papadimitriou et al., 2015). However, previous studies on city image have not focused on the potential of "sport image" as a city branding resource. Doing so contributes significantly to sport management literature.

Image Fit

The concept of image fit represents part of the image transfer process (Deng, Li, & Shen, 2015; Grohs & Reisinger, 2005). Theories of image fit were derived from the sport sponsorship literature that examines the phenomenon of image transfer between an event and its sponsors in analyses of consumer responses, such as cognitive and affective reactions, to sponsors (e.g., Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Koo, Quarterman, & Flynn, 2006). During event sponsorship, “when the sponsor brand becomes linked with the event, some of the associations with the event may become indirectly associated with the brand” (Keller, 1993, p. ll). This link is often called “image transfer." The image of the event is transferred to the image of the sponsoring brand when an individual connects the event's attributes or benefits or his/her attitudes about the event with the brand in his/her memory (Gwinner, Larson, & Swanson, 2009). This branding shows the relationship between branding and the goals of city marketing and the management of a city’s image as identified in the literature (e.g., Ashworth & Voogd, 1990; Kotler, Asplund, Rein, & Heider, 1999).

Though a number of studies have focused on the relationship between event and sponsor, few empirical studies have clarified the fit between event and host city. Xing and Chalip (2006) performed theoretical research on the co-branding and bundling of a destination with an event. They claim that the image of a sport event can influence the image of a destination when the sport event’s images are seen to fit the images of the destination. However, the study was based on an artificial lab experiments and was not applied in the field. This study extends the image fit concept to a real-world situation. Hallmann and Breuer (2010) is one of the few empirical studies to investigate this relationship in a real-world context. They created a model that includes antecedents (e.g., destination image) and consequences (e.g., behavioral intention) to investigate the impact of image fit on future behavior (e.g. intention to revisit the destination) in an endurance sporting event. Their findings indicated that city image influenced image fit and that fit also influenced future behavior. Therefore, image fit is a useful variable for predicting future behavior in the relationship between sporting events and city image.

Affect Toward Event (ATE)

Affect is an influential variable that stimulates consumers’ attitudes and behavior (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999). Various affects are inspired by sporting events because of their hedonic character (Uhrich & Benkenstein, 2012). Since sporting events

are closely tied to consumers' affect, it is reasonable to apply affect toward event (ATE) as an antecedent variable. Lacey and Close (2013) confirmed that consumers form a more favorable event–sponsor fit when they enjoy the event. Other studies have found that consumers form more favorable event–sponsor linkages when they feel engaged with the event (Bennett, Ferreira, Lee, & Polite, 2009; Harvey, 2001). Furthermore, several studies have shown that affective images (e.g., that are pleasant, exciting) have a positive influence on image evaluations (Baloglu & McClearly, 1999; Lin, Morais, Kerstetter, & Hou, 2007; Papadimitriou et al., 2015), implying that ATE is useful for predicting positive linkages between city image and image fit.

Theoretical Model

Based on the literature review, we developed a theoretical model to verify the antecedents and consequences of city image and predict spectators' future intentions (see Figure 1).

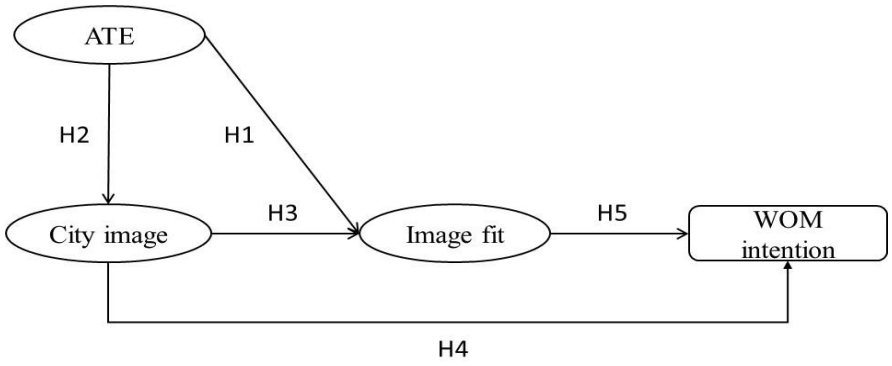

Figure 1. Theoretical model.

As an antecedent variable, ATE is added to the model, while image fit and intention to recommend the host city are added as consequent variables.

The research hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Attendees' ATE will have a positive impact on their fit between the event and city image.

H2: Attendees' ATE will have a positive impact on their city image.

H3: City image will have a positive impact on image fit.

H4: City image will have a positive impact on positive WOM intention towards the host city.

H5: Image fit will have a positive impact on positive WOM intentions towards the host city.

Revisit intention was not utilized in our model despite being a popular consequent variable (e.g., Hallmann & Breuer, 2010; Kapkanidou et al., 2007). Since our research location is not a sightseeing destination, spectators are less likely to revisit it. Thus, we utilized only positive WOM intention towards the host city to represent city branding as a consequent variable.

Methodology

Context

We selected Tour de France Saitama Criterium for our study. This one-day event was held in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Tour de France with the cooperation of Saitama City. The event has been held for three straight years. This event was the first cycling event named after the Tour de France and marks the first pivotal sporting event in Japan. According to the event organizer, over 100,000 spectators attended the event. Saitama City is located in a prefecture north of Tokyo and has a population of approximately 1.25 million. Unfortunately, Saitama prefecture has few tourism resources and accommodation facilities; however, they do have sport facilities, such as an arena and stadium, as well as two professional soccer teams and a professional basketball team. Given these sports teams and facilities, the mayor wants to transform the city's image into that of a sports city through sporting events. The city launched the Saitama sport commission in 2012 for the submission of bids and the hosting of tournaments and training camps, and the city is expected to become a sports city. Assuming that sporting events prove to be an effective catalyst for transforming the city's image, this event and the city are good examples of city image impact and are thus worthy of investigation.

Pilot Study

To develop the structure of host city image, a pilot study was conducted to collect data on the Saitama (host) city image. A descriptive methodology is appropriate for understanding perceptions of city image (Merrilees, Miller, & Herington, 2013). A questionnaire survey was conducted at the last event (Saitama Criterium Tour de France 2013) via convenience sampling. A series of questions was asked of 120 spectators' (local citizens) concerning the image of Saitama City. Table 1 summarizes the sample's demographics: 61.9% of the respondents were male, and the 40s was the highest age

range. As per the Saitama census, 50% of the population is male, and the average age is 42.9 (Saitama City, 2014). Comparing the census data with the sample description

showed that the male ratio was higher in the census, and the average age was on roughly the same level as in the sample.

Table 1. Demographics (pilot survey).

Gender		
	Male	61.9
	Female	38.1
		100.0 (%)
Age		
	Below 20	3.5
	20–29	11.5
	30–39	18.6
	40–49	28.1
	50–59	17.2
	60 and over	20.4
		100.0 (%)

A discussion was facilitated with two experts (a professor of sports management and an associate professor of sports economics) by referencing previous city image studies (Luque-Martínez, Barrio-García, & Ibáñez-Zapata, 2007; Merriees et al., 2009, 2013; Stylidis, Sit, & Biran, 2015). Two new factors were developed based on the discussion: Sports and City atmosphere. Sports comprises four items: Many sporting events, Adequate sports facilities, Effective sports promotion, and Many sporting opportunities. City atmosphere also comprises four items—Stylish, Bright, Fresh, and Fun—corresponding to affective image (e.g., Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Papadimitriou et al., 2015). The city image scale consists of 21 items with six factors: City/Convenience, Sports, City atmosphere, Sightseeing/Leisure, Nature, and Business.

Main Survey

Sample and Data collection

With the cooperation of the local city government and event organizer, questionnaires were distributed to spectators of the 2014 Tour de France Saitama Criterium in Japan. To collect data, each assistant was assigned to their own area by covering all area where spectator could watch the event. Convenience sampling was utilized, and 10 trained surveyors collected 330 questionnaires for a response rate of 100.0%. Fifty-five of the questionnaires were rejected because items were left blank

yielding a usable response rate of 82.9% (n = 274). Table 2 presents the demographics and additional sample characteristics. In the event samples, 65.0% of the respondents were male and 43.4% were married. The average age of the respondents was 36.9 years (SD = 11.19), and 61.3% were employees. The average monthly discretionary income was 54629.7 JPY. The survey data indicated that 31.5% of the participants attended the event last year. The willingness to attend the event next year was 6.08 (SD = 1.15).

Table 2. Demographics and Additional Information (main survey).

Gender			
	Male	65.0	
	Female	35.0	
		100.0 (%)	
Family			
	Single	56.6	
	Married	43.4	
		100.0 (%)	
Age			
	Below 20	1.8	
	20-29	28.1	
	30-39	31.8	
	40-49	24.1	
	50-59	10.6	
	60 and over	3.6	
		100.0 (%)	
	Average	36.9 (11.19)	
Occupation			
	Employee	61.3	
	Student	8.8	
	Public worker	7.3	
	Self-employed	5.5	
	Others	4.4	
	Part-time worker	4.0	
	Home maker	3.6	
	Medical worker	3.3	
	Unemployed	1.8	
		100.0 (%)	
Allowance in a month	Average	54629.7	
Past experience of attending last years' event		Yes	No
		31.5	68.5
Willingness to attend the next year		6.08 (1.15)	

Questionnaire and Measurements

We adapted a city image scale with six factors and 21 items from a pilot study: Fit (four items; Speed & Thompson, 2000) and Affect toward event (three items; Lacey & Close, 2013), adapted from previous studies, and WOM intention (one item). The respondents were asked: "Would you recommend Saitama City to others (e.g., friends, family)." A seven-point Likert scale was used (1 = "absolutely disagree," 2 = "disagree," 3 = "slightly disagree," 4 = "neutral," 5 = "slightly agree," 6 = "agree," 7 = "absolutely agree") for every scale. Several sociodemographic items were included in the questionnaire, such as gender, age, address, family, occupation, interest in the event, and willingness to attend the event next year.

Scale Reliability and Validity

We conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to check the validity and reliability of the city image scale. We also calculated construct reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) for the same purpose. Table 3 shows the mean value, standard deviation, and factor loadings for each city image item, as well as the CR and AVE for each factor. Table 3 presents the results of the global fit indices that assess the proposed city image model's fit with the data. Table 4 also presents the CR and AVE for image fit and spectators' affect.

The comparative fit index (CFI) was greater than the cutoff point of .90 (Hair, Blach, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2005). The values for the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were not lower than the criterion of .08 specified by Hair et al. (2005); however, the levels were acceptable (from .08 to .10; Browne & Cudeck, 1993).

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics, Standardized Factor Loadings, Construct Reliability Coefficients, and Average Variance Extracted.

Items	M	SD	β	CR	AVE
City/Convenience				.85	.58
1.Roads well maintained and repaired quickly	5.37	1.16	.60		
2. Road network adequate	5.34	1.37	.80		
3. Urban area	4.81	1.44	.85		
4. Busy city	4.99	1.19	.78		
Sports				.88	.76
1. Many sporting events	5.13	1.24	.81		
2. Adequate sports facilities	5.55	1.23	.83		

3. Effective sports promotion	5.37	1.24	.83		
4. Many sporting opportunities	5.04	1.19	.72		
City atmosphere				.89	.66
1. Stylish	4.04	1.36	.79		
2. Bright	4.76	1.24	.86		
3. Fresh	4.66	1.53	.80		
4. Fun	4.55	1.22	.80		
Sightseeing/Leisure				.79	.57
1. Many places for sightseeing	3.85	1.14	.59		
2. Good restaurants and bars	4.09	1.16	.87		
3. Wide choice in shopping	4.48	1.35	.77		
Nature				.79	.56
1. Natural wonders	4.45	1.42	.74		
2. Good weather	4.36	1.22	.69		
3. Access to outdoor recreational areas	4.26	1.40	.81		
Business				.84	.63
1. Good place to do business	4.34	1.33	.73		
2. Local business appears to be thriving	4.19	1.11	.76		
3. Business innovation	4.05	1.28	.88		

χ^2(df)	RMSEA	CFI
516.26	.085	.900

Note. M =mean; SD = standard deviation; CR = construct reliability; AVE = average variance extracted.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics, Standardized Factor Loadings, Construct Reliability Coefficients, and Average Variance Extracted.

Item	M	SD	β	CR	AVE
Image fit between Saitama city and TDF				.92	.76
The company and the event stand for similar things	4.05	1.72	.84		
There is a logical connection between the event and the sponsor	3.80	1.58	.92		
The image of the event and the image of the sponsor are similar	3.34	1.55	.88		
The sponsor and the event fit together well	3.96	1.61	.83		
Affect toward the event (ATE)				.97	.93
TDF is fun	6.37	0.92	.95		
TDF is entertaining	6.32	0.98	.97		
TDF is enjoyable	6.36	0.98	.97		
Word of Mouth (WOM) intention towards Saitama City	4.73	1.24			

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; CR = construct reliability; AVE = average variance extracted.

The overall assessment of the fit indices indicated that the measurement models had an acceptable fit to the data. We further assessed the measurement models by examining the CR results and the extracted AVE for each construct (Hair et al., 2005). We computed both the CR and AVE based on factor loading values to examine whether all the constructs met the recommended level of .70 for CR and .50 for AVE (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2005). The satisfaction of these cutoff values confirmed the reliability and convergent validity of the constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2005). The computed CR and AVE values for the eight constructs ranged from .79 to .97 for CR and from .56 to 93 for AVE, indicating reliability and convergent validity.

Table 5 shows the discriminant validity results for each scale. We assessed discriminant validity, which requires a clear distinction between any two constructs, using the method suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). This method confirms discriminant validity if the AVE value for each construct is greater than the squared correlation coefficients between the respective factors. None of the squared correlations exceeded the AVE values, indicating discriminant validity in every construct.

Table 5. Discriminant Validity (Average Variance Extracted Value for Each Construct with the Squared Correlations between the Respective Constructs).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. City/Convenience	.58a							
2. Sports	.25	.76b						
3. City atmosphere	.45	.23	.66c					
4. Sightseeing/Leisure	.22	.13	.28	.57d				
5. Nature	.01	.05	.06	.06	.56e			
6. Business	.30	.27	.32	.38	.06	.63f		
7. Image fit	.11	.12	.16	.19	.14	.13	.76g	
8. Affect toward the event (ATE)	.04	.03	.03	.00	.02	.07	.03	.93h

Note. a = AVE at city/convenience; b = AVE at sports; c = AVE at city atmosphere; d = AVE at sightseeing/leisure; e = AVE at nature; f = AVE at business; g = AVE at image fit; h = AVE at affect toward the event

Hypothesis Verification

We conducted structural equation modeling using AMOS 22.0. Figure 2 shows the result for the hypothesis model, indicating that the measurement models had an acceptable fit to the data (χ^2/df = 2.48, CFI = .900, TLI = .900, RMSEA = .074). The

attendees' ATE did not show a positive impact on their fit, while prove a positive impact on their city image. Thus, hypothesis 2 was supported while hypothesis 1 was not. City image positively influenced Image fit and WOM intention; thus, hypothesis 3 and 4 were supported. Finally, Image fit had a positive impact on WOM intention towards the host city; thus, hypothesis 5 was supported. Nature and Sports did not show a strong influence on City image. The R^2 indicated that the explanatory power for WOM intention in this model was 23%.

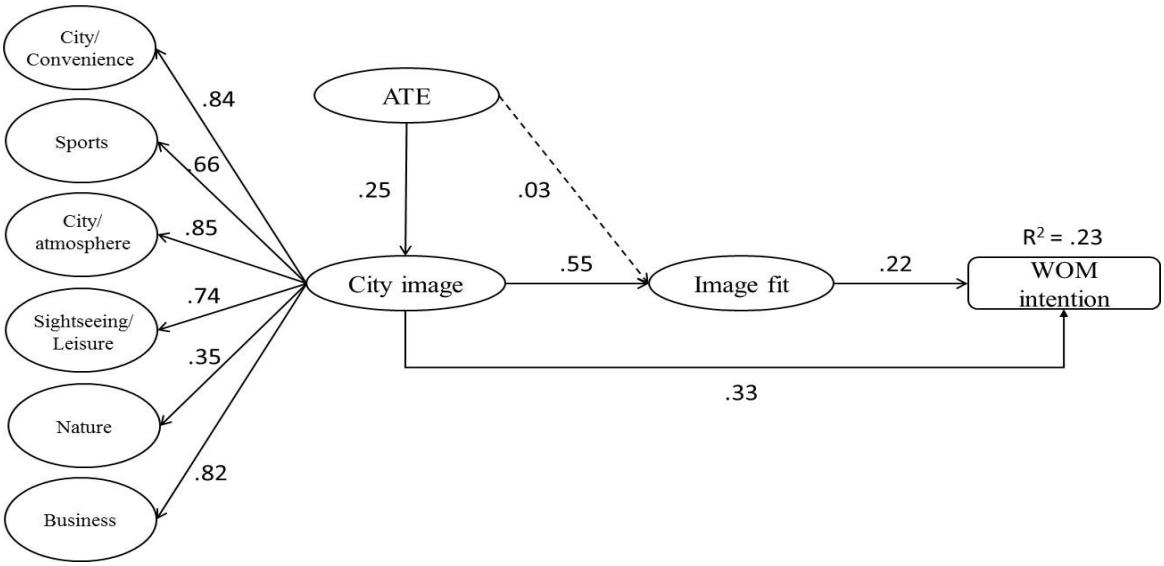

Figure 2. Results of the structural equation modeling (χ2/df = 2.48, CFI = .900, TLI = .900, RMSEA = .074).

Discussion

The main contribution of this study is its focus on social impacts—those on city image—by developing a theoretical model utilizing several variables such as ATE, City image, and Image fit in the context of an international sporting event. Though several social impacts have been pointed out in previous studies, this study develops the understanding of the role of city image in sporting events.

This study (1) develops a structure of host city image, (2) verifies the antecedents and consequences of host city image, and (3) predicts spectators' positive word-of-mouth (WOM) intention towards the host city. First, the results produced a city image scale comprised of six factors and 21 items with reliability and validity. This scale

incorporates the sports image into the city image to enable a comparison between the sports image and other city images. The sports image has not been included in city image studies (e.g., Luque-Martínez et al., 2007; Merrilees et al., 2013; Stylidis et al., 2015) or destination image studies (e.g. Hallmann & Breuer, 2010; Kaplanidou et al., 2007; Papadimitriou et al., 2015); this paper contributes to sport management research.

Second, ATE was found to be an antecedent variable to city image, image fit, and WOM intention as a consequent variable. The positive relationship between ATE and city image is in line with previous studies' finding that affective image (e.g., pleasant, exciting) has a positive influence on image evaluations (Baloglu & McClearly, 1999; Lin et al., 2007; Papadimitriou et al., 2015) and is part of the close linkage between affect and sporting events (Uhrich & Benkenstein, 2012). On the other hand, hypothesis 1, on the positive direct relationship between ATE and image fit, was not supported. Perhaps because the research object was only the second event, a positive affect might not have influenced the image fit between the host city and the sporting event. Of the linkages between ATE and City image and ATE and Event fit, the latter linkage may need more time to form. For example, a previous study suggested that increasing experience and knowledge of an event could strengthen the relationship between event image and local city image (Roy & Cornwell, 2004). Thus, a linkage between ATE and image fit might form if the event continues to be held and spectators' knowledge and experience of it accumulate. On the other hand, as an indirect effect (ATE to city image to image fit) has been found, ATE is a useful variable for developing image fit as mediated by city image.

Image fit and WOM were consequent variables supporting hypotheses 3 and 4, in results that match previous study (Hallmann & Breuer, 2010). This confirms that city image plays an important role in developing spectators' image fit and positive WOM and could lead to host city branding through positive WOM. Given that the relationship between City image and WOM is stronger than that between Image fit and WOM (hypothesis 5), City image could develop positive WOM even if Image fit has not been well-formed.

Third, City image and Image fit are factors in predicting positive WOM intention towards the host city. These results clarify the roles of city image and image fit, a novel contribution of this study since few studies have focused on these issues (Hallmann & Breuer, 2010). The study also provides a tested model with real-world marketplace applications that confirms findings on event fit and city image that have mostly been

obtained from artificial lab experiments and student samples (e.g., Chien, Cornwell & Pappu, 2011; Johar & Pham, 1999; Koo et al., 2006; Speed & Thompson, 2000).

One practical implication of this study is that holding a sporting event and entertaining spectators by inspiring positive emotions could develop city image and are useful factors in developing image fit and positive WOM towards the host city. This implies that an event manager's attempt to generate participation and fun in an event could help develop a city image. An entertainment program about French culture was held during the event near the event site and included the sale of French food and wine and several specialty products. This helped create an international atmosphere that made spectators feel positive emotions. The organizers of the Tour de France Saitama Criterium also arranged for amateur cyclists to participate by allowing them to use the main racecourse. Thus, creating entertainment programs and making them fun could be a useful way to develop the host city's image. This study clarified one of the social impacts of sporting events, which event managers could use strategically as a city branding tool.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this study offers several contributions, several limitations may have influenced the study's results. First, we cannot generalize the results of this one case study; additional research is required utilizing the study's structured model. Second, the city image scale must be improved. Since the model fit was not adequate, a destination image scale (e.g., Hallmann & Breuer, 2010; Papadimitriou et al., 2015) should be considered in future research. Finally, H1 was not supported, indicating that the fit between TDF and host city has not yet formed. Further study, such as longitudinal research, must clarify the impact of fit growth on attitudes and intention. Further, this study was conducted using spectators who live outside the host city; we need research from the host residents' point of view. In the city branding literature, residents' recognition of their own city is an essential element of city branding (Luque-Martinez et al., 2007). Most previous studies (e.g., destination image studies) have focused on the tourists' point of view; multilateral frameworks, including the residents' point of view, are necessary to explore city attractiveness.

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