DEVELOPING A SCALE: SENSORY IMAGE FIT BETWEEN SPORTING EVENTS AND DESTINATIONS

by

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Much research demonstrates an impact of sensory experience on sports fans' satisfaction with live sporting events (Lee, Heere, & Chung, 2013; Lee, Lee, Seo, & Green, 2012). It was, however, not studied how to enhance those sense-centric experiences. One possible approach would be to utilize unique region-based characteristics to design unforgettable and emotionally engaging experiences. Most sporting events are location-based, and venues are also considered as a landmark of the area where they are placed. Consequently, we can create a natural link between sporting events and the hosting cities or regions. Visual designs, musical contents, famous local food, and signature smells, those sensory “images” of the local space can be brought into the live sporting context by which spectators consume the event not merely as a sports game but as a cultural experience. We can achieve the "sporting event image/local image fit" by crafting fans' sensory experiences congruent to the local sensory features.

Despite the potential value of the topic of interest, there was no instrument that adequately measures the level of image fit. Thus, the purpose of this study was to develop a reliable and valid scale to measure spectators' perception of sensory image fit between live sporting events and local destinations. A qualitative investigation via focus groups was conducted to identify the dimensionality of the scale and to develop individual measurement items. Then, two sets of data were collected from online surveys from which an explorative and confirmatory factor analysis was performed respectively 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 explorative and confirmatory factor analysis were satisfactory based on multiple criteria suggested by prior research. The results of this study concluded that the conceptualization of sensory image fit is feasible in sports fans' mind, and the developed instrument possesses statistical soundness 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.