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## Research Paper

## Influence of event image on destination image: The case of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games

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## ABSTRACT

Despite the long recognized effects of mega-events on image enhancement, knowledge on the core manifestation of the effects—the influence of event image (EI) on destination image (DI)—remains limited. Accordingly, this study aimed to provide a better understanding of such influence focusing on the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games as the case study. A questionnaire survey was conducted among 702 onsite Chinese tourists during this event. Results showed that (a) generally, EI was positively correlated with DI, and this correlation varied in intensity according to different levels and dimensions of the two image constructs; (b) EI had stronger effects on DI than the established formation agents of DI; and (c) EI and DI mutually predicted each other with similar predicting power. This study disclosed key aspects of the previously unrecognized influences of EI on DI, and offered some general guidelines for managing DI using mega-events as a special and important leverage.

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## 1. Introduction

Mega-events, such as the Olympic Games, the World Expo, and the FIFA World Cup, can affect their host destinations both intangibly and tangibly. Hosting such events, when well managed, can aid in upgrading their host destinations' infrastructures, improve their attractiveness, vitalize local cultures, and enhance their reputation and competitiveness (e.g., Chalip, Green, & Hill, 2003; Essex & Chalkley, 2004; Getz & Page, 2015; Green & Chalip, 1998; Hall, 2006; Smith, 2005). A major manifestation of this influence is the image enhancement effect of such events (e.g., Chen, 2012; Lai & Li, 2012; Lee, Lee, & Lee, 2005; Walker et al., 2013), because destination image (DI) clearly influences tourist behaviors before, during, and after visitation (e.g. Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Gallarza, Saura, & Garcia, 2002; Pike, 2007). The image effect induced by hosting mega-events is a complex phenomenon that can be examined from various perspectives. A recent review article (Lai & Li, 2014) indicates that 16 issues, such as *evidence*, *nature*, *image transfer*, and *effect decay*, have been investigated by previous researchers as they have explored the 'what?', 'why?', and 'so-what?' questions of the effects on DI.

One important perspective is examining the influence of event image (EI) on the DI of the host destination. In line with image formation models (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Gartner, 1993), an event can affect the host's DI in two basic

ways: (a) indirectly influencing DI by producing onsite event experiences and/or induced/autonomous/organic information for tourists; and (b) directly influencing DI through mental constructs, such as perception, attitude, and image of the event. Among such mental constructs, EI might have a more direct influence on DI, because EI is within the same type of phenomenon (mental images) with a similar conceptualization, internal structure, and formation process (e.g. Hallmann, Kaplanidou & Breuer, 2010; Kaplanidou, 2007). Therefore, if an event can actually affect the host's DI at the fundamental level, EI influences DI. As such, the direct effect of EI on DI can be deemed as the *most direct* effect of mega-events on the hosts' DI.

The established information on this subject matter remains, however, limited. Several empirical studies have shown that the influence can come in various different forms: EI and DI exhibit co-varying patterns (e.g. Deng & Li, 2014; Ferrand & Pagès, 1996; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007); EI and DI have overlapping influences (Bodet & Lacassagne, 2012; do Valle, Mendes, & Guerreiro, 2012; Hallmann et al., 2010; Hallmann & Breuer, 2010); EI causes DI to change either positively or negatively (Green, Lim, Seo, & Sung, 2010; Xing & Chalip, 2006); EI is subsumed by DI (Kaplanidou & Jordan, 2012); EI and DI are irrelevant (Kaplanidou, 2007) (detailed explanations are provided in Section 2.3). These studies only partially captured the influence because the investigation was limited to certain levels and dimensions of the two image constructs. Analysis on the relative importance of EI in affecting DI has also been inadequate. EI is previously known to affect DI, but the

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intensity of such influence still requires investigation. Another unresolved issue is the uncertainty about whether EI and DI mutually affect each other (Section 2.4 provides the explanation).

These issues, among others, have restrained the quality of knowledge produced, particularly on the influence of EI on DI, and generally on the image enhancement effect of mega-events. Thus, this study aimed to explore the influence further by examining the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games as an important mega-event. This goal was achieved by addressing three critical issues concerning the influence. First, how does EI affect DI at different levels and dimensions of these two constructs? Second, what is the relative importance of EI in affecting DI? Third, do EI and DI mutually predict each other? Section 2.4 provides a detailed explanation of and justification for these issues.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Destination image (DI)

DI is one of the most explored topics in the tourism literature, where various sub-topics have also been discussed. Among these sub-topics, the conceptualization, structure (or conceptual model), formation, and measurement of DI have direct relevance to the current study. Researchers generally posit that DI denotes the perceptions or impressions of actual or potential tourists toward a certain destination (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). This proposition serves as a commonly accepted, though not problem-free, working definition of DI, that is further considered to be either a structured or unstructured construct (i.e. with or without internal conceptual structures) (Lai & Li, 2012). Several DI structures have been proposed, with the 'cognitive-affective-overall' model (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999) enjoying relatively higher popularity. In this model, the cognitive, affective, and overall components of DI refer to tourists' evaluation of the factual, emotional, and holistic aspects of a destination, respectively (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999).

Two models demonstrating how DI is formed have been developed. DI formation is essentially perceived as a process, in which pre-visit, onsite, and post-visit images are indispensable elements of tourist decision-making and buying behaviors (Gartner, 1993). Based on this general view, Baloglu and McCleary (1999) modeled the formation of pre-visit DI by conducting path analysis, whereas Beerli and Martin (2004) modeled the formation of post-visit DI using the structural equation modeling approach. Commonly adopted in the quantified models, DI is determined jointly with two types of 'image formation agent' or factors that can give rise to DI. These factors are external information, such as type and intensity of information regarding a destination and personal factors, including but not limited to tourist motivation, past travel experience, and socio-demographics (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004). Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods have been adopted by previous researchers to measure DI (Gallarza et al., 2002; Pike, 2007). The qualitative method generally employs open-ended questions to measure DI as a whole, the quantitative method uses a set of variables to estimate different DI dimensions, and the mixed method employs both. Among these different methods, the quantitative method has been more widely applied (Pike, 2002, 2007).

### 2.2. Event image (EI)

EI research has been strongly affected by DI research because EI is believed to share many commonalities with DI (e.g. Hallmann & Kaplanidou, 2010; Kaplanidou, 2007). Based on the influential work of Keller (1993) on brand imaging, Gwinner defined EI as 'a particular market segment's overall subjective perceptions of the

[event] activity' (1997, p. 148). Similar to DI, EI is also considered to be a multidimensional construct. Many researchers (Deng, Li, & Shen, 2015; Gwinner, 1997; Huang, Li, & Cai, 2010; Kaplanidou, 2010) suggest that EI may embrace various components. Nevertheless, a general and accepted attitude is to apply the 'cognitive-affective-overall' model of DI in measuring EI (Kaplanidou, Gibson et al., 2012; Koo, Byon, & Baker, 2014; Walker et al., 2013).

Some scholars have argued that EI is formed by the interaction between internal and external factors (Gwinner, 1997). Empirical studies show that EI and/or its subdimensions are affected by numerous factors, such as event-brand fit and identification level of the event/brand (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Gwinner, Larson, & Swanson, 2009), trip purpose (Kaplanidou, 2007), geographical distance (Kaplanidou, 2009), tourist/destination type (Hallmann & Kaplanidou, 2010), familiarity with event slogans, and socially responsible status of event organizations (Walker et al., 2013), as well as age and gender (Hallmann, 2012). Despite these efforts, a more robust model of EI formation still needs to be developed. In measuring EI, both quantitative and qualitative approaches have been used, with better preference for the former.

### 2.3. Influence of EI on DI

Although DI and EI themselves have drawn considerable attention from researchers, significant studies on their confluence do not exist. A search for published studies examining the influence of EI on DI or other types of image (hereafter (D)I, unless specified otherwise) yielded only 16 empirical publications. The search included images other than DI, because the literature on DI is too limited. Overall, previous studies showed that the influence had five major types (Table 1).

Firstly, evidence has been collected to show that hosting or sponsoring an event induces discernible co-varying patterns between EI and (D)I. Above all, correlations between EI and (D)I were found. Ferrand and Pagès (1996) examined the image bond between Perrier, a seller of mineral water (the sponsor), and the Lyon's Tennis Grand Prix, France (the event) using canonical analysis. Two sets of correlation were found between the event's and the sponsor's images as follows: (1) in one set, 'popular', 'entertaining', 'active', 'full of life', and 'pleasant' images of the event were correlated ( $R_i = .70$ ) with 'appreciated' and 'fresh' images of the sponsor; and (2) in another set, 'successful' and 'distracting' images of the event correlated ( $R_i = .60$ ) with 'light' and 'dynamic' images of the sponsor. According to Ferrand and Pagès (1996), these associations implied that both the sponsor and the event were deemed as highly popular, entertaining, dynamic, successful, but distracting.

Secondly, using regression modeling, researchers also established beta coefficients between EI and (D)I. In examining the active participants of an amateur bicycling event, Kaplanidou and Vogt (2007) found that the cyclists' affective image of this event effectively predicted their cognitive and affective image of the hosting destination ( $\beta = .71, p < .05$ ), but the reverse influence was not supported ( $\beta = -.18, p > .05$ ). A later study on onsite spectators of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games further confirmed this effect (Kaplanidou, 2009). This study showed that the spectators' cognitive image of the games moderately predicted that of Athens, at the following factorial level: (1) 'Infrastructure/organization' ( $\beta = .26, p < .05$ ) and 'service aspects and environment' ( $\beta = .21, p < .05$ ) predicted 'local attraction' and (2) "service aspects and environment" ( $\beta = .38, p < .05$ ) predicted 'infrastructure'. Similarly, Deng and Li (2014) recent study on the 2010 Shanghai Expo revealed that the spectators' cognitive image of the Expo strongly predicted their cognitive image of Shanghai City ( $\beta = .74, p < .001$ ).

Moreover, indirect evidence supporting correlations between EI and (D)I was sought. Gwinner and Eaton (1999) examined

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