



Events tourism as catalyst to promote destinations: Event attendees' perceptions of events in East London, South Africa

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Abstract

Globally, events have demonstrated rapid growth as unique types of attractions within tourist destinations. Such events have the potential to propel the image of host destinations to new heights. Events have been identified in many destination as a strategic tool to attract tourism investment especially in the context of developing economies such as South Africa. The aim of this study was to assess the event attendee's perceptions of the sport tourism events in East London, South Africa. The empirical findings elucidate respondents as being 18-30 years old (with the 31-40 years old also being a notable), most were white females who were married. The study indicated that the 93.5% showed an interest in the continuation of sport tourism events. The study further highlighted the majority (53.2%) respondents perceived an increase of destination awareness due to a larger number of tourist influx. The results further suggest that the majority (81.8%) of respondents concur that the events provide opportunities for people to have fun with their family and friends and that the event was thus seen to appeal to family and friends to get away and visit a different destination. Generally, the respondents' perceptions concerning the overall event, included the following: enjoying a different destination supporting family and friends, economic benefits, marketing and image enhancement, opportunities to meet people and opportunities for entertainment. Consequently, the provincial tourism marketing boards, local municipalities and events bureaus, should develop strategies that are events-oriented in order to promote their destinations to the World aesthetically and identify with especially, the Eastern Cape, South Africa.

Keywords: Events tourism, South Africa, sporting events, Tourism board, marketing.

Introduction

South Africa's recent apartheid political history has left the country with developmental challenges that require a holistic approach if they are to be adequately addressed. Events Tourism could be seen as one of the catalysts that destination managers could use to overcome these challenges. It is also widely accepted that events contribute significantly toward increasing tourist traffic and driving economic development in the region (SA Tourism & DEAT, 2002). Events tourism has become one of the most common methods for visitors to satisfy their desires to sample local foods and traditions, participate in sporting events, or simply be entertained. Local and regional events have the added advantage of keeping the domestic tourism market active. Consequently, it is the unique and distinctive nature of the local host community that serves as the key attraction to event tourists (Getz, 1991).

Oklobdžija (2015) highlights that events are of special importance and attract both participants and visitors. They thus attract great attention from the public, contribute to the image of destination and maintain and revitalize tradition. Classic examples of hallmark events are the Comrades Marathon, the Durban July Horse Race, the Cape Town International Jazz Festival, the Carnival in Rio, the Tour de France, and the Oktoberfest in Munich and sports events such as inter alia Wimbledon. These events are identified with the very essence of these places and their citizens, and bring substantial tourist revenue as well as a strong sense of local pride



and international recognition. Thus, many destinations utilise events as part of their destination marketing strategy in order to leverage the benefits that are brought about by these events.

Every year, a sizeable number of different types of events that attract tourists take place in many destinations around the World and also, a great number of new events are planned annually. As destinations try to differentiate their offerings to their competitors, events are held to succinctly communicate the destination offerings. There seems to be a trajectory in destinations in an endeavour to find out the potential of events in implementation of various economic and tourist objectives, and in order to achieve the strategic objectives of a destination (Mxunyelwa and Tassiopolous, 2013). Various destinations have developed a portfolio of their events offerings in order to respond accordingly to their key markets. The portfolio approach is similar to how a company strategically evaluates and develops its line of products and services. It is goal-driven and value-based. Destinations must decide what they want from events, that is, what the desired benefits are and how they will measure their value (Getz, 2008).

Weed and Bull (2004) concur that spin-offs of events have boosted the pride and the economies of the host countries. Immediately after 1994 which is the post-apartheid regime in South Africa, former statesman Dr. Nelson Mandela addressed the people of South Africa (SA) about the role which the 1995 Rugby World Cup played in contributing to building the nation. Subsequent to SA's hosting of the 1995 Rugby World Cup, a number of Mega Events were hosted, these ranged from the International Cricket Council (ICC) World Cup 2002, Fédération Internationale de Football Association Confederations Cup (FIFACC) 2009, Fédération Internationale de Football Association Confederations (FIFA) 2010 World Cup. In addition, Weed and Bull (2004) maintain that sport related tourism initiatives have been at the forefront of urban regeneration programmes within the host community. These events have placed South Africa on the global map as a destination that can successfully host Mega Events.

The Eastern Cape Province is one of the largest provinces in South Africa and tourism is utilised as a vehicle to drive the Local Economic Development for the province. The Provincial Growth and Development Plan (PGDP) Strategy Framework, further, identifies opportunities for tourism development in the Eastern Cape which includes developing niche markets, amongst others, in events and business tourism. The PGDP Programme is aimed at, amongst others, consolidating the development of events such as the National Arts Festival and the Wild Coast Festival (PGDP, 2004).

Weed and Bull (2004) claim that the growing needs in the tourism sector can contribute to the creation of new jobs in catering, hotels, museums and other unique and attractive places for tourists to visit. This in return also creates new opportunities beyond the immediate tourism sector such as in the food-production industry. The host countries are also usually compelled to improve the current transportation infrastructure and quality of their football stadiums. Countries such as Greece, Germany, South Africa, and South Korea, had to dramatically improve their infrastructure to ensure that football fans had the possibility to freely move between cities hosting the football games in the duration of hosting their respective events. The infrastructure improvements came in the form of stadiums, transport infrastructure, roads and accommodation in form of the hotels and guest lodges. These developments create an everlasting impression about the destination in a tourist's mind.

Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency (ECPTA) Events Strategy (2013-2015) postulate that in line with their mandate, the hosting of events is seen as a catalyst for facilitating the development of local tourism products, marketing the province as a destination and increasing visitor numbers to and within the Eastern Cape Province. It is further felt that by hosting events, the ECPTA will also be able to create opportunities for job creation and local economic



development within the province while at the same time creating awareness about the Eastern Cape as a tourist destination to the national and international market respectively.

However, there is paucity of studies that investigate the event attendees' perceptions on the events that are hosted in the Eastern Cape, South Africa (Tassiopoulos, 2011). Therefore, the purpose of this research was to investigate perceptions of event attendees on events that are held in Eastern Cape, South Africa. In order to accomplish this goal, the article structure is organised in the following manner: the introduction is followed by a problem statement and theoretical background, after which an explanation of the research method followed by a discussion on the results and finally, conclusions and recommendations thereof are presented.

Event Tourism is an increasingly important facet of the tourism product of many destinations (Smith, 2004). For instance, in 1996 about 233 tourism events were identified in New Zealand that met the requirements of being able to attract international or out of region visitors and again as Smith (2004) indicates, the New Zealand Tourism Strategy for 2010 highlighted events as a key means to grow year-round and regional demand. Since events attract both international and domestic tourists, there is a need to cater for tourists at the destination where the event is intended to be staged. A thriving events industry will play an important role in realising this ambition.

ECPTA (2013-2015) argues that major events already draw thousands of visitors to the Eastern Cape creating economic benefits, and they raise the profile and showcase the area's assets through national and international media coverage. Furthermore, they enhance the quality of life of the Eastern Cape as a place to live, work and visit. Events also play a vital role in tourism. Their ability to attract visitors, extend the visitor season, increase average spend and increase the average length of stay make events an important tool in developing the tourism industry.

According to the study conducted by Zima (2012) it is revealed that events act as catalysts for attracting image-makers and tourists, providing competitive advantages, positioning destinations in the market, and creating destination profiles. The aim of events is to create a positive destination image, increase the tourist-destination, increase the economic revenue of the destination, expand the traditional tourist season, and draw international and national visitors. Furthermore, hosting events helps to bring new markets segments to a hosting region. Swart and Bob (2005) suggest however, that events which bring people together with the same interests and events, are of limited duration. Event tourism has potential to be a cornerstone of developing tourism in many under developed/developing destinations. Henceforth, a study to determine event attendees' perceptions on events as catalyst to promote destinations has been visualised. The findings of the study could improve event attendees' perceptions and conceptualise event attendees' probability of intention to return and attend events in the Eastern Cape, South Africa.

Theoretical background

Tourism is one of the largest and most lucrative industries across the global spectrum. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2015) reports that international tourist arrivals grew by 4.4% in 2015 to reach a total of 1,184 million in 2015, marking the sixth consecutive year of above-average growth with international arrivals increasing by 4% or more every year since the post-crisis year of 2010. Some 50 million more tourists (overnight visitors) travelled to international destinations around the world in 2015 than in 2014.

Van Schalwyk, (2012) highlighted that it was estimated that total global tourist arrivals will surpass one billion rand, recording growth of between 3% and 4% per annum. It is therefore not surprising that the national governments around the world have resolved to strategically look at events tourism as their strategic policy intervention. Tourism is vital to the economic



development of South Africa and its people. Indeed, it is the fastest growing industry in the country, employing an estimated 600,000 people and growing.

In 2005, Saayman and Olivier (2005) found that tourism was also the largest industry in the world, and the fourth largest industry in South Africa after mining, agriculture and trade. In addition, tourism was also the largest employer in the world. With an estimated growth of eight percent annually it has the potential to become South Africa's largest earner of foreign currency. Thus, the promotion of events tourism should be categorised as of the critical policy imperatives for developing tourist destinations such as the Eastern Cape because of their developmental nature.

Various scholars and leading authors such as, Goldblatt (2002), Getz (1997) and Hall (1992), argue that the event organizer and local government only take into account the economic impacts and ignore the perceptions of the event attendees. They argue that greater attention should be paid into understanding the motivating factors that necessitate the event attendees to come to events. Events constitute one of the most exciting and fastest growing forms of leisure, business, and tourism-related phenomena.

Rogerson (2005) observed that the South African tourism industry could be conceptualised as a three-tiered hierarchy of enterprises. At the top are the operations of larger established groups of enterprises responsible for the country's major travel and tourism retail and wholesale operations, such as transportation, hotels, casinos and event facilities. The middle-tier of the hierarchy consist predominantly of SMEs that operate a host of different establishments from travel and touring operations, restaurants, small hotels, self-catering and resorts, game farms, B&Bs or backpacking hostels (Rogerson, 2005). As such an increase in meetings and events has resulted in a need for more conference and meeting facilities to enable destinations to host successful events. This sector is responsible for a reasonable market share of the tourism industry (Bennett, Jooste & Strydom, 2005). The events tourism provides an enabling business environment for the entire tourism sector to benefit economical and otherwise.

Specific events dominate certain destinations – it could be indicative of certain destinations developing event niches as well as clear branding and positioning. Some destinations have given themselves event related titles to accentuate their tourism strategy. Furthermore, such strategic attempts are also being made to utilise events to flatten seasonality or to boost tourism in a destination (Mxunyelwa, 2011).

Methodology

There are two major sport tourism events that are held in East London on an annual basis. One of these event's attendees were included in the study. These events complied with criteria to be viewed as high impact events as highlighted in the events literature (Tassiopoulos, 2010). These types of events are large-scale in nature which are high in status or prestige, and which attract large crowds and media attention. As such these play a major role in creating economic opportunities for local economies. The Spec-Savers Ironman South Africa Triathlon event held in East London on annual basis was chosen for the purpose of this study.

The research design for the study primarily involved exploratory and descriptive research. The target-sampling frame was the event attendees. Potential participants were included in the sample through utilising a simple random sampling method. The research instrument was in the form of a questionnaire which was utilised to collect data. The purpose and the extent of the study were discussed with the event attendees during the data collection period. Culminating from the engagement with the respondents, a questionnaire that consisted of four sections, namely: demographic profiling (age, gender, race, etc.), overall interest in the event,



destination promotion through events, opportunities created when hosting events, and general perceptions concerning the hosting of events.

To measure the event attendees' perceptions of the event the following dimensions were used: Section A: Demographic information of the attendees such as the age, gender, occupation, education levels, population group, marital status, income levels. In Section B the following was interrogated: The overall perception of how the event impacts the lives of event attendees. The impacts of the event on the destination, such the positive and negative aspects of hosting such an event. Were also unpacked. The perception towards the continuation of the event was also assessed. Section C dealt with the motivation for attending events and also the encouraging aspects about attending the event as well as the reasons for attending the event. The impact of the event on the host destination was also considered.

Reliability and validity

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), in order to ensure qualitative research measurement, it is necessary to pay special attention to two technical considerations that are reliability and validity. Veal (2006), describes validity as an extent to which the data collected truly reflects the phenomenon which is being studied or investigated. He further, points that tourism research is fraught with difficulties in this area, mainly because empirical research is largely concerned with people's behaviour and with their attitudes, and for information on these the researcher is, in the main, reliant on people's own reports in the form of responses to questionnaire based interviews. Validity refers to the extent to which research findings would be the same if the research were to be repeated at a later stage or with different sample of subjects (Veal, 2006). He further asserts that validity can be seen as a model taken from the natural sciences where, if experimental conditions are properly controlled, a repetition of an experiment should produce identical results.

For the purpose of this particular study the questionnaire was utilised as a primary data collection tool. Some of the questions on the questionnaire were adopted from previous sport tourism events studies in South Africa, such as 2006 Old Mutual Two Oceans Marathon. The validity and reliability in collecting data, as well as the constructs and contents of questions in the questionnaire survey had been taken into consideration from previous research projects. Furthermore, field workers were trained and questions in the questionnaires and surveys, were clarified prior to the event in order to limit unreliability elements in the study. The event attendees were approached during the event for data collection purposes by the researcher and field workers were trained during the month of January 2014. The time selected presented a perfect opportunity because it is when the event takes place. Data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science which is a statistical analysis software programme (SPSS 22, 2014).

Results and Discussion

Demographic characteristics can influence the events attendees' perception on attending an event. As such, events destinations have to be familiar with the demographic characteristics of the event attendees in order to develop effective marketing strategies that will attract event tourists. In light of this, Table 1 reflects the demographic composition of the respondents.

Table 5.1 Demographic profile summary

AGE	TOTAL %
18-30	44.2



31-40	27.3
41-50	10.4
51-58	6.5
60-above	11.7
GENDER	TOTAL %
Female	63.6
Male	36.4
EDUCATION	TOTAL (%)
Grade 8	2.6
Grade 12	19.5
Post matriculation	11.7
Undergraduate or diploma	44.2
Postgraduate	20.8
Other	
POPULATION	TOTAL (%)
Black	7.8
Coloured	3.9
White	85.7
Other	2.6
MARITAL STATUS	TOTAL (%)
Married	54.5
Single	40.3
Divorced	3.9
Widowed	1.3
Other	
INCOME PER ANNUM	TOTAL (%)
Less R35000	18.3
R35001-R50000	4.2
R50001-R70000	8.5
R70001-R100000	18.3
R100001-R200000	19.7
R300001-R400000	11.3
R400000-R500000	2.8
R500001 and above	12.7

The findings characterise the respondents as being 18-30 years old (with the 31-40 years old also being a notable group), most were white females who were married, have at least tertiary level educational qualifications (undergraduate degree or diploma) and most likely earn ZAR 100,001 to ZAR 200,000 per annum. However, those in the ZAR 70,0001- ZAR 100,000 earning bracket were also deemed to be a notable finding. This finding suggests the availability of disposable income to spend money to attend (and even participate at) such events.

The study sought to determine if the respondents were interested in the event and the future continuation of the event. The study revealed that 93.5% indicated their interest in the continuation of this event. Furthermore, the study found that a key motivating factor for the attendees to come to the event was family members that were participating in the event. This result implies that the event provides an opportunity for the attendees to bond with family and friends and the events create a vibrant atmosphere for a family to enjoy and create fond memories. Additionally, the multiplier effects are created for local economies due to families attending in numbers.

The events attendees were requested to indicate their level of attendance of the event in the previous two years. The results highlight that 61% of the respondents had previously attended the event. This finding is pivotal in that it indicates that the event has long lasting effects on the attendees. As such it is highly possible that the event will be sustainable going forward. The research further probed event attendees' perceptions concerning their level of interest for this particular event.



The literature of the study indicates that the number of people that attend events can provide benefits to the local economy. Therefore, it was critical for this study to ascertain the benefits that are brought about to destinations through such events. The majority (50.6%) of attendees perceived the event as bettering/improving the appearance of the destination and its image thereof. It was further noted that in contrast, almost a quarter (23.4%) of respondents suggested that there was no visible positive change to the appearance of the area. The study brought to light that majority of respondents were of the view that hosting events is good and beneficial to the economy of the host destination. This is therefore indicative of the fact that opportunities for tourism development are created through such events.

The respondents were asked to indicate if the event provides opportunities for event attendees to meet people. The study revealed that an overwhelming majority (81.8%) of respondents concur that the event provides opportunities for event attendees to meet people and the event was thus seen to appeal as an attraction to the host destination. This finding is further supported by the demographic profile finding that suggests that most respondents are married and that the event is perceived to be providing families with opportunities to bond and enjoy attending an event.

Event tourists who are dissatisfied with the event experience are likely to tell someone about their experience whether good or bad and may respond differently (Goldblatt, 2008). They may, for instance, act as follows: quietly exit; defect or attend an event in another event tourist destination; continue to patronise the destination even though their experience does not meet their expectations; or even return to the same tourist destination in the future (Goldblatt, 2008).

Recommendations

The researcher recommends that politicians and organisers of sport tourism events must make greater efforts to understand the tourism value and investment that occurs by virtue of hosting an event. As such, the planning and marketing of such events must focus on satisfying the needs of event tourists so as to ensure repeat visitation to the destination in question. Gursoy (2006) asserts that event planners must be cognisant of the needs of tourists and that of the community, so as to ensure that the event delivers an authentic product that reflects the aesthetics of the host destination.

The researcher further recommends that event planners and relevant stakeholders must focus more on strategically looking at direct visitation-related impacts to plan for much longer outcomes, for instance fostering business relationships, investment, employment opportunities, trade, re-imaging host destinations in key markets and encouraging repeated stays. This will ensure that the benefits accrued through hosting of events will impact positively on all relevant stakeholders. The researcher recommends that the event planners must ensure that the African culture and heritage is celebrated when hosting these events in order to differentiate the destination to its competitors. This is imperative especially in the context of a developing destination such as the Eastern Cape where unemployment, poverty, inequality has reached unprecedented levels. Events tourism is well poised to address these challenges.

The Eastern Cape is a 'honey pot' of the South African heritage. For example, the World renowned political icons are sons and daughters of this province. These leaders include Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Govan Mbeki, Thabo Mbeki, Walter Sisulu, Chris Hani, Steve Biko, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and Albertina Sisulu. Events in the Eastern Cape must thus also seek to reflect the history and heritage of these political icons to enable the destination to appeal to the competitive tourism global market. The researcher further recommends that longitudinal studies be conducted on an ongoing basis to keep abreast with the development of the tourism industry.



Despite the managerial implications, the study has several limitations. Although the researcher made a concerted effort to enhance the trustworthiness and the validity and reliability of the research process, as with any study, there remained certain limitations. Approaching event attendees was time consuming, as the study was conducted during the event itself and some event attendees refused to participate in the study. The viewpoints of event tourist who refuse to participate in the study are lacking. In addition, the measurement of the event attendees' perceptions was limited to an event hosted in East London. Finally, the event attendees' expectations cannot be measured as clearly and precisely as financial profits.

Conclusions

The results reveal that well-planned events are now widely accepted by most event attendees as a developmental and marketing strategy from which destinations can gain economic benefits and strategic competitive advantages. It is therefore important for event organisers, destination managers, tourism planner/managers to fully understand the events attendees' perceptions of events tourism. This will in the long term ensure the sustainability of events in the East London Area. However, the events are not held on a regular basis and to brand and promote the destination is difficult. East London as a potentially good tourist destination, lacks international exposure of its tourism offerings and the lack of measuring the event attendees perceptions also has an impact on the perceptions of the tourists and potential new visitors. Therefore, the events tourism planners in East London need to take advantage of their geographical location and use it as an opportunity for improving tourism and diversifying it as well as tourism product packages. This could be achieved by adding the aspects that reflect cultural and heritage elements at the said event. Finally, the research supports the South African Events Growth Strategy (SAEGS, 2010 and National Tourism Sector Strategy 2012-2020) to utilise events as catalysts to promote South Africa as a desirable and worthwhile global tourist destination.

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