

## Exploring visiting friends & relatives' (VFRs) image fit between Indy and the Indy 500

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### Abstract:

Although sport and tourism researchers have become increasingly interested in studying the relationship between sport events and tourism destinations, yet not much research has been conducted to examine the similarities and dissimilarities between destination images and sport event images as well as their interrelationship. This study empirically explored the image fit between Indianapolis (Indy) as a leisure travel destination and the Indy 500 as a well-known sport event perceived by Indy's visiting friends and relatives (VFRs). A cross-sectional questionnaire was designed consisting of four parts: 1) the cognitive image of Indy and the intent to revisit and recommend Indy as a leisure travel destination, 2) the cognitive image of the Indy 500 and the intent to revisit and recommend the Indy 500, 3) the affective image of Indy and the Indy 500 respectively using bipolar items, 4) information about respondents' demographic characteristics and their previous visits to Indy and the Indy 500. A self-administered survey was conducted online via Qualtrics and collected with 548 usable data. According to the results of this study, the Indy 500's cognitive image variables are more favorably perceived than Indy by the VFRs indicating the Indy 500 is more popular than the city itself as perceived by the VFRs. Indy's tourism organizations should take advantage of the popularity of the Indy 500 when promoting the city to VFRs. All the top rated and the important cognitive image attributes are found to be related to Indy's sports and events, which further highlights the importance of positioning Indy as a sport and event city in tourism marketing; innovative marketing strategies are needed to create a more successful image of "sport and event city" in the VFR market segment. One marketing implication of the findings is that tourism and event organizations and marketers should allocate more marketing resources and promotional efforts to the VFRs who have already visited Indy and the Indy 500 as these are the people who tend to be more active in recommending and promoting Indy and the Indy 500 to their friends. The method of quantifying image fit may not be fully adequate between sport events and destinations in this study, but the image fit approach should be recommended and applied as a supplemental tool in assessing the synergy of the attractiveness of both the destination and the sport event.

**Key Words:** Image fit, Cognitive image, Affective image, VFRs, the Indy 500

### Introduction

Over the last couple of decades, city governments have often viewed urban tourism as an important tool in restoration and revitalization of economic development that results in improved quality of life for residents and visitors alike (Bianchini, 1993). Ellis (2003) observed that some highly developed cities have used urban tourism for the purpose of generation of civic pride, raising the city profile, and attracting inward investment. One such example is the city of Indianapolis (Indy). Since about a decade ago, the Cultural Development Commission in Indianapolis has been set up aiming to position the city nationally and globally as an urban cultural tourism destination (Payne, 2020). It established the Indianapolis Cultural Tourism Initiative to support and encourage a cultural environment, help improve the quality of life for Indianapolis residents, and enhance visitors' experience.

Cities especially in mid-west America have been affected by declining manufacturing companies once key to their economic prosperity. As a result, cities like Indy make efforts to seek new avenues for economic development, and have turned to event tourism, such as conventions, sport events and festivals as a part of development strategies. In Indy, sport events and festivals offer an opportunity for branding the city externally, potentially attracting new economic revenues, while at the same time reconstructing its place image, of which the city residents feel proud. Indy and its residents have a long history of identifying with sports and having been proud of the mega event Indy 500. Indy 500 is an automobile race held annually at Indianapolis Motor Speedway in Speedway, Indiana, USA. The event is held over Memorial Day weekend in late May. This sport event is considered as a part of the Triple Crown of Motorsport, which comprises three of the most prestigious motorsports events in the world, also including the Monaco Grand Prix and the 24 Hours of Le Mans. Indy 500

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has been a major draw for visitors to the city. The venue itself has over 250,000 permanent seats, and the total attendance is up to approximately 300,000 (Visit Indy, 2017).

Event and tourism researchers have become increasingly interested in studying the relationship between sport events and tourism destinations (e.g., Florek & Insch, 2011; Getz, 2008; Hallmann & Breuer, 2010). For cities with well known sport events, it is hoped that the sport event may shape an image which contributes to the overall image of the city as a travel destination (Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010; Tasci et al., 2007). However, not many researches have been conducted to examine the similarities and dissimilarities between the destination images and sport event images and their interrelationships. This study is designed to empirically explore the image fit between Indy as a leisure travel destination and Indy 500 as a sport event perceived by the visiting friends and relatives (VFRs).

## Literature Review

### *Image components*

Kinnear and Taylor (1987) defined image as an average of many separate attitudes toward a company, brand, or concept. Assael (1984) defined destination image as the total perception of the place that is formed by processing information from various sources over time. According to Gartner (1996), destination image is made up of three distinctly different but hierarchical interrelated components: cognitive, affective, and conative. The cognitive component is derived from fact and may be viewed as the sum of beliefs and attitudes of the object leading to some internally accepted picture of its attributes. The affective component of image is related to motives in the sense that it is how a person values the object under consideration. The conative component of image is analogous to behavior because it is the action component. The interrelationship of these components ultimately determines predisposition for visitation (Gartner 1996).

In terms of whether cognitive image or affective image may play a determinant role in influencing people's behavioral intentions, there is some controversy among the researchers (Stabler, 1988): Previous studies of destination image have mainly focused on tourists' cognitive perceptions, i.e. tangible physical attributes, as indicated by Pike's (2002) based on a review of 142 destination image papers published in the literature during the period 1973-2000; however, as debated by some other scholars (e.g., Gallarza, Saura, & Garcia, 2002), a place may be best understood by focusing on its symbolic meaning rather than on the sum of its physical attributes. It is considered that focusing on either cognitive or affective image does not seem to be appropriate to study the complexity of place image, which may pose some problems for conceptualizing and measuring images. It is construed that a comprehensive image study should include both the cognitive and affective image components.

### *Events and sports as sources of destination image formation*

In the research on both the images of places and events, researchers support the idea that an image is a multidimensional concept, whereby images are developed through the interpretation of information from various sources. There are various sources forming the image components including not only the publicity materials such as real visiting experience, word-of-mouth, and media, but also the local means of cultural entertainment, architecture, service quality and events, etc. (Moon, et al., 2011). In cities, the cultural events and sports exert profound impacts on destination image, and a plenty of research has paid attention to their roles on tourism destination image (e.g., Ahmed, 1991; Getz, 1991 & 1997; Gwinner, 1997; Hall, 1989; Kaplanidou, 2007). For instance, Gwinner (1997) analyzed the influential factors of event image and proposed three major factors: event type (sports, festival and art activity), event characteristics (scale, professional reputation, historical development, promotion etc.) and individual factors (significance of event, intensity of significance, and personal's activity history).

### *Image fit*

This concept of the degree of common image associations between the destination and the sport event, also called the image fit, has been researched by Hallmann and Breuer (2010), who observed that there is an image fit and a relationship between the images of the destination and sport event in their study. Most literature on image fit has been theory driven. Xing and Chalip (2006), for example, did some theoretical research on co-branding and bundling approaches 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 holds images that are fitting with the images of the destination. Hence, the impact of the sport event image on the destination image could be significant. Yet, only a few empirical studies have been done to explore the relationship between destinations, sport events and their fit (e.g., Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007), and Hallmann and Breuer (2010) seem to be the first to quantify the image fit between destination image and sport event image using a formula to index the different variables measuring the cognitive and affective images.

### *Importance of VFR travel*

VFR is one of the most important motivations for travel to a destination and one of the leading trip purposes (Asiedu, 2008), which represents a large and significant component of tourism. Previous VFR research study observed that VFR is often not the sole travel motive but may be combined with one or more other motives, which results in visitor participation in a variety of activities within the destination, not just VFR (Moscardo et al., 2000). In the U. S., about 44% of the domestic tourists are VFRs (Hawkins, 1986). Visiting friends and

relatives has been one of the oldest and largest forms of travel (Backer, 2011). It has a significant impact on national and regional economies because of the scale and distribution of involvement impacting various travel characteristics such as spending, activity choices and hotel use (Seaton and Tagg, 1995). Despite this, VFR travellers have been considered as a group having low economic impact on the travel destination. Consequently, tourism organizations and marketers in the tourism industry have paid less attention to the VFR market (Seaton & Tagg, 1995). VFR Travel tends to be overlooked in marketing campaigns as VFR travellers have been regarded as individuals who cannot be influenced because of their perceived minimal economic impact. As a result, VFR travel has often failed to draw interest from marketing practitioners, tourism organizations, or academic researchers (Backer, 2012).

Given the lack of empirical study on the image fit between destination image and sport event image in Indianapolis, this study is designed to address this issue and explore the relationship between destination image and sport event image.

## Research Methods

### *Selection of image attributes*

There are many famous attractions in the United States for leisure travelers to consider when making a decision for a domestic travel, and Indianapolis may not be on the list of America's top attractions. When promoting Indianapolis as a leisure travel destination, it may not be the generic destination attributes but the iconic and the most impressive ones attracting visitors. Besides, in a developed country like the U. S., the generic attributes (such as the infrastructure, transportation, accommodation, amenities, and services) tend to be more standardized and comparable among the competitors. As a result, a more effective marketing for a destination like Indianapolis is to distinguish and promotes its iconic and impressive image attributes.

Instead of applying a standard list of the cognitive image measures as introduced in typical tourism literature, this study identified a list of cognitive image attributes, respectively, for the city and Indy 500, by exploring and collecting people's online comments about the images of Indy and Indy 500. In addition, a short survey among a group of 40 college students who are studying and living in Indy was conducted, asking them to share their thoughts on the distinctive image attributes based on two open-ended questions - "From the perspective of a visitor to Indy, please name spontaneously three terms that come to your mind regarding the city of Indianapolis" and "From the perspective of an Indy 500 spectator who are not a local Indy, please name spontaneously three terms that come to your mind regarding the sport event of Indy 500." Based on the results of the content analysis of all the comments, from both online and the students, the notions with high frequency of occurrence were summarized and aggregated as displayed in Tables 1 and 2. As displayed, twenty cognitive image attributes for Indy and 16 attributes for Indy 500 are identified. In addition, two items are added to measure the overall image of Indy and Indy 500, respectively, i.e., 'the respondents' intent to visit/revisit' and 'respondents' intent to recommend to their friends'.

### *Questionnaire design and measurement scales*

A cross-sectional questionnaire was designed, consisting of four parts: The first part measures the cognitive image of Indy, and the intent to revisit and recommend Indy as a leisure travel destination; the second part measures the cognitive image of Indy 500 and the intent to revisit and recommend Indy 500; and the third part measures the affective image of Indy and Indy 500, respectively, using bipolar items as recommended by Baloglu and Mangalolu (2001). These measures are gloomy/cheerful, dull/exciting, unpleasant/pleasant, and distressing/relaxing. The fourth part provides information about respondents' demographic characteristics as well as their previous visits to Indy and Indy 500. All the image questions in the first and second parts use the 7-point Likert scale, with 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree. The bipolar items also use a 7-point scale.

### *Data collection and analyses*

After the survey questionnaire was designed, it was presented to a group of senior college students. The students were asked to comment on the wording and clarity of the questions in the survey. Changes were made based on their comments. A self-administered survey was then conducted online via Qualtrics in 2016 and 2017 by a total of 105 student assistants residing in Indianapolis, who reached out to their relatives and friends who were from outside the central Indiana and ask them to fill out the survey. As a result, a total of 548 usable surveys were collected. Data were input into SPSS for data analyses including descriptive statistical analysis, multiple regression analysis, t-test and correlation analysis.

## Results

### *Demographic profiles of respondents*

Among the respondents, about 65% are females and 35% are males. Over 60% received at least four-year college education, while less than 40% received somewhat college education or less. About half of the respondents reported an annual household income of \$60,000 or less, while the other half with more than \$60,000. With regards to the age distribution, 46.1% were in the age group of 18-25 years old, 13.8% 26-30, 13.2% 41-50, 14.7% 51-60, and few in the other age groups. The age distribution skewed to young generations, possibly due to the reason that the data were collected by the college students who tended to reach out to people of the same age group.

Most of the respondents have visited Indy. Many of them have visited the city more than 10 times and only 6.9% have not yet. In contrast, about half of the respondents have not visited Indy 500 as a spectator. Most of the VFRs have visited Indy by car (84.4%). 65.9% chose to stay with their VFRs in Indy while 22.3% chose to stay in hotels.

*Respondents' perceived images of Indy and Indy 500*

As shown in Table 1, on a seven-point scale, the mean scores of the cognitive items about Indy range from 3.71 to 5.95, most of which are modest, indicating Indy's attractiveness is perceived to be mildly positive. The average value of all the mean scores is 4.71, reflecting a mild overall image of Indy. The top positively perceived items include 'lots of good restaurants and bars' (5.95), 'well known as a sport city' (5.80), 'the sports facilities are modern' (5.72), 'there are lots of interesting sport events in the city' (5.69), and 'Indianapolis is an attractive city' (5.58). Interestingly, three of the five most favorable items are related to Indy's sports or sport events. The conative image items represented by intent to visit/revisit Indy (5.10) and intent to recommend to friends (4.99) are also very mild.

Table 1. VFRs' Perceived Cognitive and Conative Images of Indy

VFRs' Perceived Images of Indy	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
<b><i>Cognitive:</i></b>			
Lots of good restaurants and bars.	544	5.95	1.048
Well known as a sport city.	542	5.80	1.202
The sports facilities are modern.	541	5.72	1.097
There are lots of interesting sport events in the city.	543	5.69	1.213
Indianapolis is an attractive city.	543	5.58	1.153
This is a thriving and active city.	545	5.56	1.146
The downtown area is beautiful.	543	5.47	1.166
Apart from Indy 500, the city doesn't have anything unique or impressive.	543	5.45	1.358
Indianapolis people are friendly.	544	5.41	1.261
Places of interest in the city are easily accessible.	545	5.37	1.272
The city of Indianapolis has lots of artsy shows and events.	545	5.26	1.169
There is not much to do in the city.	545	5.22	1.435
In general, price in Indianapolis is affordable.	542	5.22	1.242
The urban culture here is diverse.	542	5.17	1.191
There are plenty of interesting cultural festivals and events.	542	5.17	1.142
Nightlife is fashionable and trendy in the city.	543	5.13	1.220
It is easy to get around in the city.	542	5.11	1.422
The downtown area is a good place for shopping.	542	4.79	1.478
Indianapolis is a quiet city.	543	3.83	1.429
It is a slow paced city.	544	3.71	1.421
<b><i>Conative:</i></b>			
Will you plan to visit/revisit Indianapolis for leisure purpose in the near future?	542	5.10	1.457
How likely will you recommend Indianapolis to your friends as an attractive leisure travel destination?	544	4.99	1.399

Scale: 1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=somewhat agree, 4=neither agree nor disagree, 5=somewhat disagree, 6=agree, 7=strongly agree

As illustrated in Table 2, in contrast, the mean scores of the cognitive items about Indy 500 range from 4.24 to 6.23 (there are three items with their values being reversed to be consistent with the other items'). The average value of all the mean scores is 5.34, which is a more favorable indicator of Indy 500 as compared to Indy's. The top positive image items include 'Indy 500 is a very popular sport event' (6.23), 'Indy 500 is a globally well-known sport event' (6.14), 'Indy 500 is a unique and famous event' (6.10), 'Indy 500 is a traditional event' (6.02), and 'it is the season for cookout and enjoying food' (5.78). Indy 500 is recognized as a globally well-known, popular, and famous traditional event of Indy.

Besides, 'enjoying food' is also found to be one of the top attractive things when the respondents think about Indy 500. While Indy 500's average mean score is higher than that of Indy's, the conative images do not look as positive as Indy's especially with VFRs' intent to visit/revisit Indy 500 (4.19) as compared the intent to visit/revisit Indy (5.10). The intent to recommend Indy 500 to friends has a mean score of 4.73, while the Indy's is 4.99.

Table 2. VFRs' Perceived Cognitive and Conative Images of Indy 500

VFRs' Perceived Images of Indy	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
<b>Cognitive:</b>			
Indy 500 is a very popular sport event.	544	6.23	1.167
Indy 500 is a globally well-known sport event.	545	6.14	1.073
Indy 500 is a unique and famous event.	545	6.10	1.008
Indy 500 is a traditional event.	543	6.02	1.106
It is the season for cookout and enjoying food.	543	5.78	1.081
Indy 500 event offers an extraordinary fun atmosphere.	544	5.56	1.303
Traffic is a big issue when attending Indy 500 (R).	542	5.55	1.272
Indy 500 is a good time for entertainment with friends or relatives.	543	5.45	1.364
Indy 500 is a sport event full of modern facilities and activities.	543	5.17	1.349
The Indy 500 related events (e.g., parade) are interesting.	543	5.14	1.307
This event reminds people of alcohol or drunk people (R)	545	5.04	1.544
The racing is a crazy and wild game.	542	5.01	1.388
This is the ideal place to meet lots of people.	544	4.76	1.501
The weather is just perfect for the event.	542	4.74	1.245
This is a mega event that I'm interested.	543	4.57	1.829
Spectator areas are dirty (R)	545	4.24	1.306
<b>Conative:</b>			
Will you plan to visit/revisit Indy 500 as a spectator in the near future?	544	4.19	1.880
How likely will you recommend Indy 500 to your friends to visit as a spectator?	543	4.73	1.548

Scale: 1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=somewhat agree, 4=neither agree nor disagree, 5=somewhat disagree, 6=agree, 7=strongly agree

Table 3 displays the mean scores of the affective image attributes of Indy and Indy 500. All the mean scores range from 5.08 to 5.66, one exception is 'distressing/relaxing' for Indy 500 which is 4.14. Overall, the VFRs' perceived affective images of Indy and Indy 500 are also mild, similar to the cognitive image attributes.

Table 3. VFRs' Perceived Affective Images of Indy and Indy 500

Affective attributes	Indy			Indy 500		
	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Gloomy : Cheerful	536	5.30	1.341	517	5.46	1.464
Dull : Exciting	533	5.10	1.381	517	5.66	1.591
Unpleasant : Pleasant	533	5.51	1.350	514	5.08	1.529
Distressing : Relaxing	531	5.08	1.305	513	4.14	1.503

*Quantifying image fit between Indy and Indy 500*

According to Hallmann and Breuer (2010), the image fit between sport event and destination could be measured by using the scores of the sport event images and the destination images. These scores were quantified by using the Euclidean distance between the results of the sport event images and the destination images. The scores of the variables that measured the destination and sport event images were transformed for every respondent to show only values from zero (bad fit) to one (perfect fit) by dividing the result obtained from the Euclidian distance by the highest possible squared distance (Hallmann & Breuer, 2010). By referring to Hallmann and Breuer's (2010) approach, only the image fit of the affective image can be measured as both used the same measures. As a result, the quantified image fit score of the affective image between Indy and Indy 500 is 0.99, indicating an almost perfect fit.

This study used a qualitative approach to identify the distinctive and impressive cognitive image attributes of Indy and Indy 500, respectively. As shown in Tables 1 and 2, many of the cognitive image attributes are not comparable between Indy's and Indy 500's, making it impractical to quantify the image fit of the cognitive image attributes of Indy and Indy 500. Even so, it is noticed, however, that the top-rated cognitive image attributes of Indy and Indy 500 are all about Indy's sport events and food.

*Determinants of respondents' intent to recommend Indy to friends*

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine how respondents' intent to recommend Indy as a leisure travel destination were predictable by the cognitive image attributes. Results of the regression analysis indicate a good adjusted R2 of 0.359, meaning 35.9% of the dependent variable's variations are explainable by the predicting variables in the proposed model. The F-ratio of 38.037 is significant (Prob.< 0.001), indicating the

result of the equation model could hardly occur by chance. The degree of variable collinearity is considered acceptable with the variance inflation (VIF) less than 10, and the condition indices less than 30 (Belsley, 1991). The t-test was used for testing whether the independent variables contribute meaningful information to the predictions of the dependent variable in the regression model (at the level of 0.05). As a result, four determinants were identified to be significant. The standardized regression coefficient 'Beta' indicates the rank order of the importance of each predictor variable, which reveals four significant determinants. In order of importance, the predictors are "there are plenty of interesting cultural festivals and events", "Indianapolis is an attractive city", "this is a thriving and active city", and "the downtown area is beautiful" (see Table 4).

Table 4. Determinants of Respondents' Intent to Recommend Indy as a Leisure Travel Destination

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-.055	.305		-.180	.857
There are plenty of interesting cultural festivals and events.	.221	.055	.180	4.010	.000
Indianapolis is an attractive city.	.217	.059	.180	3.684	.000
This is a thriving and active city.	.183	.053	.152	3.464	.001
The downtown area is beautiful.	.159	.054	.134	2.945	.003
R=.607, R <sup>2</sup> = .368, Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = .359					

Likewise, multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine how respondents' intent to recommend Indy 500 to their friends was predicted by Indy 500's cognitive image attributes. Results of the regression analysis indicates a good adjusted R<sup>2</sup> of .480, meaning 48% of the dependent variable's variations are explainable by the predicting variables in the proposed model. The F-ratio of 58.636 037 is significant (Prob.< 0.001), indicating the result of the equation model could hardly occur by chance. In order of importance, four items proved to be significant predictors, which include "this is a mega event that I'm interested", "Indy 500 event offers an extraordinary fun atmosphere", "Indy 500 is a good time for entertainment with friends or relatives", and "the Indy 500 related events (e.g., parade) are interesting" (see Table 5).

Table 5. Determinants of Respondents' Intent to Recommend Indy 500 to their Friends to Visit as a Spectator

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.188	.333		.564	.573
This is a mega event that I'm interested.	.322	.050	.361	6.413	.000
Indy 500 event offers an extraordinary fun atmosphere.	.267	.078	.215	3.431	.001
Indy 500 is a good time for entertainment with friends or relatives.	.215	.075	.180	2.851	.005
The Indy 500 related events (e.g., parade) are interesting.	.200	.071	.160	2.825	.005
R=.699, R <sup>2</sup> = .488, Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = .480					

#### *Moderating effects of visiting times on the determinants*

Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the moderating effects of visiting times on the determinants of 'intent to recommend Indy to friends'. Significant positive relations were identified with all the determinants, indicating that the respondents tend to perceive the determining variables more favorably if they visit Indy more times (see Table 6).

Table 6. Relations between the Determinants of 'Intent to Recommend Indy' and Visiting Times

Determinants of Intent to Recommend Indy	How many times have you visited the city of Indy as a leisure visitor?		
	Pearson's r	Sig.	N
Indianapolis is an attractive city.	.244	.000	547
The downtown area is beautiful.	.156	.000	547
There are plenty of interesting cultural festivals and events.	.213	.000	546
This is a thriving and active city.	.218	.000	549

The data shows that almost half of the respondents have visited Indy 500 while the other half have not. The variable of 'visiting times to Indy 500' was recoded as a dichotomous variable (1=not visited, 2=visited) so that an independent-sample t-test was conducted to test if there are perceptual differences between the respondents who have visited Indy 500 and who have not yet in terms of the determinants of 'intent to recommend Indy 500 to friends'. The results show that the categorical variable has significant moderating effects on all the perceived determining variables. The respondents who have visited Indy 500 held more favorable perceptions of the determinants than the ones who have not visited the sport event (see Table 7).

Table 7. Perceptual Gaps of the Determinants of 'Intent to Recommend Indy 500' between Not-visited and Visited Respondents

	Dichotomous Var	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	t	Sig.
This is a mega event that I'm interested.	1.00*	277	5.09	1.353	-7.228	.001
	2.00**	267	6.06	1.036		
Indy 500 event offers an extraordinary fun atmosphere.	1.00*	276	4.04	1.817	-5.618	.001
	2.00**	265	5.13	1.679		
Indy 500 is a good time for entertainment with friends or relatives.	1.00*	276	5.17	1.430	-3.915	.001
	2.00**	267	5.75	1.231		
The Indy 500 related events (e.g., parade) are interesting.	1.00*	277	4.74	1.350	-5.918	.001
	2.00**	265	5.55	1.118		

\* not visited, \*\* visited

### Discussion and Conclusion

Indianapolis has long been considered as a moderate travel destination, not as attractive as America's top attractions such as New York City or Washington, D.C. The city of Indy requires more innovative ideas and strategies in order to effectively promote the destination. VFR is one of the major market segments of Indy's tourism and Indy 500 is one of the few iconic attractions of the city. It is essential to gain an understanding of VFRs' perceptions of Indy and Indy 500 in the context of tourism.

All the mean ratings of the cognitive image attributes are moderate. Yet, the variables related to sports and events received higher mean scores than the other variables. In contrast, Indy 500's cognitive image variables are more favorably perceived than Indy' by the VFRs. This may indicate that Indy 500 is more popular than the city itself as perceived by the VFRs. Indy's tourism organizations should take advantage of the popularity of Indy 500 when promoting the city to VFRs.

The study indicates a good image fits Indy's and Indy 500's affective image attributes. A successful promotion of Indy 500 should also benefit the promotion of the city as a leisure travel destination. Indy's tourism organizations should look for a long-term and closer collaborative partnership with Indy 500 in joint marketing efforts. Sport events and festivals are as much a place maker as tourism (Nauright, 1996) which is asserted to be one of the most significant shapers of collective or group identity in the contemporary world.

This study identified the most determining cognitive image attributes which influence the VFRs to recommend their friends to visit Indy and Indy 500. These determinants are all important attributes, but may not be the most favorably perceived attributes. For instance, 'there are plenty of interesting cultural festivals and events' is a less favorable cognitive image attribute of Indy and 'this is a mega event that I'm interested' is one of the least favorable cognitive image attribute of Indy 500. Given their importance in determining how VFRs would recommend to their friends, Indy's tourism marketing efforts should focus on these important but less favorably perceived determining factors and launch more effective campaigns to disseminate information about Indy's cultural festivals and sport events in the VFR market segment.

All the top rated and the important cognitive image attributes are found to be related to Indy's sports and events, which further highlights the importance of positioning Indy as a sport and event city in tourism marketing; innovative marketing strategies are needed to create a more successful image of 'sport and event city' in the VFR market segment.

This study shows that the more times the VFRs visited Indy, the more favorable perceptions of the important cognitive images the VFRs would have; and the people who have visited Indy 500 perceived the sport event's image more positively than the ones who haven't yet. One marketing implication of the findings is that tourism and event organizations and marketers should allocate more marketing resources and promotional efforts to the VFRs who've already visited Indy and Indy 500 as these are the people who tend to be more active in recommending and promoting Indy and Indy 500 to their friends.

To quantify the image fit between the cognitive image attributes of a destination and a sport event, researchers may encounter an issue in deciding which attributes should be included and measured. The selected items should reflect the unique characters and conditions of the destination and sport event, respectively. As a result, to adopt exactly the same list of cognitive attributes for both the destination and sport event in order to

quantify the image fit may not be practically meaningful. In contrast, to quantify the image fit of the affective image attributes is relatively easier and more applicable. This study indicates that the applicability of the image fit approach is limited and should not be amplified. The method of quantifying image fit may not be fully adequate between sport events and destinations. Nevertheless, the image fit approach should be recommended and applied as a supplemental tool in assessing the synergy of the attractiveness of both the destination and the sport event.

Finally, there are limitations which need to be recognized when interpreting the findings of this exploratory study. One is the creation of the measures of the cognitive image of Indy and Indy 500 which are mainly gleaned from the online information and the students' comments which may not have covered all the attributes considered important by VFRs. The second is the data being collected which may not be a representative sample of the VFR market segment. More studies are needed to further generalize the findings.

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