

The role of international exhibition venues in marketing exhibitors' destinations

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Abstract

Exhibition venues are an important tool in promoting exhibitors' destination image. Venues act as a communicative environment for both visitors and exhibitors. This study, using structural equation modelling to analyse responses of 1000 visitors to the Egyptian venue at the Expo 2015 in Italy, examines the effect of the venue image's dimensions on improving the image of the Egyptian destination and the intentional visiting behaviour of participants. This study fulfils the research gap of testing the effect of exhibition venue image on promoting the exhibitor's home country's image. It is revealed that venue design, facilities, staff, available information and comfort have positively affected exhibitors' country image promotion and the intentional behaviour of visitors. There are some insights to destination marketers on how to use expositions' exhibitors to market their tourist destinations.

Keywords

Destination image, Egypt, exhibition image, Expo, intentional behaviour, venue image

Introduction

Hosting a special event, such as expositions and festivals, has been recognized as an important strategy not only for a short-term rise in tourist volume and revenue but also for improving destination's image and building brands for sustainable development (Jago et al., 2010; Yu et al., 2012). The first world exposition was arranged in 1851 in London, with 10 countries participating, and it attracted 6 million visitors. Since then, the size and popularity of World Expos have increased (Roche, 2003).

During the 19th and 20th centuries, the focus for world expositions was on nations presenting technology, achievements, news and regions conquered. In the contemporary setting, world expositions have instead become business oriented (Bolin, 2006). Historically, mega-events have been reserved for the developed world. However, during the past decade, developing countries have recognized the potential role of mega-events in sustainable development (Björner and Berg, 2012; Jago et al., 2010).

Du Plessis and McCoy (2000) reported that exhibitions have been used as a marketing medium throughout the world to penetrate new markets and build business image. In additions, exhibitions have direct effects on host destinations in terms of economic benefits, enhancing host destination image and building future visitations to the destination (Arnegger and Herz, 2016). Furthermore, it is well documented that the visiting decisions are significantly affected by the destination's image (Vicol and Zait, 2014).

In mega-events, such as the Expos, countries build their venues to market their destinations and advertise their products and services. However, very few studies have measured the effect of the exhibition venues on promoting the

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