

PERCEPTIONS OF THE HOST DESTINATION AS A RESULT OF ATTENDANCE AT A SPECIAL EVENT: A POST-CONSUMPTION ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Many destinations are now using special events as integral components of their marketing strategies. The aim of this study was to explore how attendance at a special event might impact perceptions of the host destination. Using a case study approach, this research explored the nexus between special events, their attendees and special event destinations. This research specifically focused on exploring whether attendance at a special event influences resulting perceptions of the host destination. The results of a survey-based study indicate that for almost a quarter of respondents who resided outside the host destination, their perceptions of the host destination had changed. Over 90% of these respondents indicated that these post-consumption perceptions of the host destination were more favourable than they were before attendance at the event. Key reasons provided by respondents for their changes in perceptions included *Access*, the *Special Event* itself and *Attractions* at the destination. The paper concludes that the synergies between the special event and the host destination can be likened to those of the celebrity and the products that they endorse and promote, and this notion should be further explored. Recommendations were made to assist marketers of host destinations to more effectively capitalise on the synergies between special events and destinations.

KEYWORDS

Destination marketing, attendee perceptions

INTRODUCTION

Special events are occurrences that are out of the ordinary, limited in duration, and infrequently staged (Arcodia & Robb, 2000; Getz, 1997; Jago, 1998). Getz (1997) highlighted that the 'specialness' of special events is enhanced by such factors as their uniqueness, quality, festive spirit, authenticity, tradition, theming and symbolism. Special events have been a part of cultures and civilisations for thousands of years and some of the earliest records of festivals date back to Babylonian times between the 9th and 7th centuries B.C. Parise

(1982) suggested that the festivals staged by the Macedonians during these times were likely to be celebrations of plantings and harvests and in honour of their gods. It was during this period that the ancient Olympic Games were first staged, as a relatively localised religious event – of very little resemblance to the Games that we are most familiar with now.

Over the centuries, special events have been used to celebrate a range of achievements, including the

landing of explorers in new territories, coronations of kings and queens, and the launching of new governments and legislation. In Australia, one of the country's first major special events, described as the "event of the century" (Clark, 1981; 1999, p. 73), was held in Sydney in 1888, and commemorated the centenary of the landing of the first English fleet at Sydney Cove. Some special events have also been created to encourage communities to reflect upon and continue their culture's history and tradition. Sofield and Li (1998) observed that the 800-year old Chinese Chrysanthemum Festival perpetuates and venerates traditional culture and is "an expression of both thanks for past prosperity and hopes for future wealth" (p. 277).

During the 19th century, however, special events, particularly World Fair Expositions (Expos) advanced to another level. These events were significantly linked to historical events (for example, the 1893 Expo in Chicago commemorated the anniversary of the arrival of Columbus; the centennial of the French Revolution was celebrated during the 1889 Paris Expo; and in 1909, the 10th anniversary of the American gold rush was commemorated during the San Francisco Expo), but they represented more than this. Gecser and Kitzinger (2002) noted that even in the 1800's the Hungarian International Fairs attracted high levels of media coverage. By default, the host destinations of Expos were afforded considerable media exposure on the international stage (Webb, 2004). In many ways, these events signalled the advent of the contemporary special event. Although not as sustainable as the impact of the resort towns of the same period [see Walton (2000)], host destinations appeared to benefit from their association with these international events as they attracted new income and ideas which assisted these destinations to develop.

Notwithstanding the fact that sometimes special events impact various communities negatively [e.g. housing evictions (Hiller, 1998; Olds, 1998)], special events are generally perceived positively. Goldblatt and Perry (2002) suggested special events have the capacity to revitalise communities. Chessell (2002) suggested that, as a form of urban tourism,

special events sometimes create a 'sense of place'. With this support, the range, size and frequency of special events staged around the world have become more varied (Jago, 1997). Special events are often the impetus for developing the awareness of the host region (Ritchie & Smith, 1991). Olds (1998, p.2) suggested that memories of the Summer Olympic Games, in particular, are suffused with glamour and spectacle.

According to Olds (1998), the spectacle of the world's media focussing on a single city has become increasingly 'glamorous'. Since the extensive, and successful media coverage of 1984 Summer Olympic Games held in Los Angeles, images of host destinations have been 'catapulted' into homes all over the world. Images of the Sydney Harbour with the Opera House and the Harbour Bridge were used extensively in the television coverage of the 2000 Summer Olympics and vignettes were developed to showcase Australia to international audiences. Carefully crafted vignettes, which are now frequently used in marketing strategies for host destinations, project purposeful images of the host destination to showcase them to audiences that are often global.

Special event tourism is one of the fastest growing areas of the tourism sector (Reid & Arcodia, 2002). Special events are used to attract tourists to host destinations both in the short- and long-term timeframes (Faulkner et al., 2000). Faulkner, (in Fredline, Jago, & Cooper, 2003) discussed the 'showcase' effect of special events, when host destinations are highlighted to tourists and are sometimes placed firmly on 'tourist maps'. Hall's (1989) seminal work on special events espoused the capacity that mega-events have to change the perceptions people have of host destinations.

Chalip, Green and Hill (2003) noted that there is sustained support in the special event literature for the notion that special events play an important role in the formation of positive images, attitudes and perceptions of host destinations. There is, however, a paucity of research on how attendance at a special event might influence perceptions of the host destination. This study was particularly interested in the synergies between attendance at special events and resulting perceptions of the host destinations, and

aimed at beginning to address this gap in knowledge. Gaining information on the synergies between attendance at a special event and the host destination will assist marketers to better understand underlying relationships between them.

Rationale and Aims of the Research

This study was based within the context of marketing and was interested in exploring the role of special events in destination marketing strategies. A Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre study that explored the role that events can play in branding destinations (Jago et al., 2002) found that there is substantial potential for this activity but that neither event nor destination managers harness this opportunity to its fullest potential. The bases to these linkages, however, need to be explored further if this potential is to be realised.

Destination marketing strategies are premised on generic marketing strategies, many of which are based on psychological theories [e.g. the theory of classical conditioning (Staats & Staats, 1958), Pavlovian conditioning (Rescorla, 1967); Ajzen's (1985) theory of planned behaviour or Fishbein and Ajzen's (1980) theory of reasoned action]. There appear to be synergies between event marketing and destination marketing strategies. This has certainly been explored within the context of festivals [see, for example, Derrett (2002); Chessell (2002)]. One premise of event-related destination marketing strategies is that images and information communicated of, and about, host destinations through events have the capacity to create positive perceptions [of a destination] which will likely be associated with positive behavioural intentions [to visit the destination] in the future. The theories of planned and reasoned action are particularly useful in understanding why marketers are interested in manipulating consumers' attitudes and perceptions.

In these studies, attitudes are defined as thoughts and opinions, in relation to both inanimate and animate objects, which are believed to influence future behaviour. Hence, by developing positive attitudes towards products and services, consumers will be more likely to purchase them in the future.

Attitudes and perceptions can be altered through a range of marketing tools. As part of integrated marketing communications, advertising is considered to be one effective way in which positive attitudes and perceptions of products and services can be developed (Jones, Sinclair, Rhodes, & Courneya, 2004). Marketers have now begun to recognise the power of special events with regard to influencing consumer attitudes, perceptions and behaviour. For example, brand marketers are more regularly focussing their attention on the role of building brand image through event sponsorship (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999). Such strategies are largely based on the findings of Khale and Homer (1985) and McCracken (1989) on image transfer within the context of consumer goods, particularly with regard to the endorsement of brands by celebrities. These studies highlight that when there are synergies between the brand and the celebrity and when the consumer purchases the product, the transfer process is completed (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999). Hence, compatibility between the brand and the event is an important aspect of the success of such strategies.

Destination marketers have also recognised the power of special events, evinced in the increasingly popular use of them in their marketing strategies (see, eg, the tourism strategies of Victoria, Hong Kong or Dubai). To some extent, special events are a metaphor for 'celebrity' within the context of destination marketing. Special events can convey messages about their host destinations, just as celebrities convey messages about the product and services that they endorse. Indeed, destinations like Edinburgh and Melbourne are using this approach in their event-related destination marketing strategies. By consistently, conveying messages about Melbourne, through sport- and theatre-events, Tourism Victoria and the City of Melbourne are positioning Melbourne in relation to its competitors. Similarly, the Edinburgh Comedy Festival is used to convey that Edinburgh is a city that supports the development of contemporary, and innovative, popular culture.

Previous research also shows that the consumption experience can alter attitudes and

perceptions of products and services. For example, after experiencing a product or service, consumers' attitudes may alter. The service quality literature has purported this notion and empirical evidence has been provided for this (see, for example, Parasurman, Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996).

Similarly, loyalty to the product or service can be altered after the consumption experience. Consumers who have positive consumption experiences are more likely to remain loyal to the product, service or organisation than those who have less positive consumption experiences (Sivadas & Baker-Prewitt, 2000; Beerli and Martin, 2004). Translating this theory to destination marketing, experience with the destination may, therefore, influence the post-visit perceived images of the destination.

The topic of perceptions has attracted interest from researchers of special events and tourism. Perceptions are what consumers see (Jones & Sasser, 1995; Kozak & Rimmington, 2000) and, according to Kotler, Bowen and Makens (2003), are dependant on the relation of the stimuli to the surrounding field. With this interpretation in mind, research has been undertaken to understand host populations' perceptions of special events with regard to the tourism impacts of special events (Fredline & Faulkner, 2000; Jeong & Faulkner, 1996; Mihalik, 2000; Mihalik & Simonetta, 1998). Furthermore, research has been undertaken to explore the influence of the experience at special events on loyalty, repeat attendance and recommending behaviour (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Sivadas & Baker-Prewitt, 2000; Wicks & Fesenmaier, 1993). However, little information has been gained about the influence that attendance at special events has on perceptions of host destinations.

The aim of this study was to explore this nexus between special events, special event attendees and host destinations. More specifically, it explored the influence of the experience of attendance at a special event on perceptions of the host destination. The study was one part of a larger,

longitudinal project on special events, which was supported by the Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre in Australia. The research questions that were posed were:

- Can attendance at a special event change perceptions of the host destination?
- If so, in what ways does it change perceptions of the host destination?
- In the case of perceptions of the host destination improving as a result of attendance at the special event, what issues emerge as being salient for attendees?

Research Context

This study employed a case study approach and focussed on the Melbourne season of *Mamma Mia!*, which commenced in June, 2001, and finished in June, 2002. It is acknowledged that some researchers may find it difficult to consider that the season of *Mamma Mia!* is a special event, but 'theatre-events' have many of the characteristics of special events. The *Mamma Mia!* season was limited in duration and provided attendees with opportunities to escape the routines of their everyday lives, both of which are essential elements of special events. *Mamma Mia!* was also part of Melbourne's tourism product and recognised as an important special event by both Tourism Victoria and the City of Melbourne, which represent the State and local governments of Victoria. Tourism Victoria in particular recognises the potential of theatre-events to attract tourists to Melbourne, as well the State of Victoria. Part of Tourism Victoria's *Strategic Plan 2002-2006* (Tourism Victoria, 2001) is to promote Melbourne, Australia, as a destination where major special events are held on a frequent basis. More specifically, the *Strategic Plan 2002-2006* aims to promote the image that Melbourne is a 'theatre' destination, where major theatre-events are a key component of the tourism product. The staging of *Mamma Mia!* was part of that strategy. Total attendance numbers at the Princess Theatre, which has a capacity of 1400, was a little over 600, 000, spread across eight performances each week of its season.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection Instrument

As part of the larger project on special event, which was mentioned earlier, an extensive questionnaire was designed to collect data from a random sample of attendees at *Mamma Mia!* across its season. Information was gained on motivations, demographics, personal values and a range of post-consumption behavioural intentions. Respondents were also asked to indicate whether their perceptions of Melbourne changed as a result of their attendance at *Mamma Mia!*.

They were then asked to indicate if this was for the better or for the worse and then probed, using an open-ended styled question, as to why this was the case. These three questions were only asked of tourists to the host destination, and not of local residents. The series of questions was designed to elicit the salient themes that contributed to changed perceptions of Melbourne as a tourist destination.

Data Collection Method

Pol and Pak (1994) recommended the use of a two-staged approach to data collection at special events and this approach was used for this study. The two-staged approach involved randomly intercepting attendees *in situ*, inviting them to participate in follow-up (telephone) interviews. Pol and Pak (1994) suggested that the two-staged approach to data collection: 1) reduces the impact of the research on attendees' enjoyment of the special event experience; and 2) optimises response rates to surveys at special events. The random sample approach was used to intercept attendees at *Mamma Mia!*. A strategy was developed to ensure that attendees were sampled across a representative number of sessions considering weeks and performances. It was decided that every fifth attendee would be intercepted at the conclusion of selected performances of the season and weeks of the year. Pol and Pak (1994) also recommended that about two-and-half times the number of attendees that is required for the follow-up interviews be intercepted *in situ*. Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI's) were conducted in the two weeks

subsequent to the *in situ* intercept interviews with a random sample of attendees who agreed to participate in the survey.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the variables of interest. Bivariate analysis was also used to explore for underlying relationships between the variables of interest. The open-ended responses were categorised based on the key reason(s) that respondents provided for their change in attitude towards the host destination. The categories were not defined *a priori*, but were derived from the data. It was thought that this approach to the categorisation of the responses, which was similar to a grounded theory approach to data analysis (Goulding, 2002), would enhance the objectivity of what was essentially a subjective approach to the analysis of this data. In grounded theory, the researcher approaches the analysis without pre-conceived ideas of what may emerge (Goulding, 2002). The approach to data analysis assisted the researchers to gain greater insights to assist in answering the research question posed for this study.

Response Rates and Sample Size

In the first stage of the data collection process, 3151 attendees were randomly intercepted and of these, 43% (1361) were prepared to participate in the *in situ* survey. The 1361 respondents then constituted the population for the telephone survey. In the second stage of data collection, the achieved sample size was 788. The response rate to the telephone survey, which is what is reported on in this paper, was 90%. This is not surprising given that consent to participate in the study was obtained in the *in situ* interviews.

Descriptive Analysis

This paper reports on results of the telephone interviews relating only to those respondents that indicated they lived outside Melbourne (n=321). A large proportion (67.8%) of the 321 respondents stated that the primary reason for their visit to Melbourne was to attend *Mamma Mia!*. Just over half of these respondents (53.9%) had visited

Melbourne more than 10 times in the past five years, and only 4.7% were first-time visitors to Melbourne.

On 10-point Likert scales, the mean rating for overall satisfaction with *Mamma Mia!* was 9.5 and the mean rating for satisfaction with Melbourne as a tourist destination was 8.7. The correlation between overall satisfaction with *Mamma Mia!* and overall satisfaction with Melbourne as a tourist destination was 0.30, which was statistically significant ($p < 0.1$, two-tailed). The correlation between intentions to recommend *Mamma Mia!* and Melbourne was 0.18, which was also statistically significant ($p < 0.1$, two-tailed). On 7-point Likert scales, the mean rating for intentions to recommend *Mamma Mia!* was 6.8 and the mean rating for intentions to recommend Melbourne as a tourist destination was 6.7.

Of the 321 tourists attending *Mamma Mia!*, almost 25% ($n=74$) responded that their perceptions of Melbourne as a tourist destination had changed as a result of attending the special event. Over 90% of these ($n=68$) said the change was 'for the better'.

Results of Analysis of the Open-ended Responses

As was outlined in an earlier section, the open-ended responses obtained from probing respondents were analysed using a grounded theory approach. Each of the responses provided by the respondents was analysed for its foremost theme(s). When it was possible, the responses were categorised into other themes that had already been identified through the analysis, so that those that were salient could then be identified (1). Otherwise a new theme was created to represent the essence of the response. Many of the responses were multi-dimensional, in that they contained information that was associated with more than a single theme (2). Hence, they were placed into more than one category for thematic analysis. Furthermore, analysis of the data highlighted that many of the themes seemed to be associated with other themes.

For example, the following response, 'The entertainment in the city is a surprise. Very

pleasant. A lot to look at', was placed into an 'Attractions' theme. Similarly, the response, 'It is just the fact that we don't get much entertainment like this and to have somewhere where you can go and get entertainment like this is terrific', was placed into the 'Attractions' category.

Furthermore, the category, *Attractions* was often associated with *Access*. One respondent stated that 'there were more buildings; the roadways, the freeways, the tunnel. The traffic flow was better and it didn't take us as long to travel in from the country.' Another respondent stated that they 'enjoyed going to Melbourne to have dinner. Go to the show and have supper afterwards. Also the parking was excellent'. The connection between these two issues was quite clear for these respondents.

The following themes emerged in the responses:

- Access – how easy it was to get to, and around, Melbourne;
- Atmosphere – the affective component of Melbourne;
- Attractions – restaurants, cafés, other events, tourist attractions;
- Comparison to hometown – how the experience enable attendees to compare Melbourne with their hometown;
- Hygiene – how clean Melbourne appeared to be;
- Novelty – how different Melbourne was to their expectations;
- People – the interactions and observations of other people within Melbourne;
- Security – how safe the respondents felt in Melbourne;
- Shopping opportunities – the shops in Melbourne;
- Special event – specific references to *Mamma Mia!*;
- Tourism – formal observations about and references to tourism services;
- Variety – the range of activities that could be participated in within the destination.

The categories that emerged most frequently were *Attractions* and the *Special Event* itself. Many respondents were impressed with Melbourne's restaurants, cafés, other events, and tourist attractions.

By attending *Mamma Mia!* At The Princess Theatre, visitors were exposed to an area of Melbourne that is not always frequented by visitors to Melbourne, particularly if they are not attending a theatre-event. In recent years, this area of Melbourne has been rejuvenated and now has a myriad of restaurants and cafés. This was noted by a number of the respondents. One respondent said:

'because I hadn't realised that there were all those nice little cafés up at the top of Bourke Street and around the corner into Spring Street'.

Another respondent stated that she:

'saw the theatre and restaurant end of town and I saw that it has really changed for the better'.

There were many specific references to *Mamma Mia!*. For example, one respondent stated that she:

'didn't think that *Mamma Mia!* was going to be that good...the performance was brilliant; the crowd was great; there was nothing to fault'.

Another respondent said that she was confident with her stay in Melbourne and that '*Mamma Mia!* just topped it all off'. The latter response indicates that the experience of *Mamma Mia!* for that respondent contributed to her confidence in Melbourne as a tourist destination.

Access also featured frequently in the responses. For example, one respondent was impressed by Melbourne's train and tram systems. She said that:

'I think that going in by train you notice how Flinders Street Station has changed and how the trams have changed...It was wonderful - the different stations around the loop were great'.

Similarly, another respondent was impressed by the ease of access to the theatre-precinct:

'I wasn't aware of the availability of live productions and how accessible they are in the city centre. They are easy to access via public transport'.

When respondents referred to the friendliness of others or the behaviour of others, their responses were categorised into the *People* category. These responses were often associated with responses that referred to the *Special Event* category. For example, one respondent stated that his perceptions of Melbourne improved because of the 'crowds that attended the event and the enjoyment that people got from it'. Similarly, another respondent said that she:

'I didn't think that the event was going to be that good...but the performance was brilliant. The crowd was great'.

In some cases, respondents referred to other destinations and compared their experience at *Mamma Mia!* to these. For example, one respondent noted that Melbourne was different to her hometown: that Melbourne was 'faster' and that the people were 'different'. This respondent also noted that there were more things to do in Melbourne than in her hometown and commented on the number of attractions and events staged in Melbourne. Another respondent referred to negative attitudes about Melbourne in his hometown, but that as a result of his attendance at *Mamma Mia!* his perceptions of Melbourne had changed, '*...all I could see were positives*'. The differences noted by some of these respondents were also received positively. Even though the host destination 'was very different' to where one respondent lived, he noted that the host destination had a lot to offer and that it has a 'different feel and atmosphere' to his hometown.

DISCUSSION

From a methodological perspective, the two-staged approach to data collection was particularly useful for this study. Had a single exit interview approach to data collection been employed, it is likely that the restriction of time on the time of the interviews and the associated noise would have adversely impacted the reliability of the data that were obtained.

The results indicate that, based on their levels of previous visitation to Melbourne, most respondents were reasonably familiar with Melbourne as a tourist destination, but for many respondents *Mamma Mia!* was the primary reason for their visit to Melbourne. Respondents were clearly pleased with their experiences at *Mamma Mia!* Satisfaction and behavioural intentions to recommend *Mamma Mia!* and Melbourne to friends and relatives were also strong. Respondents were likely predisposed to having a favourable impression of Melbourne – which was likely instrumental in their decision to attend *Mamma Mia!* in Melbourne. When respondents asked to indicate if their perceptions of Melbourne had changed as a result of the attendance at *Mamma Mia!*, they may have responded thinking that there was no need for their perceptions of Melbourne to change. This might explain the relatively low percentage of respondents who indicated their perceptions of Melbourne had changed as a result of attending *Mamma Mia!* On the other hand, if this result is considered within the context of Melbourne, as a tourist destination, this result is a little more telling.

There was a near-consensus among those respondents whose perceptions of Melbourne had changed and that these had improved as a result of their attendance at *Mamma Mia!* This is a powerful finding. Furthermore, given that a large proportion of respondents in this sample were not unfamiliar with Melbourne, the results would appear to be even more powerful. For researchers of special events and in the field of marketing, the findings are important, as the notion that special events play a role in developing positive perceptions of host destinations has, in the past, been largely based on anecdotal evidence. Although the marketing literature shows that attitudes and perceptions can be changed through the consumption process, it is not an easy task to achieve, hence, the results provide some support for the use of special events in developing positive perceptions of their host destinations.

The analysis of the open-ended responses further highlights that there were synergies between the consumption experience at this special event and resulting perceptions of Melbourne as a tourist

destination. Of the issues in the open-responses that were considered by respondents, *Attractions* emerged as an important factor in influencing revised perceptions of the destination. Many respondents were keen to experience the attractions in Melbourne and were clearly impressed with them. Although this study did not measure the degree of causality between the experience and the themes, there is some indication that attractions were most important in altering perceptions of Melbourne. *Access* also emerged as an important factor in terms of changing perceptions of Melbourne. Respondents were impressed by the road infrastructure, the public transport and the parking facilities available to, and within, the destination. Melbourne's ability to successfully stage *Mamma Mia!* was well-recognised by many respondents, and was an issue that seems to have contributed to revised perceptions of Melbourne as a tourist destination. This aspect of the special event experience indicates that there is potential to successfully implement elements of relationship marketing within the context of special events and destination marketing.

What also emerged as a result of the analysis of the open-ended responses was the fact that some respondents used their place of origin as a point of reference for comparison to Melbourne. These respondents were 'mapping' Melbourne perceptually in relation to their hometown, which highlights the role of special events in effective positioning strategies. This information is important for marketers of destinations, as positioning plays such a large part of destination marketing strategies.

Limitations

As this study used the case study method, the results cannot usually be generalised to the broader population of special events, host destinations and their attendees. The measure of perceptions was a single-item measure. Whilst this measure was useful in gauging overall perceptions of Melbourne as a tourist destination, future research on this topic should investigate whether a more comprehensive measure can lead to more information being gained on the topic. Similarly, the

analysis of the open-ended responses was based on a relatively small sample and further research in this area should aim to address this issue.

This study was a post-consumption study and whilst it provided insights into the synergies between the special event, the attendee and the host destination, it may have been useful to conduct a pre-consumption phase of the study. Menard (1991) suggested that the cross-sectional approach to data collection is useful where changes in psychological constructs over a period of time are the focus of the study. There are, however, considerable barriers to doing this within the context of special events – one of which is access to attendees before their attendance at the event in the host destination. This approach may be worth considering in future research on this topic, if some of the logistical problems associated with it can be overcome.

CONCLUSIONS

This study provides some empirical evidence for the notion that attendance at special events can change perceptions of host destinations. Whilst this information was gained from the descriptive statistics, it provides insights into the issues that attendees considered to be salient in changing their perceptions of Melbourne as a result of their attendance at *Mamma Mia!*.

In response to the first and second research questions that were posed for this research, the results indicate that the consumption of special events can impact perceptions of the host destination. This study would indicate that this is most likely to be in a positive direction. Furthermore, the consumption of special events appears to be useful in positioning the host

destination in the market place against its competitors and origin destinations. There were clearly synergies between the host destination and the special event that require attention by marketers of both destinations and special events. There are opportunities for destination marketers to encourage attendees to formulate or re-examine their perceptions when they attend special events. It would seem logical, however, that the attributes of the destination must perform well for the perceptions of it to improve. The salient issues for those respondents whose perceptions of Melbourne had improved as a result of their attendance at *Mamma Mia!* were reasonably clear. Based on the considerable level of commonality amongst the responses provided by respondents, the results suggest reliability, but this cannot be demonstrated statistically.

Synergies were identified between the special event and the host destination and for some attendees, *Mamma Mia!* emerged as the 'persona' of Melbourne. This gives rise to the metaphor of the 'special event as a celebrity' within the context of destination marketing. In this case, as is the case of successful sponsorship partnerships when the image of the sponsor is transferred to the product or service being sponsored, the characteristics of the special event can be transferred to the destination. This seems to have occurred in the case of *Mamma Mia!* in Melbourne. Recommendations for Further Further research on this topic might address the limitations of this study. For example, the case study method could be addressed by the use of a multi-event/multi-destination study. The measure of perceptions may also be assessed in other studies. Menard's (1991) repeated cross-sectional approach to data collection might also be considered in future research.

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