Evaluation of the tourist perception of the spectator in an eSport event

Evaluación de la percepción turística del espectador en un evento de eSport

对电子竞技赛事中观众对游客的感知的评估

Оценка туристического восприятия зрителя на е-Спортивном мероприятии

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Abstract

eSports events are a great tourist attraction for event organizations, for this reason, the objective of the study is to analyse the tourist impact of the eSports event "Iberian Cup 2019". The sample consisted of 390 participants who attended the tournament in the city of Barcelona. The instrument used was a questionnaire that analyses the tourism impact in sport events. In relation to the results, the variables "Emotion-Environment" obtained a greater correlation and the variable "personal of the event" was the best evaluated. The attendees had a good satisfaction of the event and future intentions, being the intention to return in the future to the city of Barcelona the best valued item. Finally, the attendees who did physical activity valued most of the parameters analysed better, finding significant differences between the group that does not do physical activity. These results are useful to create strategies to attract more tourists in future events.

Keywords: League of Legends; electronic sport; destination image; tourism; future intentions

Resumen

Los eventos deportivos electrónicos son un gran atractivo turístico para las organizaciones de eventos, por este motivo, el objetivo del estudio es analizar el impacto turístico del evento eSports "Iberian Cup 2019". La muestra constó de 390 participantes que asistieron al torneo en la ciudad de Barcelona. El instrumento utilizado fue un cuestionario que analiza el impacto turístico en eventos deportivos. En relación a los resultados, las variables "Emoción-Ambiente" obtuvieron una mayor correlación y la variable "personal del evento" fue la mejor valorada. La dimensión del evento mejor valorada fue "Estoy emocionado/a con la celebración del evento", seguido de "la existencia de zonas interesantes para visitar en la ciudad" en relación la imagen de destino. Los asistentes tuvieron una buena satisfacción del evento e intenciones futuras. Finalmente, los participantes que realizaban actividad física obtuvieron diferencias significativas. Estos resultados son útiles para crear estrategias que atraigan más turistas en futuros eventos.

Palabras clave: League of Legends; deporte electrónico; imagen destino; turismo; intenciones futuras

概要

电子体育赛事可以为赛事组织城市带来巨大的旅游吸引力, 因此, 本研究的目的是分析"2019年伊比利亚杯"电子竞技赛事对旅游的影响。样本包括390位参加了巴塞罗那市比赛的选手。研究使用工具为一份用于分析体育赛事中的旅游影响的问卷。结果表明, 有关"情绪-环境"的变量具有较高的相关性, "赛事人员"变量获得最积极评估。评分最高的赛事维度是"我对赛事举办感到兴奋", 其次是与目的地图片有关的"在参观的城市中有有趣的地方"。参与者对活动和未来的打算非常满意。最终显示, 进行体育锻炼的参与者表现出显着性差异。这些结果有助于在将来活动中制定吸引更多游客的策略。

关键词: 英雄联盟; 电子竞技运动; 目的地图片; 旅游; 未来意图

Аннотация

Электронные спортивные мероприятия являются большой туристической достопримечательностью для организаторов мероприятий, поэтому целью исследования яв-

ляется анализ туристического воздействия электронного спортивного мероприятия «Кубок Иберии 2019». Выборка состояла из 390 участников, которые присутствовали на турнире в Барселоне. В качестве инструмента использовался вопросник, который анализировал влияние туризма на спортивные мероприятия. По сравнению с результатами, переменные «эмоции-окружение» получили большой уровень корреляции, а переменная «персонал мероприятия» была оценена наилучшим образом. Лучше всего оценивалось измерение мероприятия: «я в восторге от мероприятия», за которым следовало «наличие интересных мест для посещения в городе» по отношению к имиджу места назначения. Участники мероприятия остались довольны мероприятием и намерениями на будущее. Наконец, участники, которые были физически активны, добились значительных успехов. Эти результаты полезны для создания стратегий привлечения большего количества туристов на будущих мероприятиях.

Ключевые слова: Лига легенд; электронный спорт; имидж места назначения; туризм; будущие намерения

Introduction

Tourism is a sector that is constantly expanding and diversifying, playing a very important role in society, culture and the global economy. Nowadays, the way of travelling has changed, people are no longer looking for traditional tourism and prefer alternative tourist activities, being sports tourism one of the most demanded offers in the 21st century (Brown, Busser, & Baloglu, 2010).

Although the concept of sports tourism looks new, there are historical evidence that as far back as Ancient Greece, the inhabitants of that time moved to other places away from their usual place of residence, where they participated in sports events (Bahia & Avila, 2011). In 776 B.C., the most obvious example is found in Olympia, where thousands of people traveled to participate, either as spectators or athletes, in the first ancient Olympic Games. Yildiz and Çekiç (2015) consider these travels as the first sports tourism in history.

Currently, attendance at sports events, as a participant or spectator, has become one of the options for occupying the population's free time and leisure (Theodorakis, Kaplanidou, & Karabaxoglou, 2015), becoming the most important element of sports tourism and maybe the one that generates the greatest number of tourists and economic impact, which is why it is being used to attract tourists to the communities (Deery, Jago, & Fredline, 2004). The technology´s development of in the 21st century has created a disruptive impact on current society, the adoption of digital technology and Internet age has generated as tourism an unprecedented change in the global economy and society (Dilek, 2019).

Along with the development of tourism and technology, the sports sector has grown in parallel with this trend of change and electronic sports events (eSports) have become an essential element of modern society, mainly gaining ground among young people (Dilek, 2019; Funk, Pizzo, & Baker, 2017).

The first eSport competition dates back to 1972, when the first gaming tournament was held at the University of Stanford (Baker, 2016). In 1980, the first mass eSport event, the Space Invaders Championship in Atari, was organised, and over 10,000 competitors participated (Li, 2016; Funk et al., 2018). Nowadays many people use eSports as a way of life, dedicating their professional life to electronic games (McTee,

2014). Esports have experienced a year-on-year increase in both the number of spectators and revenues. It is estimated that by 2020 the industry will be worth more than 1 trillion euros and have nearly 600 million spectators worldwide (Dilek, 2019). According to data from the World Game Market Report (Newzoo, 2018), the game "League of Legends" was the electronic sport with the highest number of players, reaching a total of 100 million registered players. The League of Legends World Cup in 2016 is the most popular eSport Championship with 21,000 live spectators, as well as being broadcast in 18 languages for 47 million spectators (Kresse, 2016).

There is a lot of discussion in defining eSports as a sport, but the fact is that it is similar to conventional sports, where there are rules and a game format, and it has some identifying features such as uniforms or outstanding players that arouse great passions and emotions among its fans (Ayar, 2018). The new generations are so fond of these innovative practices that the International Olympic Committee Commission (IOC, 2017) studied the possibility of considering eSports and its competition as a sports activity and even considered the possibility of eSports being part of Olympic sports. However, this last proposal was finally rejected and eSports were not included in the Olympic modality. However, the population's demand for eSports is increasing. This type of event is no longer held exclusively in a virtual space, but there has been a growth in eSport competitions and events organised in physical spaces, which are increasingly crowded and have greater international impact (Taylor, 2012). This growth in interest in experiencing these events live has attracted the attention of the tourism and entertainment industry (Funk, Pizzo, & Baker, 2018).

Sports events are a tourist attraction for eSport fans, where spectators have the opportunity to see the best players in the world compete, meeting their favorite players or sharing their passion with other attendees with the same interests (Dilek, 2019). For this reason, in recent years different proposals have been developed which aim to increase the visibility of these events, to size up the venue for the competition and to contribute to the dissemination of the brand of the city or region in which they are held for tourism purposes (Antón, 2018). They are a really viable tourist attraction, and with the significant interest already shown in this sector, they have the potential to be very profitable (Agius, 2015: Yenişehirlioğlu, Erdoğan, Şahin, & Ulama, 2018). The current research in eSports is limited, it is a new and emerging market, where there are not many studies that address this issue from the tourism impact that can reach. Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyse the perception and the tourist impact of an eSport event.

Method

Sample

The sample was composed of a total of 390 respondents, who attended the League of Legends "Iberian Cup 2019" tournament in Barcelona. 92.6% of the respondents were male (n=361) and 7.4% female (n=29), the average age of the respondents was 21.65±5.62 years. Regarding the education level, 43.1% had professional training or high school studies, followed by junior high school (39.0%). Most were students (66.9%) or students and part-time workers (15.9%). 57.3% belonged to a middle social class, while 24.4% considered themselves to be from the lower-middle class. Concern-

ing their marital status, 90.3% were single. 66.2% of the sample indicated that they were physically active.

Table 1

Descriptive analysis of the sample

Variables	F	%	Variables	F	%
Gender			Occupation		
Male	361	92.60	Self-employed	5	1.30
Female	29	7.40	Worker	43	11.00
Education level			Student	261	66.90
Without studies	3	.80	Student and partial worker	62	15.90
School	15	3.80	Unemployed	16	4.10
Junior High School	152	39.00	Retired	1	.30
High School/ professional Education	168	43.10	Housekeeping	2	.50
Universities studies	36	9.20	Social level		
Postgraduate	16	4.10	High	12	3.10
Marital Status			Medium-High	51	13.20
Single	352	90.30	Medium	221	57.30
Married or cohabited	36	9.20	Low-Medium	94	24.40
Widowed	2	.50	Low	8	2.10
Physical activity practise					
Yes		258	66.20	No	132	33.80

Instrument

The instrument used to analyse the tourist perception of the event was the one developed by Vegara-Ferri (2017) on the tourist impact on sports events. It is composed of socio-demographic variables and items on the perception of tourism. Each one of these items was evaluated following a 7-point Likert type scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree). A series of variables were also added to obtain tourist information regarding travel to the event.

Procedure

The procedure followed was, first, contact with the organisers of the event who autho-rised the researchers to pass on surveys to those attending the event. The data collec-tion was carried out during the event through online surveys conducted in person by two pollsters and through mobile devices. A non-probabilistic sampling was used for convenience. The interviewers gave access to the attendees through a link or QR code that allowed them to complete the questionnaire. In addition, interviewers randomly and personally interviewed attendees, recording responses online using tablets.

Data analysis

Data analysis was performed using SPSS v.24.0 licensed by the University of Murcia. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation for continuous variables, and of frequencies and percentages for qualitative variables were performed. A correla-tion analysis and the t-test were performed to calculate the existence of significant differences according to the practice of physical activity. The significance level was established at $p \leq .05$.

Results

The results in Table 2 show the general assessment of the event as perceived by the spectators. All the items obtained high average values over a total of seven points, with the event staff being the variable best valued by the attendees with an average of 5.99 ± 1.1 points; conversely, the ticket price was the worst valued variable (M = 4.62 ± 1.7) and the only one that obtained values below five points. The rest of the variables of the event obtained a high valuation between 5.64 and 5.88 points.

Table 2

Descriptive analysis of general event assessment

Variables	M	S.D.
Event staff	5.99	1.1
Logistic of the event	5.88	1.2
Information of the event	5.64	1.3
Activities and play areas	5.82	1.3
Ticket price	4.62	1.7
Overall organization	5.76	1.2

Table 3 below shows the analysis of correlations between the descriptive statistics of tourism perception. Firstly, there was not high correlation between the different variables. However, the variables with the highest scores showed a moderate correla-tion, being "Emotion-Environment" (*r = .644*), "Repeat experience-Recommendation of event" (*r = .626*) and "Interaction spectators-meeting new people (*r = .614*). The vari-

ables that obtained the lowest correlation were "Intention to return-meet new people" (*r* = *.150*) and "Areas to visit-meet new people" (*r* = *.181*)

Table 3

Correlation analysis

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Environment	1												
2. Emotion	.644**	1											
3. Meet new people	.322**	.394**	1										
4. Contact with other participants	.501**	.526**	.614**	1									
5. Solidarity and hospitality	.358**	.439**	.364**	.478**	1								
6. Leisure & Entertainment	.392**	.386**	.239**	.391**	.528**	1							
7. Areas to visit	.304**	.325**	.181**	.328**	.529**	.580**	1						
8. Quality-Price	.285**	.321**	.269**	.294**	.544**	.355**	.426**	1					
9. Sense	.538**	.568**	.292**	.444**	.485**	.521**	.490**	.406**	1				
10. Recomendation	.511**	.539**	.270**	.391**	.463**	.510**	.461**	.406**	.551**	1			
11. Repeat the experience	.461**	.539**	.219**	.383**	.335**	.430**	.384**	.228**	.589**	.626**	1		
12. Share information in SM	.311**	.483**	.367**	.295**	.290**	.222**	.215**	.219**	.325**	.393**	.259**	1	
13. Future intention	.357**	.325**	.150**	.265**	.411**	.478**	.479**	.329**	.378**	.510**	.510**	.216**	1

** Note. P-value≤0.01

Table 4 shows the evaluation of the parameters of tourist perception analysed. In the perception of the event, the item best valued by both groups was "I am excited about the celebration of the event", while meeting people with the same interests was the worst valued item of the dimension and of the whole questionnaire with a score of 4.26 and 4.70 points.

Regarding the image of the destination, the existence of interesting areas to visit in the city was the best rated item (M = 6.30 ± 1.1, and M = 6.11 ± 1.2), while the quality/price of the city was the parameter with the lowest results for the dimension with a score of 5.10 ± 1.4 and 5.19 ± 1.5. The spectators had a good satisfaction of the event and high values in their future intentions, being the best valued item of the dimension and of the questionnaire the intention of returning in a future to the city of Barcelona with a score of 6.38 ± 1.2 and 6.15 ± 1.4 respectively.

A comparison of the groups of participants who did or did not do physical activity shows that the participants who did physical activity gave a better value to most of the parameters analysed, and significant differences were found in four of the items.

Concerning the tourist information of the spectators surveyed at the event, for 73.5% of the respondents it was attendance to the event that was the main reason for their

trip. The average number of accompanying persons was 3.6 ± 2.4, most of them (81.2%) being friends or relatives (15.3%). Tourists made an average trip of 93.3 kilometres, only 8.6% made another leisure, cultural or entertainment activity in Barcelona and one in every four people surveyed spent time in a restaurant in the city.

Table 4

Descriptive of tourism perception

Ítems	Is physically active		No physical activity		p-value
	M	SD	M	SD	
Perception of the event					
1. The atmosphere of the event is what I am looking for in an eSports environment.	6.00	1.1	5.87	1.3	.027*
2. I'm excited about the event.	6.01	1.2	5.90	1.3	.116
3. I've met new people with the same interests as me.	4.26	2.3	4.70	2.1	.069
4. I enjoy social interaction with other viewers or participants in this event.	5.45	1.6	5.31	1.6	.388
Destination image					
5. I have felt the solidarity and hospitality.	5.66	1.6	5.66	1.6	.853
6. In Barcelona there are good opportunities for leisure and entertainment.	6.17	1.1	5.97	1.4	.115
7. Barcelona offers interesting areas to visit.	6.30	1.1	6.11	1.2	.815
8. As a tourist destination. Barcelona offers good value for money.	5.10	1.4	5.19	1.5	.181
Satisfaction					
9. I have a good feeling about attending this event.	5.93	1.1	5.88	1.2	.111
10. I will recommend the destination to friends and family.	6.14	1.2	5.78	1.6	.001*
11. If I have the opportunity to attend a similar eSports event I will repeat the experience.	6.27	1.1	6.08	1.4	.091
12. I will be posting photos of the attendance at this event on social networks.	5.15	2.0	5.00	2.3	.038*
13. I want to go back to Barcelona in the future.	6.38	1.2	6.15	1.4	.042*

*$p \leq .05$

Discussion

The aim of the study was to analyse the tourism impact of an eSports event, specifically the "Iberian Cup 2019", held in Barcelona. Consumer demand for eSports and the growth of its competitions had generated considerable attention from the sports, events, tourism and entertainment industries (Funk et al., 2018). Although eSports do not depend on the physical abilities of the participants in the way traditional sports do (e.g. basketball, football or hockey), eSports tourism can still be evaluated as a type of sports tourism, according to Gibson (2003), because eSports events attract the largest audiences in the world (Pe, Čičin-ain, & Blažević, 2017; Yu, 2018) and are a tourist attraction for any event sports organisation (Yenişehirlioğlu et al., 2018).

League of Legends is one of the electronic games with the greatest potential for tourism as shown by the fact that its World Championship in 2016 was the second most followed tournament with 43 million spectators (Statista, 2018). This trend in the increase of eSports spectators is very interesting for the entertainment and tourism industry, since in recent years it has become an even more important factor for creators, distributors and travel agencies of electronic games (Linscott, 2017; Peša et al., 2017). As eSports culture grows in popularity, consumers find pleasure not only in computer games as a form of sport, but also in watching other people play live computer games, particularly if those other people are exceptionally skilled players (Seo, 2016).

A positive correlation had been observed between the increase in the number of spectators, the sale of electronic games and the number of people travelling to electronic sports events, which had recently attracted the attention of federal regulators and travel agencies (Eslgaming, 2014; Quinn, 2017). In addition, eSports events provide perceived consumer experiences in the context of special interest tourism (Dilek, 2019).

Correlation analysis determined that all items were significantly related to each other, even if at low or moderate levels. The strongest relationships were associated with the variables of emotion, satisfaction and future intentions, which have a great influence when assessing the tourism perception of the event. Although it should not be forgotten that Barcelona is a city with extensive experience in organising major sports events since it organised the Olympic Games in 1992, hosting many world and European championships in widely practised sports such as basketball, handball, swimming, water-polo and athletics.

Spectators at the event appreciated that the best perceived variable was the quality of the event staff. Quality in sports events is a very important factor in event analysis since it has been one of the most analysed factors in sports tourism studies (Montazeri, Feizi, & Mehdizadeh, 2015; Tzetzis, Alexandris, & Kapsampeli, 2014). In addition to this factor, the quality of communication must be considered in any sporting event (Moon, Kim, Ko, Connaughton, & Lee, 2011) as these are two aspects that receive a lot of attention from tourists. These factors, both of workers and volunteers, are essential to achieve a high quality of service, perceived by the different spectators of the event (Bodet, 2006).

Destination image was generally rated above six points except for the value for money, as Barcelona is one of the main tourist cities in Spain with more than 19 million overnight stays in 2017 (Avisu, 2017). This fact might lead to an increase in prices due to the high demand. Knowledge and analysis of the destination image is important to develop different strategies that help the proper functioning and possible improve-

ments of subsequent events (Allameh, Khazaei, Jaberi, Salehzadehy, & Asadi, 2015; Hallmann, Zehrer, & Müller, 2015; Jin, Lee, & Lee, 2013; Pratt & Chan, 2016). Furthermore, this destination image interferes in the decisions of sports tourists, especially in their intention to return to the event's destination and future editions (Getz & Andersson, 2010; Kaplanidou, Jordan, Funk, & Ridinger, 2012). Also, contradictory results were found with the results of this study, for example, Jin et al. (2013) in their study on the IAAF World Championship Daegu 2011, the destination image had a marginal effect on the future intentions of the spectators.

Satisfaction scored close to six points, being one of the most valued dimensions within the international literacy, several studies carried out in sports events have found a relationship between event satisfaction and intentions to repeat the experience (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010; Koenig-Lewis & Palmer, 2014; Prayag, Hosany, & Odeh, 2013) as is the case in this study. Other studies had found that positive "word of mouth" influences other factors such as destination image, tourist attitude or intentions to recommend a destination or re-travel (Jalilvand, Samiei, Dini, & Manzari, 2012).

Finally, analysis of the comparative results of tourism perception according to the practice of sport has found that spectators who do sport have better ratings on practically all items than those tourists who were not active. Mullin, Hardy and Sutton (2014) indicated that fans who identify highly with the product tend to travel and spend more because of the sports event than on a normal travel. They added that a fan who plays a sport identifies with that sport and is prepared to consume more.

This study contributes to improve the knowledge in the evaluation and management of eSport events, however, it also presented a series of limitations. Firstly, a relatively low response was obtained, given that the sample was limited to tourists attending only one phase, so the time factor prevented a larger sample and therefore the results cannot be generalised to other regions or to the event in general. Secondly, the team of interviewers was reduced to only two interviewers, which also had a negative impact on being able to interview a larger number of tourists. Another limitation was that the data of the study was collected in a transversal way, that the impact of tourism can only be contemplated from the execution of the event. However, it could be better to carry it out some day after the event collecting emails from the interested parties since this allows the tourist to have a greater consideration of the host locality that can be discerned from the moment of making the assessment during the enjoyment of the experience of the event. Future studies may contemplate carrying out the study in different locations in different regions and sizes that will allow for the comparison of results and the observation of possible differences of opinion among tourists, as well as being able to generalise the results with respect to the type of eSports event, even though they have a huge online audience.

Conclusions

The main conclusions of the study are that the personnel and logistics of the event were two of the best evaluated elements along with the parallel activities to entertain the tourist, with the tourists not being very in agreement with the price of the ticket to access the venue where the event was taking place. All the variables studied were significantly related to low or moderate levels, the most positive being those related to future behavioural intentions.

In relation to the results of tourism perception, the items related to future intentions, and emotions were the ones that presented the highest scores above the six valuation points, while meeting new people was the aspect that was worst valued by the tourists. In short, tourists who did physical activity or sport had a better evaluation of the event than those tourists who did not do any kind of physical activity or sport.

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