

Sport Events as Brand Extensions of a Destination Brand:
A Case Study of Phoenix, AZ

by

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Abstract

Sport events have been linked to building a destination image and brand. Researchers have argued that destinations should implement competitive promotional strategies, such as unique destination marketing campaigns and creative destination branding. One strategy that could be considered is to create destination brand extensions. Brand extensions leverage an established brand name (commonly referred as the parent brand) to launch a new product (the extended brand). In doing so, when applied strategically, brand leveraging and brand extension concepts have been shown to strengthen brand equity, brand value, reputation of destination, and the core destination brand if visitors are able to create strong attachment to the extended brand.

The purpose of this study was to examine sports events as destination brand extensions and study their function within a host destination's overall brand. More specifically, this study used an intrinsic case study to evaluate the Phoenix Metropolitan Area (PMA) and examine the ways in which sports events potentially act as extensions relative to the area's destination brand. The following research questions are used to guide this research: (a) How do tourism stakeholders in the Phoenix Metropolitan Area view sports events as brand extensions? and (b) How does the Phoenix Metro Area strategically use sports events as destination brand extensions? A total of 16 semistructured interviews were conducted in person and via Zoom with key personnel from local tourism organizations in the Phoenix Metropolitan Area, such as Visit Phoenix, Tempe Office of Tourism, and Experience Scottsdale. The interviews were transcribed and coded using thematic analysis to identify themes and patterns within the data, examining semantic (physically present) and latent content (implicit meaning). Findings from this study showed that "outdoor" emerged as the area's overarching parent brand, which, as a result, helped link and distinguish the Valley's

various destination brand extensions. Four individual brand extensions were identified: (a) weather, (b) resorts, (c) recreation and leisure activities, and (d) sport/sports events. The results from this study provide evidence that stakeholders in the PMA realize that sports events in the Valley are valuable destination brand assets, but they also understand that events hosted in the PMA are only one of multiple brand extensions that, when grouped together, define the Valley as a popular “outdoor” tourism destination. Furthermore, it was discovered that, if marketers and tourism stakeholders choose to promote a holistic destination brand that employs an integrated destination branding approach, by framing sports events as destination brand extensions, this creates a more effective and efficient marketing dynamic to promote the area’s complex and multidimensional “outdoor” brand. Thus, this study provided insights into how marketers and local DMOs in the PMA (and potentially other markets) can utilize and leverage “outdoor”-related sports events as destination branding assets to elevate and enhance the destination’s greater mix of tourism products and services, particularly the area’s supplemental “outdoor” products and services.

Keywords: destination branding, parent brand, brand extension, destination brand extensions, sports events

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Robert Arthur Trzonkowski, completed under the supervision of Dr. Daniel S. Mason. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “Destination Branding: Sport Events as Destination Brand Extensions of a Destination Brand”, No. Pro00098265, 3/16/2020.

DEDICATION

*This thesis is dedicated to my parents Barbara and Jacek Trzonkowski. Without your constant love and support I would not be able to pursue the goals that I aim to achieve. Your confidence and continuous belief in my abilities is what drives me to be the best person that I can be.
You two are my heroes, I love you.*

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Sport Events as Brand Extensions of a Destination Brand: A Case Study of Phoenix, AZ

As cities compete in an increasingly integrated global economy, the application of branding techniques to destinations has shown rapid growth as a strategy to identify, position, and differentiate the destination from alternative destinations in the minds of target audience members (Krešić & Prebežac, 2011; Qu et al., 2011). Hazari and Sgro (2004) argued that globalization has had a major impact on tourism, particularly by increasing mobility factors, such as the flow of capital and consumers. Notwithstanding the recent COVID-19 pandemic, tourists are more free to travel from one destination to another to enjoy and consume the private and public goods that destinations offer, such as local nightlife, restaurants, heritage and culture sites, and various shopping opportunities. In addition, tourists are typically offered various destination choices that provide similar features, including quality accommodations, beautiful scenic views, and/or friendly people. In turn, consumer mobility and homogenous experiences have led to added pressure on local tourism authorities, such as destination marketers and destination marketing organizations (DMOs), to become innovative with their management and marketing strategies (Dwyer et al., 2000; Hassan, 2000; Jamal & Getz, 1996; Kozak & Rimmington, 1999; Pearce, 1997; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Therefore, to become competitive, Kozak and Baloglu (2011) argued that destinations should not only use their existing comparative advantage but also implement competitive promotional strategies, such as unique destination marketing campaigns and creative destination branding.

Destination branding is regarded as extremely complex in nature (e.g., Creswell, 2004) because the application of destination branding goes far beyond any type of corporate or product branding (e.g., Ooi & Steeper, 2011). Compared to single products or corporations, destinations

consist of different tangible and intangible elements, made up of social (Rana & Nagar, 2016), political (Marino & Mainolfi, 2019), and economic (Kozak & Mazurek, 2011) activities.

Furthermore, destination branding tends to be considered a more long-term approach that looks to maximize the value of the overall product and reinforces the overall product brand (Balakrishnan, 2009). Therefore, from a tourism perspective, Blain et al. (2005) suggested that destination branding strategies should be designed to delineate and differentiate the destination from other destinations and to communicate image as part of an appeal to tourists to experience the destination using those features and characteristics that make it distinctive and attractive (Hall, 1999).

In recent years, however, the pressure for DMOs to find cost-effective marketing and branding strategies has been increasing because of budget restrictions in destination marketing (Anholt, 2009; Park et al., 2013). In cases where destinations lack a strong brand, experience substandard brand awareness, or are looking to rebrand the destination, DMOs have sought to create a new destination brand altogether (Liam & Weaver, 2014). Although such campaigns may seem feasible, such undertakings are typically costly and risky (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Kozak & Mazurek, 2011). Therefore, DMOs and marketers are being actively challenged to become creative when implementing new destination-branding strategies. Kim et al. (2019) suggested that one cost-efficient strategy that could be considered is to create brand extensions. Brand extensions leverage an established brand name (commonly referred as the *parent brand*) to launch a new product (the *extended brand*; Aaker & Keller, 1990). In doing so, when applied strategically, brand leveraging and brand extension concepts tend to strengthen brand equity, brand value, reputation of destination, and the core destination brand if visitors are able to develop a strong attachment to the extended brand (Kozak & Mazurek, 2011).

Contrary to alternative destination branding strategies such as co-branding, brand extensions primarily focus on leveraging a single common brand, whereas co-branding attempts to transfer the positive associations of one co-branding partner to the other through joint advertising and/or media (Besharat, 2010). One fundamental advantage of brand extensions compared to co-branding is that brand extensions avoid the dependence of customers needing to be familiar with another partnered brand. Therefore, when considering brand extensions in the context of destination branding, the most important aspect of the brand extension is that the new product is explicitly part of the destination's brand range, and that there is a consistency between concepts and features represented by the parent and brand extension (Chalip & Costa, 2005).

One way DMOs and destination marketers can look to use brand extensions as a means of destination branding is through the use of sports events. Brown et al. (2004) identified how sports events are being used with increasing frequency to build the brand of their host destinations. The researchers determined that marketers and DMOs use such events with expectations that attention towards the destination will be enhanced through advertising, publicity, and word-of-mouth before, during, and after the event (Brown et al., 2004). Other scholarly work has shown that communities view the use of sports events as a positive branding tool that contributes to the future success of the destination by creating awareness, improving destination image, and attracting tourism development to generate future inbound travel (Dimanche, 2003; Ziakas & Costa, 2011). Moreover, numerous studies have shown that sports events can take different roles relative to destination branding (Brown et al., 2004; Dimanche, 2002; Lee & Arcodia, 2011; Morgan & Prichard, 2007), including serving as a brand extension. Chalip and Costa (2005) evaluated sports events as brand extensions and determined that when a sports event is closely tied to the host destination's brand (*parent brand*), any benefits

recognized through the sports event (*brand extension*), as a consequence, could also become benefits associated with the overall destination brand.

Although destination branding is heavily discussed throughout the tourism literature, there is a lack of empirical case study evidence interpreting how sports events are being utilized as part of destination branding strategies. Furthermore, in regard to brand extensions, Kim et al. (2019) suggested that there needs to be a greater amount of attention focused on how brand extensions are being applied within the specific context of destination marketing. Tourism scholars have underlined the importance of research on tourism brand extensions and innovation management—especially with the focus on the development of innovative destination branding strategies (e.g., Buhalis, 2000; Hankinson, 2005). Although various studies have explored events as a way to brand a destination (Chalip & Costa, 2005; Jago et al., 2003), using a number of different theoretical perspectives, little work has been done to collect empirical evidence using a focused case study approach to understand how such a strategy is employed. Jago et al. (2003) conducted a series of workshops with leading event and destination marketers—conducted by the CRC for Sustainable Tourism throughout Australia—that were designed to clarify what destinations and event marketers do when using events in destination branding and to further identify what the industry would like to know to make better use of events in this regard. From the workshops, the researchers concluded that event marketers and destination marketers have not yet learned how to cooperatively synergize their efforts, and that there is a need for further research into the best means to use events to build a destination's brand. Furthermore, Mackellar and Nisbet (2017) and Hemmonsbey et al. (2018) both conducted studies that used in-depth interviews to investigate how a local sports event can affect a destination brand, but both

recognized the limitations of their studies by focusing on only a single event and suggested that further research should be undertaken in a variety of event and tourism settings.

The purpose of this study was to examine sports events as destination brand extensions and study their functions within a host destination's overall brand. More specifically, it employed an intrinsic case study approach to examining the way in which sports events are a perceived fit to act as extensions of the Phoenix, Arizona, Metropolitan Area's destination brand. Furthermore, this study looked to examine the destination branding concept, particularly through the perspective of various DMOs and event practitioners in the Phoenix Metro Area that actively influence the makeup of the area's sports event portfolio. Therefore, filling this research gap will provide researchers, marketers, and event practitioners with additional evidence on how the processes of destination branding can vary or be determined as a result of applying sports events as destination brand extensions.

Literature Review

Understanding how consumers respond to brands—what they think and feel and how they act toward them—is a critical aspect of any type of branding. Although a brand can serve several functions, at its most basic level, brands act as markers for the offerings of a firm. For customers, brands can simplify choice, promise a particular quality level, reduce risk, and/or engender trust (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Aaker (1991) argued that the primary role of a brand is to “identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors” (p. 7). From a consumer perspective, consumers who are in frequent contact with brands often think of branding as being “roughly synonymous with advertising, graphic design, promotion, public relations, or even propaganda” (Anholt, 2007, p. 3), and is a topic that has a close relationship with media and marketing

objectives. As brands are positioned throughout various marketing outlets, brands are generally designed to represent a promise that sellers give to the buyers. Blythe (2006) emphasized that, from a producer's perspective, branding is:

The culmination of a range of activities across the whole marketing mix, leading to a brand image that conveys a whole set of messages . . . about quality, price, expected performance, experience, and status . . . that acts as a common point of contact between the producer and the consumer. (p. 89)

Therefore, branding goes far beyond simply determining how customers see you, but is "the process of defining a point of difference and organizational culture and communicating a product message internally and externally" (Mearns, 2007, p. 56).

As perceptions of a brand are increasingly linked to consumers' experiences with the brand, brands that deliver a comprehensive brand experience are being specifically designed to target the consumer. Berry (2000) determined that "marketing and external communications help build the brand, but nothing is more powerful than the customer's actual experience" (p. 136). Thus, by understanding the process of branding through the scope of a more experiential approach, it can be inferred that brands primarily act as signals and impressions to the customer, generating trust that the overall product experience will be as promised, whereas they are at the same time assisting in protecting both the consumer and the producer from competitors providing similar products.

Destinations

Although the historical roots of branding can be traced back to the late 19th century with the development of branded consumer products such as Gillette and Quaker Oats (Low & Fullerton, 1994), researchers over the past 30 years have only just started to consider branding

destinations as a “topic of interest” (Blaine et al., 2005). Destinations offer an amalgam of tourism products and services, which are consumed under the brand name of the destination, providing tourists with an integrated travel experience. Leiper (1995) explained that destinations are “places towards which people travel and where they choose to stay for a while in order to experience certain features or characteristics—a perceived attraction of some sort” (p. 87). Although destinations may be characterized through various external/internal influences, the tourism literature describes destinations as places or regions in a spatial and/or administrative hierarchy that relay images and narratives that are described in terms of the destination’s attractions, facilities, and services (Framke, 2002).

Destination Branding: Theory and Definition

Blain et al. (2005) proposed that, for tourism destinations, the concept of the visitor experience (identified as a critical tourism concept by Ryan, 2002) needs to be incorporated into the process of branding (L. Berry, 2000; Pine & Gilmore, 1999). The image of a tourism destination is defined as “the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions a tourist has on a certain destination that is being perceived as a multidimensional concept, ruled by the three primary dimensions: cognitive, emotional and conceivable” (Prayag, 2009, p. 113). Research has demonstrated that although visitors purchase individual tourism services, the entire visitor experience is what is effectively being bought (Otto & Ritchie, 1996).

In an attempt to incorporate a more intensive and rigorous framework for managing a destination’s reputation, Ritchie and Ritchie (1998) provided one of the first attempts to define a “destination brand” as the following:

A name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination; furthermore, it conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience

that is uniquely associated with the destination; it also serves to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience. (p. 103)

Accordingly, this definition builds on Aaker's (1991) core branding concepts (identification and differentiation) while drawing from concepts of "experience" in tourism theory and management (e.g., Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Schmitt & Simonson, 1997). Furthermore, the definition not only highlights the strategic marketing activity through such brand communicators as the destination name or descriptive insignias, but, notably, it highlights a "pleasurable and memorable travel experience" that links the idea of destinations being a perceptual concept for the prospective tourist.

Sports Events and Destination Brands

A relatively new strategy among destinations is to use events to strategically build a destination brand (Getz, 2008). Trošt et al. (2012) stated, "many destinations throughout the world have developed event portfolios, that range from sports, cultural events, music, food, art or other cultural activities as strategic initiatives to attract tourists and to reinforce their brand" (p. 68). As a result, sports events are more widely recognized as having a relevant role in tourism while also being intrinsically linked to building a destination image and brand (Brown et al., 2007; Getz, 2008).

Previous research identified the key factors that destinations need to consider before any benefits can be achieved from hosting sports events. These may include the development of a sports event portfolio (Chalip & Costa, 2005), the selection of appropriate types of sports events (Xing & Chalip, 2006), and an investigation into how the destination is perceived in the marketplace (Brown et al., 2007). Once such factors are considered, events can contribute to both the competitiveness and sustainability of a destination (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). In a study

investigating destination branding and the role of events when developing “Brand Australia,” Brown et al. (2007) identified the following benefits that can be gained by hosting sports events: (a) increased tourism in a region and enhanced tourism development; (b) positive economic impact; (c) increased employment; (d) improvement in a destination’s image or awareness; (e) ability to act as a catalyst for development; (f) reduction in seasonal fluctuations or extension of the tourism season; (g) animation of static attractions; and (h) enhanced community pride.

While hosting sports events can provide destinations with various benefits, events also serve other important roles. Sports events hosted within a particular destination can be viewed as a particular place where an experience is held, thus meaning that sports events can be investigated through various dimensions. Crouch (2000) stated that sports events could be viewed as a place of expression that takes on a role of embodiment (i.e., “a process of experiencing, making sense, knowing through practices as a sensual human subject in the world” p. 68). From a marketing and economic perspective, Rein and Shields (2007) viewed the role of sports events as being powerful levers for place branding, tourism, and potential investment, commenting that “due to the globalization trend and marketplace fragmentation, both established and emerging places are facing increasing international competition to attract and retain residents, investors and tourists” (p. 82). The authors argued that sports events receive widespread free media coverage, which can generate valuable visibility that can attract tourists, residents, and investors at a low cost (Rein & Shields, 2007). Finally, research has shown that sports events can also serve a role as a link to other destination tourism opportunities (Chalip & Costa, 2005). Chalip and Costa (2005) provided a case demonstrating how Fort Lauderdale, Florida, is home to the International Swimming Hall of Fame (ISHOF). Not coincidentally, Fort Lauderdale often hosts national and international swimming competitions. The ISHOF is

commonly mentioned or shown in swimming event advertising and publicity while supporting the swimming events' effects on Fort Lauderdale's brand while also promoting the ISHOF as an attraction for tourists (Chalip & Costa, 2005). Thus, it can be argued that sports events can represent a powerful lever for the transmission of information and representation of a destination (Manzenreiter, 2010).

In respect to destination brand awareness, media coverage concentrated on major sports events tends to increase the brand awareness of the host as a tourism destination (Brown et al., 2007; Jago et al., 2003; Ritchie & Smith, 1991). Such attention leads to tourism being one of the key industries to benefit from the event by drawing sports tourists into places where they would otherwise be unlikely to go (Getz, 2003; Solberg & Preuss, 2007; Xing & Chalip, 2006).

Although sports events can provide widespread free media coverage and destination brand exposure (Rein & Shields, 2007), event organizers and DMOs should use such a strategy with caution. In a study investigating the effects of sports event media on destination image and intention to visit, Chalip et al. (2003) concluded that the negative effects of event media play a significant role on a tourist's intent to visit, and, even worse, if event media affects a vital dimension of the destination image negatively, then the media from the event could even damage visitation outside the period of when the event takes place.

As described above, the local tourism industry can be a major beneficiary of sports event hosting. Although sports events are an essential tool for a destination's tourism, their contribution is not limited to the increase in inbound visitors or generating income and tourism business, but they can also minimize the effects of tourism seasonality by stimulating the flow of people throughout various times of the year (Mikalauskas et al., 2014). Kurtzman (2001) noted that cities like Perth, Australia, and Indianapolis, IN, have adopted branding slogans such as

“City of Sporting Events” and “Amateur Sports Capital of the World” as ways to actively attract international and domestic tourists and events. Cities such as Calgary, AB (Ritchie & Smith, 1991), Sydney, AU (Brown et al., 2002), Birmingham, UK, and Manchester, UK (Smith, 2005), have also been notable cities that have sought to build similar sports event branding strategies.

From a theoretical perspective, when considering sports events as brand extensions—making use of an existing established brand name for a new product or a new product category (called brand stretching)—a strategic approach is required to develop a logical connection between the destination’s parent brand and the sports event brand extension being developed. Other sports attractions and destination activities are likely to provide a workable basis for making the connection because they can signal that the event fits with the destination’s product and service mix (Chalip & Costa, 2005). For example, Kurtzman (2001) identified how Lake Placid has tried to create a destination image as the “Winter Sports Capital of the United States” (p. 19). As a destination, Lake Placid markets itself to tourists by offering winter activities such as backcountry skiing and snowshoeing, pond hockey, dogsled rides, sledding, and ice fishing. However, by incorporating brand extensions concepts and leveraging the city’s destination image (a winter destination), Lake Placid boosts annual winter tourism revenue by also hosting a number of winter sports events. Such events include, but are not limited to, Empire State Winter Games, World Cup Bobsleigh & Skeleton, Lake Placid Nordic Festival/Loppet, and the Annual Winter Carnival. In addition, Lake Placid has periodically hosted major sports events, including the 1932 and 1980 Winter Olympics, 1972 Winter Universiade, 2000 Goodwill Games, 2020 ISU World Synchronized Skating Championships, and the 2023 Winter Universiade.

Theoretical Framework: Brand Extensions

Brand extension is a strategy widely used among firms with high brand equity looking to

launch new products into new market segments. Aaker and Keller (1990) were the first to introduce the idea of brand extension, defining the concept as “the use of established brand names to enter new product categories or classes” (p. 27). Aaker and Keller (1990) believed that consumers transfer the positive attitudes and perceptions they already have of the parent brand to the newly created extension more easily compared to unfamiliar brands or brands with low brand equity. Brand extensions are popular among firms that seek market growth (Farquhar, 1989) because they offer several advantages, including market growth for less investment than other strategies (Kapferer, 2004); a reduction in the risks and costs associated with launching new products into the market (Buil et al., 2009; Klink & Athaide, 2010); greater market share (Smith & Park, 1992); and improved survival rates (Martinez & Pina, 2003). Apple is an example of a parent brand that has employed extensions into various market segments such as music (Apple Music) and television streaming (Apple TV).

According to Keller and Aaker (1992), the concept of brand extensions originated from categorization theory, which argued that consumers could easily transfer their existing attitudes about a parent brand to the extension if the new brand extension is introduced with product similarity. Prior research (see Carter & Curry, 2013; Völckner & Sattler, 2007) provided evidence that the two most influential drivers of brand extension success are (a) the perceived fit between the parent brand and the extension, namely “the attribute or association overlap between an extension and the parent brand” (Lei et al., 2004, p. 245) and (b) the perceived quality of the parent brand, meaning “the consumer’s judgment about a brand’s overall excellence or superiority” (Zeithaml, 1988, p. 3).

Based on the two drivers illustrated above, marketing and branding research shows that perceived fit between the extended brand and parent brand is the primary determinant of a

successful brand extension (Martínez et al., 2009). Perceived fit is conceptualized as the shared associations between the extended and the existing brand or parent brand (Czellar, 2003) while sharing similarity or consistency between the extended and the existing brand in terms of product features and brand concept (Czellar, 2003; Park et al., 1991). In other words, the more similar or closer the parent brand is with the new product, the greater the fit. Previous findings suggest that high fit, in turn, leads to favourable evaluations of the extended brand by consumers (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Mathur et al., 2012; Park et al., 1991).

Despite the role of perceived fit in brand extension success, the effectiveness of brand extensions also needs to take into account the perceived quality of the existing parent brand (Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994). In the case of brand extensions, the overall quality of a parent brand is considered brand equity (Boush & Loken, 1991; Martínez et al., 2009). Aaker (1991) defined the idea as “a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm’s customers” (p. 15).

For tourism, building strong brands and brand extensions by using sports events or new tourism products/services could be used strategically to influence the core parent brand equity of a destination. In regard to destination branding, the process of applying or creating a brand extension is extremely important because it could influence the image and the fulfilment of brand promises. Favourable brand associations with the overall parent brand could improve brand perception and brand equity, thus enabling tourism destinations to increase the number of visitors and total tourism revenue (Kozak & Mazurek, 2011).

Although destination brand extensions may present a promising strategy, using sports events as destination brand extensions does bear a unique risk, particularly if the event develops

a significant brand of its own. Chalip and Costa (2005) provided examples showing how popular events can obtain substantial media coverage and a consequently salient position in consumers' imaginations—so much so that the destination's brand could be overwhelmed by the event brand. For example, the name “Wimbledon” is better known internationally for the tennis event than for the event's host city. To avoid future consequences, the researchers argued that, as events grow, DMOs need to build the event into their marketing strategies, taking a tactical and proactive approach, and look to manage the events as brand extensions when planning the greater destination's marketing campaigns. If used strategically, brand extension concepts will tend to strengthen brand equity, brand value, reputation of destination, and the core brand if visitors are able to create strong attachments to the brand, thus serving as an ideal framework to investigate destination branding through the use of sports events.

Research Site: Phoenix Metropolitan Area

This study used the Phoenix Metropolitan Area, AZ (PMA) as the chosen research site to investigate the process of destination branding by framing sports events as destination brand extensions. The focus of the study was to understand how destination marketers and DMOs in the PMA view sports events as leverageable assets to serve as destination brand extensions. With respect to sports events in the PMA, the games hosted by major professional sports teams were also considered as sports events. Within the PMA, events include, but are not limited to the Waste Management Phoenix Open, Arizona Cactus League, National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) Championship Weekend, College Football's Cheez-It Bowl, and Fiesta Bowl, and games played by each of Arizona's four major professional sports league teams—(Arizona Cardinals, Phoenix Suns, Arizona Diamondbacks, and Arizona Coyotes).

Although the PMA is regarded as a popular tourism destination for a number of reasons, collectively the area's core metro cities—Phoenix, Mesa; Scottsdale, Tempe; Chandler, Glendale; Gilbert, Peoria—serve as an interesting research site to investigate sports events due to two particular destination qualities. First, the PMA maintains a substantial sports event portfolio, ranging from major professional, college, and amateur sports events. For example, all four major league sports teams—the National Hockey League (NHL), National Football League (NFL), National Basketball Association (NBA), and Major League Baseball (MLB)—in Arizona are based in the area (1 of only 13 cities in the United States to have all 4); the region is home to several stops on the Professional Golf Association (PGA) Tour—most notably the Waste Management Phoenix Open, also known as “The Greatest Show on Grass,” which regularly boasts the highest attendance on the PGA Tour, with over 500,000 attendees, and it is the site of the MLB Spring Training Cactus League, which draws nearly 1.8 million attendees to the area annually. Clearly, the PMA's sports event portfolio is a prominent potential contributor to its destination brand equity—the set of brand assets believed to represent the entirety of a brand's value (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998).

Second, tourism is one of two major industries in the PMA. The area hosted nearly 44 million visitors in 2017, including more than 1.8 million international visitors. In addition, with over one million Canadian snowbirds (a northerner who moves to a warmer southern state in the winter) locating to the PMA, Canadians spent an additional \$1.4 billion during an average 4-month stay, bringing the 2017 total tourism spending in the Greater Phoenix Area to \$14 billion dollars (Tourism Economics, 2017). According to Snowbirdadvisor.ca/Arizona, the Phoenix Metro Valley area is where most snowbirds make their winter homes, choosing golf communities, condo developments, mobile home communities and RV parks.

Not surprisingly, golf is a major draw, as there are hundreds of golf courses in Arizona. Other winter pastimes include tennis, bird watching, hiking, festivals, events/sport events, and outdoor dining and shopping. Finally, as mentioned above, the area is home to many Major League Baseball spring training teams and attending Cactus League games is a major winter pastime for snowbirds who relocate to the PMA. King (2002) suggested that travel is increasingly about experiences, fulfillment, and rejuvenation rather than about “places and things” (p. 106). Thus, this allows the researcher to investigate how sports events are being used to influence tourism decisions and bring tourists to the area.

Method

To better explore destination branding using sports events as destination brand extensions in the PMA, a qualitative case study approach was employed, with interviews acting as the primary source of data. A qualitative approach was considered suitable because the aim of this study was to understand the perspectives of local tourism and sports stakeholders, vis-à-vis sports events as brand extensions. In a broad sense, qualitative data seek to explain “how” and “why” a particular phenomenon, or behaviour, operates as it does in a particular context (Yin, 1989) and is most often captured in textual format (Huberman & Miles, 1998). Furthermore, qualitative research involves using an interpretive, naturalistic approach toward the subject matter, which entails “studying things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2). Therefore, interviews were determined to be the best source of data for this study, aiming to gain a practical understanding of how stakeholders in the PMA view sports events as destination brand extensions.

Interviews were used to understand the experiences of tourism stakeholders in the PMA

and gain deeper inquiry of the general meanings they make of such experiences. Conducting interviews provided the researcher with greater insight into stakeholder involvement, leadership, and expertise in the PMA—using sports events as a form of destination branding—thereby supplying the researcher with a “subjective understanding” of the activities that are associated in the research site. Furthermore, interviews were used to detail information relating to the specific research questions being explored (i.e., are sports events seen as brand extensions in the PMA, and, if so, how are they being used strategically? Using a semistructured approach, the researcher navigated the interviews by using a set of predetermined questions and also provided a sufficient amount of flexibility and opportunity for the interviewees to shape the flow of information based on their subjective understanding of the matter. This was especially important because it allowed participants the freedom to express their views in their own terms and helped better understand the participants’ personal opinions, behaviour, and experiences based on the phenomenon being explored.

Using the Phoenix Metropolitan Area as an intrinsic case study, this study was used to provide insight into the specific research theory being studied—sports events as destination brand extensions (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Stake (1995) used the term intrinsic and suggested that researchers who have a genuine interest in the case should use this approach when the intent is to better understand a specific case study. In relation to the current study, the PMA facilitated a supportive role, whereas the researcher’s primary objective was to understand how sports events are being used as destination brand extensions in relation to the area’s destination brand. Intrinsic case studies are often undertaken because, in all its particularity and ordinariness, the case itself is of genuine interest (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Moreover, intrinsic case studies are selected because of their uniqueness (Stake, 2003) to provide in-depth exploration of a phenomenon. This

case study is classified as intrinsic because the emphasis of the study is placed on the exploration of the PMA, the area context related to sports events, and the experiences of the tourism stakeholders involved within the research area.

Data Collection

Primary data for this study were collected from two interview transcript sources. A total of 16 interviews ($n = 18$ participants) were conducted for this study. The first set of interview transcripts were used from a larger research study that investigated the fit between isolated sports infrastructure development projects, specifically NHL arenas, and broader urban development initiatives—in this case, Gila River Arena, AZ, and Westgate Entertainment District. A total of six interviews were conducted, which consisted of a broad range of semistructured questions. These transcripts served as initial groundwork material for this study and provided context when formulating interview questions for the second round of interviews. The remaining 10 interviews were purposive and with elites, and a snowball sampling technique was used after the initial first interviews. As shown in Table 1, the interviewees include key personnel from local tourism organizations, such as the Tempe Office of Tourism, Experience Scottsdale, and the Office for Visit Phoenix. In addition, interviews were also undertaken with local city employees, members of the local media, academics, and other local tourism interest groups.

Table 1: *List of Participants Interviewed in Study*

Name	Position Title	Industry	Area	Organization
Kelly Triplet	Director of Marketing	DMO	Scottsdale, AZ	Experience Scottsdale
Stephanie Presser	Director of Community & Government Affairs	DMO	Scottsdale, AZ	Experience Scottsdale
Erica Pumphrey	Sales Manager	DMO	Scottsdale, AZ	Experience Scottsdale
James Tevault	Director of Sales	DMO	Tempe, AZ	Tempe Office of Tourism
Toni Smith	Director of Communications	DMO	Tempe, AZ	Tempe Office of Tourism
Eric Kerr	Director of Research & Business Analysis	DMO	Phoenix, AZ	Visit Phoenix
Ronnie Collins	Director of Sales	DMO	Phoenix, AZ	Visit Phoenix
Christine Vogt	Professor	Academia	Phoenix, AZ	Arizona State University

Eric Legg	Assistant Professor	Academia	Phoenix, AZ	Arizona State University
David Swindell	Associate Professor	Academia	Phoenix, AZ	Arizona State University
Jerry Harper	Deputy Director	City	Phoenix, AZ	Phoenix Convention Center
Jeremy Legg	Special Projects Manager	City	Phoenix, AZ	City of Phoenix
Roxann Favors	Special Projects Administrator	City	Phoenix, AZ	City of Phoenix
Rebecca Mobley	Director of Marketing & Public Relations	Entertainment	Glendale, AZ	State Farm Stadium
Bridget Binsbacher	Executive Director	Entertainment	Phoenix Metro	Arizona Cactus League
Brandon Brown	Journalist, Tourism/Hospitality	Media	Phoenix, AZ	<i>Phoenix Business Journal</i>
Kent Somers	Journalist/Columnist, Sports	Media	Phoenix, AZ	<i>The Arizona Republic</i>
John Schmider	Chief Executive Officer	Consulting	Phoenix, AZ	The Huddle Up Group

All interviews lasted between 1 to 2 hr in length. Six interviews were conducted in-person during an on-site visit to the PMA, with the remaining 10 interviews being done over the telephone. It was anticipated that at least 10 interviews would be conducted in this second phase, with saturation determining the final number sought. Saturation was met when it was reasonably assured that further data collection would yield similar results based on the emerging themes and conclusions being discovered (Faulker, 2017). In addition, archival data and media reports were also collected (economic reports, visitation profiles, tourism trends, etc.) remotely online from various DMO and tourism websites, such as Visit Phoenix, and the Arizona Sport and Tourism Authority, and served as secondary data when conducting data analysis. Table 2 provides a list of all the secondary sources used for this study. Visit Phoenix was a salient source for secondary data collection because it is the area's principal organization that promotes the Greater Phoenix community to the global audience. These secondary sources later served to triangulate data using multiple methods and data sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena (Heale & Forbes, 2013).

Table 2. *Secondary Data Sources*

Organization Name	Industry	Source Website
Snowbird Advisor	Travel Advisor	www.snowbirdadvisor.ca/snowbirds-guide-arizona
Visit Phoenix	Tourism	www.visitphoenix.com/
Experience Scottsdale	Tourism	www.experiencescottsdale.com/
Tempe Office of Tourism	Tourism	www.tempetourism.com/
Arizona Sport and Tourism Authority	Tourism & Sport	www.az-sta.com/
Arizona Office of Tourism	Tourism	www.tourism.az.gov/
<i>Phoenix Business Journal</i>	Newspaper/Media	www.bizjournals.com/phoenix/
<i>The Arizona Republic</i>	Newspaper/Media	www.azcentral.com/
Arizona Golf Association	Sport	www.azgolf.org/
Arizona Cactus League	Sport	https://cactusleague.com/
Arizona State Parks & Trails	Government	https://azstateparks.com/
The City of Phoenix	Government	https://www.phoenix.gov/

Data Analysis and Coding

Data analysis for this study was approached from an interpretative perspective (Guba & Lincoln, 2004), using a modified thematic analysis (TA) of both semantic and latent content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This analysis was considered “modified” because, in qualitative analysis, TA typically focuses exclusively on one level of content: *semantic* or *latent* (Braun & Clarke, 2006). From the perspective of an interpretive paradigm—utilizing meaning (versus measurement) to understand a phenomenon as it is seen from the subjective experiences of individuals (Reeves & Heberg, 2003)—the process of analysis would be incomplete if data were exclusively analyzed using one level of content. Therefore, this study aimed to analyze both levels of content to establish rigor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) while at the same time enabling the researcher to identify underlying meanings and ideas that could be later linked to the branding concepts used in the study. The flexibility of TA means it is suitable for analyzing a wide range of data, such as “traditional” face-to-face data collection methods such as interviews (e.g., Niland et al., 2014); thus TA was an ideal method of data analysis for this study.

The first round of coding involved coding the interview transcripts using *descriptive coding*. This process involved a detailed line-by-line reading of each interview transcript, focusing on the semantic content. Descriptive codes were created to help summarize data into a

single word or short phrase categories (Miles et al., 2014). Prior research examining sports and destination branding (Brown et al., 2007; Chalip & Costa, 2005; Getz, 2008), and how sports events are able to influence a destination brand (Jago et al., 2003), aided in developing specific descriptive codes. Descriptive codes included categories such as tourism development, quality of life, destination branding, destination marketing, brand awareness, jobs, local entertainment, and so on. Descriptive coding was primarily done to categorize and index data content, which was essential groundwork for the second cycle of coding.

The goal of the second cycle of coding was to develop a sense of categorical and thematic organization stemming from the first array of descriptive codes. Descriptive codes were populated into a data matrix (thematic map) to create a visual tool to help identify data patterns and initiate the second cycle of *pattern coding*. Furthermore, using a data matrix, data summarisation and synthesis reduced the volume of data while still maintaining a direct link to the primary data captured in the interview transcripts, such as the data context, language, and meanings. Here, specific attention was spent on the latent content of the data set to create pattern codes (Miles et al., 2014) by clustering together material from the first-level coding process to identify initial themes relative to sports events as destination brand extensions. Once all the pattern codes were analyzed, themes were then used as explanatory and inferential codes to create more meaningful analysis in the third cycle of coding.

The third and final phases of coding involved *theming the data* (Morse, 1994). This stage of the analysis involved examining the relationships among the pattern codes and looked to tie together different pieces of data into recognizable groups and concepts. Pattern codes that showed characteristics of similarity, sequence, causation, or correspondence were identified as potential themes. “Theming the data” was undertaken to develop a more integrated

understanding of events, processes, and interactions and how such themes related to destination brand extensions in the case study. Patterns from the second cycle of coding were clustered in respective subgroups (subcodes) that potentially captured a number of other codes within their boundaries to determine the relationship between themes and between different levels of themes (e.g., main overarching themes and subthemes within them). Once the data were coded, the themes were later “defined and refined” to identify the “essence” of what each theme was about, allowing the researcher to determine what aspects of data each theme captured (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92).

Results

The initial goal for this study was to explore the following research questions: (a) how do tourism stakeholders view sports events as brand extensions of the PMA? and (b) how is the PMA strategically using sports events as a destination brand extension? Although the majority of the semistructured questions asked to interviewees were tailored to examine sports events in the PMA, once the interviews began, an interesting dynamic emerged. The interviewees were reluctant to exclusively focus on sports events as the focal point of discussion when speaking on destination branding in the PMA. Responses tended to highlight a more holistic view of the PMA’s destination brand and how all the other brands in the PMA complemented the area’s greater destination brand. A preliminary review of secondary sources such as local DMO websites and local digital tourism marketing materials did not reveal any explicit advertisements or narratives that highlighted or signaled a cohesive “destination parent brand” for the PMA. However, despite the lack of a formal, designated parent brand, analysis of the data for this study revealed that industry stakeholders had reached some consensus for what they determined the parent brand for the PMA. In interviews, “The Valley,” “Phoenix Metro,” and the “Phoenix

Metropolitan Area” (PMA) were used interchangeably as the primary destination identity titles used to describe the Phoenix region, and these will be used as such when referring to the research site in the results below. However, as will be discussed below, it became clear that the PMA’s overall destination brand related to the *outdoors*, and the value of the brand extensions to be described below were articulated in terms of how they related to this outdoor brand.

The Parent Destination Brand

An immediate theme that emerged was the framing of the PMA’s parent brand as being an “outdoor” destination. Consistently, interviewees used terms such as “outdoor paradise” (Eric Legg, ASU Associate Professor), “outdoor lifestyle” (Toni Smith, Director of Communications, Tempe Office of Tourism), and “outdoor activities” (Kelly Triplet, Director of Marketing, Experience Scottsdale) when being asked to describe the essence of the PMA as a tourism destination. Furthermore, this “outdoor” parent brand consistently showed evidence as being a contributing factor when any new branding theme was being discussed. For example, when discussing all the different events held throughout the calendar year in the Valley, Toni Smith, Director of Communication for the Tempe Office of Tourism, explained the significance of the Valley’s “outdoors” stating, “anything that we can celebrate, and we can be outside, that’s what we like to do, and I think the visitors come here for that kind of outdoor lifestyle experience.” Thus, “outdoor” emerged as the area’s overarching parent brand, which, as a result, helped link and distinguish the Valley’s destination brand extensions.

The Valley’s Brand Extensions

Four individual brand extensions were identified when participants were asked to explain what the Valley is known for when being considered as a prospective travel destination: (a) weather; (b) resorts; (c) recreation and leisure activities; and (d) sport/sports events were the

main four brand extensions recovered from the interviews. Individually, each of the brand extensions presented their own marketing and branding opportunities to strategically enhance the PMA as a tourism destination. Each brand extension is described below.

Weather

One of the most notable characteristics of the Valley is the area's climate. Statistically, the PMA is one of the sunniest major metropolitan areas in the United States, receiving 295 days of sunshine, compared to the national average of 205 (Visit Phoenix, 2020). When discussing all the different individual brands in the PMA, the Director of Marketing for Experience Scottsdale agreed that one of the biggest features that the Phoenix Metro Area shares is the destination's consistent weather, saying "You know, obviously, and this is not a differentiation between our neighbouring cities but year round sunny weather, I think that what makes this region unique." When linking the area's "outdoor" brand, Ronnie Collins, Director of Sales for Visit Phoenix, highlighted "weather" as clearly being a destination brand extension, saying,

It's the weather, which leads to outdoor activities and being outside. I mean how many cities can you, during the winter if there's snow in Flagstaff, you can be sitting by your pool drinking a margarita in the morning, skiing on the slope in Flagstaff in the afternoon, be at the Grand Canyon the next morning, [and] be back down here. Like there are not many places in the country that you can have that dynamic.

Furthermore, each interviewee suggested in one way or another that "weather" was one of the biggest reason's tourists traveled to the area:

I would say the biggest . . . The biggest factor for all tourists that come to the Phoenix areas and the Valley is the weather. So I think the weather is the main reason that many

people come here, and that there's other reasons to do things here. (Brandon Brown, *Phoenix Business Journal*)

This sentiment was echoed by a number of other tourism stakeholders who noted that during the cooler months of the calendar year in other cities across North America (December–February), the Valley is typically in the middle of their “peak” tourism season—largely due to the area’s favourable weather. As a result, “weather” as a destination brand extension has made the PMA a sought-after travel destination for travelers looking to escape colder climate cities. Jerry Harper, Deputy Director for the Phoenix Convention Center, underlined his thoughts on how “weather” accents the Valley’s “outdoor” destination brand, saying,

Another thing that you might notice clustered around that time period is also the weather. October, November here is different from the majority of other places. So the idea that tourists can leave Chicago, come out here in November or February, be outdoors, enjoy dinner outdoors . . . is a huge selling point for visitors who travel here.

In regard to strategically promoting the Valley’s consistent attractive year-round weather to generate tourism and greater travel opportunities, tourism stakeholders in the area acknowledged that the area’s “weather” provided the PMA with a huge competitive advantage when competing against other destinations throughout North America, who tend to promote similar events and tourism opportunities. For example, when speaking on how the Valley markets itself as a destination when bidding to host a major convention, Jerry Harper explained that, “weather” and being “outdoors” was without a doubt the biggest selling point that set the PMA apart from other competing cities, stating “Indianapolis is another big convention city, so I think that if people say they can’t compete with Phoenix, it’s probably a lot of it I think would be weather based.”

When seeking to attract new events, and working actively to maintain existing events, “weather” was also associated as a brand extension of the PMA’s “outdoor” brand. Jeremy Legg, Special Projects Manager for the City of Phoenix, commented,

So, during the peak season, it seems like every weekend there’s some major event going on, whether it’s a festival, music festival, arts festival, or something like that because the weather is so nice . . . so that’s an additional experience for visitors to be outdoors.

Resorts Destination

As most of the participants interviewed described the Valley as being a “weather”-based destination, another destination brand extension emerged, revealing that the PMA is highly regarded as a popular “resort” destination. Priding itself as being a destination that provides among the best resorts in the United States, the PMA has more than 68,000 guest rooms in over 495 hotels, and more than 40 full-service hotel and resort properties (Visit Phoenix, 2020). With Scottsdale, AZ, being the anchor metro city in the Valley that offers “the resort” experience, Kelly Triplet, Director of Marketing for Experience Scottsdale, confirmed the area’s “resort” brand by saying, “we are very much a resort destination. That’s one of our main products . . . we have 70 hotels and resorts from the area, and we’re definitely known for a lot of our luxury resorts.” Kelly Triplet established a link with the PMA’s “outdoor” brand, when she explained how resorts in the PMA are seasonal products that are mainly influenced by the area’s weather and ability to be outdoors:

I think definitely we are a seasonal destination, so what we call our shoulder season starts ramping up in October. And then our really prime season is in those winter months when we’re warmer than so many of our cold weather markets, and our guests can be swimming in pools, golfing, hiking, etcetera.

Roxann Favors, Special Projects Administrator for the City of Phoenix, provided similar insight, commenting that “the Valley is known for our beautiful outdoor resorts” when being asked about what destination features make the PMA a unique travel destination compared to other destinations. Jeremy Legg, Special Projects Manager for the City of Phoenix, shared his point of view when discussing the area’s destination brand, stating, “when you think of Phoenix (PMA), it’s like there are going to be high-end resorts, which have fantastic restaurants and golf courses and nightlife, and I’d say that’s definitely true here.”

When reviewing “resorts” in the context of tourism, stakeholders acknowledged that the “resort experience” (Brandon Brown, *Phoenix Business Journal*) is typically the favoured choice of hospitality when visiting and experiencing the Valley as a destination. Local resident Christine Vogt, and Tourism Professor at Arizona State University, acknowledged that “resorts” are a huge part of what makes up the Valley’s brand, saying, “I’d say it’s resorts, it’s the world-class resorts that really give people the experience of the Metro Area.”

When making the connection between the PMA’s “outdoor” parent brand and “resorts” as a brand extension, the interviewees commented that, of the majority of amenities offered, the most popular of these “world-class” resorts tend to be “outdoor”-based activities. Kent Somers, columnist for *the Arizona Republic*, and local resident of the PMA for over 35 years, commented stating, “if you don’t want to, you don’t have to leave the resort. Most resorts have beautiful swimming pools, golf courses and outdoor fine-dining experiences, so there’s plenty to do outdoors at most of the resorts.”

Recreational and Leisure Activities

Phoenix is home to the largest municipal park in North America. South Mountain Park and Preserve covers more than 16,000 acres and has more than 50 miles of hiking, biking, and

equestrian trails (Visit Phoenix, 2020). In addition, anchored in the heart of the Valley, Camelback Mountain—with an elevation of 2,704 feet—is the area’s most popular daytime hike destination for visitors, located right in the middle of the Phoenix Valley. When tourism stakeholders were asked to describe what type of destination qualities the Valley favours when creating any type of travel or tourism marketing campaign, consistent themes of recreation and leisure activities were mentioned. Eric Legg, Assistant Professor at Arizona State University spotlighted the Valley’s recreational brand, saying, “Our outdoor scene is actually rather impressive. The hiking here is great. Mountain biking is great. The cultural scene, both museums and native ruins, are great. As a resident, I benefit from them, but, as a tourist, there’s so much to do here.” Christine Vogt, Tourism Professor at Arizona State University, also agreed that the Valley provides many different outdoor recreational opportunities, which, in turn, have shown evidence of being one of the preferred ways tourists spend their time when visiting the Valley. As she explained,

I would say outdoor recreation is big here, whether it’s hiking, OHVing [Jeeping], whatever it is. We’ve got some, actually some amazing canyon lakes as well for boating . . . so I think in good times, I’ve seen more attention to outdoor recreation. . . . Phoenix has done research, and they know that outdoor recreation is one of the top things that visitors do.

When discussing what recreation and leisure opportunities are most popular in the PMA, interviewees emphasized that anything visitors can do outdoors is usually popular. Kelly Triplet, Director of Marketing for Experience Scottsdale, explained what her organization typically sells as daytime activities to tourists who are looking to visit Scottsdale:

There's a lot of outdoor adventure throughout the Phoenix Metro Area. In Scottsdale alone, there's more than 30,000 acres of preserved land that's been set aside for natural open space, with more than 200 miles of trails that are mixed use, so hiking, biking, horseback riding, things like that.

Finally, adding to the Valley's recreation portfolio, Phoenix and its neighbouring communities are home to nearly 200 golf courses, with Greater Phoenix being known as a golf destination. In 2016, the Arizona Golf Association reported that about eight million rounds of golf are played in Arizona annually, most of which played in the Greater Phoenix area (Arizona Golf Association, 2016). As such, when discussing the Valley's overall brand, recreation and leisure activities served as a brand extension of the area's overarching "outdoor" parent brand due to the fact that the majority of the recreation and leisure activities enjoyed by visitors were typically spent outdoors.

Sports and Sports Events

As reviewed earlier, the PMA has developed an extensive and diversified sports event portfolio, hosting a broad range of different sports teams and events in the area. Director of Sales for Visit Phoenix Ronnie Collins formally addressed that sports in the PMA are seen as being a large part of the area's overall destination brand:

So there truly is something for everyone. I focus more on looking at the market holistically and everything it has to offer, and sport is one of the few markets in the country that you can check every single one of those boxes . . . I mean whatever sport you're looking for, we're going to have it.

When interviewees were asked to summarize the Valley’s sports events portfolio, a similar pattern emerged. Eric Kerr, Director of Research and Business Analysis for Visit Phoenix provided an overview of the PMA’s annual major sports event offerings:

You start the year with the Fiesta Bowl, then you go to the Waste Management Phoenix Open, and then you move into Spring Training . . . then baseball season starts, football season, hockey season etc. I mean it’s just, there’s something going on almost every night.

Brandon Brown, Tourism Journalist for the *Phoenix Business Journal* also acknowledged the Valley’s rich sports event brand, saying,

Yeah, I would say Phoenix, on a regular basis, holds a number of really successful events. The Valley does a lot of successful events, whether it’s the Phoenix Open, the golf tournament, or the Fiesta Bowl; they do those every single year. And also spring training, which is huge here.

Table 3 below provides a list of all the major sports events scheduled in the PMA for the 2020 calendar year. It is clear to see that the events are diverse and that the majority of events are predominantly “outdoor” spectator events.

Table 3. 2020 Phoenix Signature Sports Events

Event Name	Sport	Date	Location	Past Average Attendance
NASCAR Championship Weekend	Auto Racing	November 6–8, 2020	Avondale, AZ	42,000–50,000
PGA Charles Schwab Cup Championship	Golf	November 8–11, 2020	Phoenix, AZ	N/A
College Football’s PlayStation Fiesta Bowl	Football	December 28th, 2020	Glendale, AZ	70,000
Waste Management Phoenix Open	Golf	Jan 31–Feb 3, 2020	Scottsdale, AZ	600,000
Cactus League Spring Training	Baseball	February 22–March 22, 2020	Phoenix Metro, AZ	1.8 million
NASCAR Ticket Guardian 500 Weekend	Auto Racing	March 6–8, 2020	Avondale, AZ	N/A

Adding to the PMA's list of "outdoor" spectator sports events, the Valley also hosts a number of other PGA and LPGA golf events, NASCAR, and NHRA racing, and many major marathons, such as the Phoenix Marathon—a qualifier for the Boston Marathon—The Rock 'n' Roll Marathon Series, and IRONMAN Arizona—the site of personal records for IRONMAN triathletes all over the world. Hence, these "outdoor" spectator and participatory sports events draw a direct link to the broader destination brand in the PMA.

Jeremy Legg, Special Projects Manager for the City of Phoenix, noted that, from an outsider's perspective, sports events in the PMA may even be perceived as the area's primary destination brand, saying, "Yeah, I mean, it certainly leans that way because of our ability to host the mega events, like the Super Bowls, and the Final Fours, and Spring Training here every year. So certainly it definitely leans that way." Although sports events in the PMA were generally viewed as an asset when discussing the PMA's destination brand, interviewees regularly stressed that although sports and sports events are indeed an important element of the PMA's brand, they should be promoted carefully and with caution, making sure not to dilute the Valley's overall parent brand and to not overshadow any of the other brand extensions that make up the greater destination. Jeremy Legg continued to explain how local tourism stakeholders are looking to brand and market the PMA as a destination, saying,

Something that I think our CVB has been really focused on in their marketing is that, "Yes, we have those things. You've probably heard of Spring Training, and you probably know that Phoenix has successfully hosted multiple Super Bowls . . . you probably know all those things already, but did you also know we have these music festivals, these art walks, these other cultural amenities, these big city things, both from a tourism

standpoint?” I think it’s showcasing the diversity of the PMA that is something that is important in terms of marketing ourselves. But is sports an integral part of that, and is sport-related events an integral part of that? Definitely.

Stephanie Presser, Director of Community & Government Affairs for Experience Scottsdale, provided a similar view of how the Valley should be regarded as a destination. She shared an example of how her organization strategically leverages major sports events in the PMA with other destination brand extensions, stating,

When the Phoenix Open plays on television, and it cuts to B-rolls that we provided to the Golf Channel, that shows just the beauty of the desert or our resorts or our nightlife. . . .

The people watching the Phoenix Open on their television, they might decide to come visit Scottsdale for next year’s Open or visit Scottsdale for another reason entirely.

Thus, although sports events were seen as being valuable attributes that contribute to the PMA’s destination brand, sports events in the Valley were considered only one of many tourism products that make up the area’s “outdoor” destination brand. When sports events in the Valley were discussed in terms of how they serve as brand extensions in relation to the PMA’s greater brand, sports events were deemed able to integrate all the other brand extensions that exist under the PMA’s “outdoor” brand umbrella. One prominent example was the Arizona Cactus League—arguably the PMA’s most popular sports event(s)—and how it has been successful in uniting other “outdoor” brand extensions to provide a more consolidated outdoor experience when visiting the Valley. Bridget Binsbacher, Executive Director for the Arizona Cactus League, noted,

We have a relationship with the Arizona Office of Tourism and Arizona State Parks, so now we are going to be funnelling inquiries for travel. So now we’re distributing

thousands of tourism packets that will be distributed every year. So working in partnership with State Parks and some of the other key industry folks, we've come up with this interactive map that highlights the State Parks of Arizona, and the overlays. So you have this spring training map with the spring training facilities, but we also advertise and provide access to all the state parks.

This strategy was also clearly highlighted when evaluating how past and future major sports events hosted in the PMA are being employed to advertise the Valley as a tourism destination. The PMA is preparing to host the Super Bowl for the fourth time, after being named host city again in 2023, and it will also host the Final Four NCAA men's college basketball tournament again in 2024. When being interviewed for a news story about tourism in the PMA by *the Arizona Republic*, Debbie Johnson, the Director of the Arizona Office of Tourism, explained how hosting major sports events and other annual sports events in the Valley offer a unique marketing opportunity to help advertise the PMA's broader destination brand, saying, "those sort of sporting events (Super Bowl and Final Four), along with Cactus League baseball, the Waste Management Phoenix Open golf tournament, and NASCAR racing give people a great look at Arizona and what it offers as a destination" (Wiles, 2018, para. 7). Kent Somers from the *Arizona Republic* shared a similar point of view, agreeing that, by hosting sports events in the Valley, the events serve as a successful channel to help bring to light all the other amenities the Valley has to offer:

I think the Fiesta Bowl had a lot to do with generating that mind-set in the Phoenix Metropolitan Area that we can put together a sporting event that will draw people from all over the country and . . . then cater to those people, making sure they have a good time and lots [of other things] to do while they are visiting.

Erika Pumphrey, Sales Manager for Experience Scottsdale, shared a similar sentiment, recalling that anytime the Fiesta Bowl is held in the PMA, the event is usually leveraged to spotlight all the different amenities and brand extensions the PMA is looking to promote:

I think dating back to, like I said, the Fiesta Bowl games . . . When they'd show what the teams did during the week at restaurants . . . When they would show golf courses, there's the cliché ubiquitous shot of the desert looking beautiful and a swarrow [cactus] right there. And show "Hey, everybody, it's December 28, and it's 76 degrees in Phoenix." How could that not be attractive to see that on your television and think, "Yeah, that'd be a good place to go for a week? And it looks like there's a lot to do."

One final note regarding sports and sports events as brand extensions in the PMA relates to the role of major professional sports teams, which may figure prominently in the images of other cities. As mentioned earlier, the PMA is one of only 13 U.S. cities to have representatives of all four major professional sports leagues. When analyzing major professional sports teams and their ability to host year-round events (games), and how such events serve as a desirable experiences for tourists, major professional sports team events did not fit as congruently as other types of events when serving as destination brand extensions, relative to the Valley's "outdoor" parent brand. Each of the four major professional sports teams in the Valley—NFL's Arizona Cardinals, NBA's Phoenix Suns, MLB's Arizona Diamondbacks, and NHL's Arizona Coyotes—are teams that host their events in enclosed buildings and are largely disconnected from providing an "outdoor" experience for fans. Brandon Brown, Tourism Journalist for the *Phoenix Business Journal*, spoke to this, saying,

Phoenix necessarily isn't in that whole . . . We have the four major sports teams, as well as the WNBA team. And we have . . . We have a minor league soccer team, indoor

football team. So we have a lot of sports here, but the [other kinds of] events, the sporting events are what get the most love from everyone in the Valley, as well as from visitors People will associate “sport events” with Valley sports more than the Diamondbacks, or the Suns, or the Coyotes.

Rebecca Mobley, Director of Marketing for State Farm Stadium, echoed this sentiment, highlighting that, although major professional teams regularly host events during the year, the events that are most sought after are the ones that tend to be hosted outdoors:

So I don’t want to completely disassociate Phoenix with the Cardinals or the other sport teams, but Phoenix as a whole isn’t, doesn’t need the Cardinals to have a brand. You have so many opportunities to do other things . . . especially during the football season, festival, and event season pick up ‘cause it’s so nice outside. You can do a beer festival, a music festival, any outdoor sport event . . . Like you can do all of these things and be outside, and you don’t necessarily have to go inside and watch a sporting event if you don’t want to.

According to Aaker and Keller (1990), a perception of fit between the original parent brand and extension product categories leads to a more favourable extension evaluation. Thus, although major professional sports have a presence in the PMA, they are not valued in the same regard as popular “outdoor” spectator events such as the Waste Management Open or the Arizona Cactus League or any of the other brand extensions identified by interviewees.

As the results above show, although sports events hosted in the PMA are viewed as important extensions of the Valley’s destination brand, individually, sports events hosted in the area are only one of multiple brand extensions that are encompassed under the Valley’s “outdoor” overarching parent brand. Furthermore, when sports events are viewed from the

perspective of destination brand extensions, this destination branding approach allows for marketers and tourism stakeholders in the Valley to advance a more comprehensive overall destination brand by leveraging the individual sports event brand extensions to draw attention to the other destination brand extensions in the PMA. Finally, it was revealed that although sports events do in fact have a significant presence in the PMA and influence the area's greater destination brand, sports events that have a direct correlation with the PMA's greater "outdoor" brand are seen as more suitable as destination brand extensions compared to those sports events that show little to no link to the area's "outdoor" destination brand.

Discussion

Carter and Curry (2013) and Völckner and Sattler (2007) argued that brand extensions stemming from a parent brand must demonstrate, by attribute or by association overlap, some type of "perceived fit." As shown in this study, each of the destination brand extensions that were identified by interviewees—weather, resorts, recreation, and leisure activities, and sports and sports events—showed some type of link to the Valley's "outdoor" brand. When evaluating sports events in this context, the fundamental advantage of treating sports events in the PMA as destination brand extensions is that they only need to be closely tied to the host destination's parent brand—in this case being "outdoor." Therefore, the connection between the sports events and the destination's parent brand is essential to the area's overall branding relationship. When sports events are linked through this "outdoor" brand association and are favourably received by tourists, the destination's overall destination brand should benefit due to consistency with the destination's brand extension. In turn, this provides marketers and tourism stakeholders the opportunity to promote a more integrated destination brand by linking all the area's destination brand extensions that are congruent with the destination's "outdoor" parent brand.

Sports Events Part of Greater Destination Brand Range

As most interviewees agreed, the Valley's core tourism product (parent brand) is the "outdoor" lifestyle the area provides. As shown above, weather, resorts, recreation and leisure activities, and sports events were identified as being brand extensions associated with the Valley's overarching "outdoor" parent brand. Whereas "outdoor" can be perceived as a broad destination brand characteristic, this overarching parent brand has direct links to each of the brand extensions identified in this study. According to Chalip and Costa (2005), who evaluated sports events as destination brand extensions, "for destination brand extensions, the important aspect is that the event is explicitly part of the destination's brand range" (p. 227).

Considering this logic, and when viewing sports events hosted in the PMA as destination brand extensions, sports events that showed a greater compatibility with the PMA's outdoor image were deemed more critical than other sports events lacking such a link. Therefore, although sports events in the PMA possess a brand of their own, the PMA's sports brand should not overshadow the Valley's greater destination brand, which is a more powerful and influential destination brand compared to the PMA's individual sports event brand composed of prominent events.

Sports Events Brand Extensions and Other Destination Brand Extensions

Previous research has shown that communities view sports events as an important branding tool that contributes to the future success of the destination by creating awareness, improving destination image, and attracting tourism development to generate future inbound travel (Dimanche, 2003; Ziakas & Costa, 2011). The results from the current study show how sports events can be framed as brand extensions of a parent brand and how some sports events hosted in the PMA can be used to help create greater tourism development and brand awareness

for other brand extensions coupled in the PMA's greater brand portfolio—weather, resorts, recreation and leisure activities, and sports and sports events. These findings parallel prior brand extension research that highlights how brand extensions are typically used as marketing strategies in which an organization markets a product or service by leveraging or taking advantage of a well-known parent brand, but in a different business category (Hem et al., 2012). In the current study, when considering “outdoor” as the destination brand (parent brand) used to leverage, develop, and launch other destination brand extensions, sports events showed evidence as being part of this marketing strategy. This was highlighted best by Bridget Binsbacher, Executive Director for the Arizona Cactus League, who spotlighted all the other “outdoor” brand extensions that she feels make the PMA a notable tourism destination. She said,

Spring training in the desert is not just about baseball. The PMA is surrounded by the scenic landscape of the Sonoran Desert. Greater Phoenix's neighbouring cities provide cultural and outdoor treasures, with Greater Phoenix being recognized worldwide for its broad range of outdoor recreational opportunities such as golf, boating, and hiking . . . and is the perfect place to enjoy more than 200 picturesque golf courses. You can go on guided tours, hot air balloon rides, horseback riding, rock climbing, and so much more while being here.

For this reason, although it was frequently stated by interviewees that, for many visitors who visit the PMA, a sports event such as the Arizona Cactus League might be their “marquee” reason to visit (Kent Somers, *Arizona Republic*), linking different brand extensions that are connected by association is a key to cross promotion with existing brand extensions and continuing to expand the PMA sports event portfolio and continuing to host a diverse range of outdoor sports events.

Using Sports Event Brand Extensions to Enrich the Destination Brand

The results provided in this study showed evidence that stakeholders in the PMA do in fact realize that the sports events in the Valley are valuable destination brand assets, but they also understand that the events hosted in the PMA are only one of multiple brand extensions— weather, resorts, recreation and leisure activities, and sports and sports events— that, when grouped together, define the Valley as a popular “outdoor” tourism destination. Many tourism stakeholders and marketers interviewed for this study acknowledged that, although they are typically focused on specific facets of the industry that they are employed in, they would much rather choose to promote a more holistic destination brand. This is because this type of integrated branding approach provides greater opportunities for stakeholders in the Valley to collaborate, create partnerships, and share resources to deliver more cooperative marketing strategies. In doing so, this creates a more effective and efficient marketing dynamic to promote the area’s complex and multidimensional outdoor destination brand. As Park et al. (1991) argued, “brand extensions are perceived more favourably when there is consistency between concepts and features represented by other products sharing the same brand” (p. 185). Based on the findings of this study, if marketers and local DMOs take an open and collaborative approach toward viewing sports events as brand extensions of a greater destination brand and are able to adopt a consistency among all the other brand extensions that relate to the parent brand, this will lead to opportunities for greater destination brand exposure and brand awareness for the PMA as a whole.

Stakeholders interviewed also referenced that, with the PMA’s ability to host large events that capture the attention of a sizable audience (as attendees and/or through the media), sports events do provide an opportunity to promote the PMA’s “outdoor” brand and all the other

amenities the Valley has to offer. As a result, the opportunity to use sports events as a brand extension-marketing tool, which recognizes sports events as being one of several other PMA destination brand extensions, allows for tourism stakeholders and marketers in the PMA to promote the Valley as a destination that is not fixed to only one singular primary destination brand.

Conclusion

Based on data collected primarily through interviews and other local secondary sources, the results from this study revealed that sports events in the PMA do serve as a prominent asset and selling point that influences the PMA's overall destination brand. That being said, sports events in the PMA are not seen as the area's primary destination branding strategy, and local DMOs and tourism stakeholders in the PMA must create and maintain a broader and more comprehensive destination brand that showcases other notable attractions of the Valley. Jeremy Legg, Special Projects Manager for the City of Phoenix, discussed this type of integrated approach:

Yeah, I mean I think we're working towards that. And again I think part of our strength is our diversity. We're not just the one trick pony of, you know, sports, or events, or weather. There are all these other things that kind of round out your experience.

In acknowledging "diversity" as a destination strength, the PMA has developed a thorough multidimensional destination brand where individual brand extensions—such as sports events—should not and cannot be isolated when further developing the destination's overall brand. This perspective echoes the arguments made by Chalip and Costa (2006), who stated,

growth in the event's brand equity should be reflected by growth in the host destination's brand equity . . . if suitably incorporated into destination marketing, events can play a

role in building the destination's brand. If destination marketers fail to capitalize on the destination marketing opportunities that events provide, the destination's brand could be diluted or eclipsed.

This has important implications in that, although events such as the Waste Management Open, Fiesta Bowl, or the Arizona Cactus League draw visitors to the PMA by the masses and are broadcast to millions of viewers worldwide, local marketers and tourism officials in the PMA need to continue balancing both the growth of the sports events individually, and the destination's overall destination brand, by paying close attention to the building of a destination branding strategy that aims to integrate all of the PMA's additional brand extensions—weather, resorts, recreation, and leisure activities, and sports and sports events—to serve the broader parent brand.

This study showed that when sports events are considered in the context of destination branding, sports events can and should be leveraged when a destination possesses a destination brand that is diverse and multifaceted. Furthermore, by framing sports events in the PMA as destination brand extensions, this study provided insights into how marketers and local DMOs in the PMA (and potentially other markets) can utilize and leverage “outdoor”-related sports events as destination branding assets to elevate and enhance the destination's greater mix of tourism products and services, particularly the area's supplemental “outdoor” products and services.

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