LGBT EVENTS: Sense of belonging for LGBT travelers

The economic contribution of the LGBT market to tourism has been growing over the last two decades and is estimated to be worth over US$ 75 billion per year in the United States. LGBT events have become key motivators for travel for the LGBT community. They serve as venues for self-expression and celebration of identity. LGBT events also raise the image of the destination by making it appear forward thinking and trendy, which appeals to both LGBT and heterosexual travelers alike. Furthermore, LGBT events are thought to have a positive impact on the psychological wellbeing of LGBT attendees by affirming their sense of belonging i.e. their individual feelings of connection to surrounding people, places, and things.

**SENSE OF BELONGING**

Drawing from social identity theory, research by Hahm and Ro sought to investigate whether sense of belonging influences event satisfaction, and behavioral intention i.e., the likelihood of attending the event again in the future. In order to explore the construct of sense of belonging thoroughly, it was broken down into two levels: affective bond and collective self-esteem.

Affective bond is the emotional connection between an individual and a particular place, brand, or person/people. In this context, it refers to the connection with other attendees at an LGBT event. The idea that this emotional connection might influence satisfaction and behavioral intention is supported by previous work on brand loyalty and travel destinations.

Collective self-esteem refers to the individual’s self-evaluation of their place within the wider LGBT community. Given the history of persecution and marginalization of sexual minorities, involvement in a community provides many benefits including information, resources, and identity affirmation. Although limited, previous work has shown that collective self-esteem influences behavioral intention.

Research in this area is lacking, both specifically in terms of the LGBT community, but also generally in terms of what motivates event attendance from a psychological perspective. The research conducted at Rosen College aims to make contributions to both academic knowledge, as well as tourism and destination marketing. Psychological findings can be applied to help improve wellbeing, and from a tourism perspective it is useful to understand the motivations of LGBT individuals for travel and event attendance.

**DATA COLLECTION AND FINDINGS**

The researchers identified a large, week-long, annual LGBT event consisting of multiple functions including dances and parties, as a suitable place to sample participants from the target population. After heterosexual participants were eliminated, 261 LGBT attendees were recruited to complete a survey assessing the psychological constructs of affective bond and collective self-esteem, as well as their satisfaction with the event, and their intention to attend again in the future.
Pride festivals started as political demonstrations and have developed into celebratory events.

Dr. Hahm and Dr. Ro have examined how sense of belonging at LGBT events can encourage repeat attendance.

REFERENCES

Key paper

Other background sources


PERSONAL RESPONSE

Personal response

given the psychological element of the work, beyond the implications for tourism, do you think there could be any other practical applications of your findings for the LGBT community?

Individuals of this study shared a tight emotional bond with others in the wider LGBT community by attending the event. Basically, the event served as a powerful platform for attendees to connect with others on a more personal level. The LGBT community can highlight the personal and emotional bonding experience of LGBT events. Also, host destinations and venues (e.g., hotels) of LGBT events can consider sense of belonging in their branding/marketing strategy to attract LGBT travelers who are known to be extremely loyal towards LGBT-supporting organizations. Emotional connection with a destination and/or brand can create place attachment (sense of belonging) that may lead to loyalty.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

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RESEARCHERS

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