

Tourism Through Pop Culture: A Conceptual Model Rooted in Japanese Cultural Events

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Abstract: This paper examines the generalization of a conceptual model that positions emerging events featuring exotic popular content as catalysts for tourism development. Originally developed through an analysis of Japanese pop culture events, such as anime conventions, the model underscores the pivotal role of these cultural events in attracting international tourists and fostering cross-cultural engagement. The framework focuses on three core components: the relationship between tourism and events, the direct and indirect impacts on the host destination and the culture destination origin, and strategic communication and differentiation efforts that enhance a destination's global appeal. To broaden the applicability of this model to other emerging cultural phenomena, five essential criteria are identified: cultural distinction and exoticism, the multiplicity of content catering to diverse demographic segments, authenticity in representing cultural narratives, the cultivation of personal connections through cultural themes, and the active participation of audiences in generating secondary content, such as cosplay or fan-produced media. These criteria, validated through the analysis of Japanese pop culture events, are critically examined for their potential application to other global cultural trends, with particular emphasis on South Korean pop culture. Through an in-depth case study of South Korean pop culture, the paper illustrates the adaptability of the model to other global cultural movements. K-pop events, noted for their exceptional fan interaction, digital engagement, and innovative performances, meet many of the established criteria, particularly in terms of cultural distinction and audience immersion. However, certain limitations in the diversity of cultural offerings at these pop events suggest opportunities for further development to fully realize the model's potential across different cultural contexts. Finally, the paper discusses the strategic implications for tourism destinations, advocating that through robust digital strategies and the promotion of culturally distinctive events, destinations can effectively position themselves as prominent hubs for global tourism. The generalized model provides a practical framework for leveraging cultural events to boost destination visibility, foster cross-cultural appreciation, and stimulate long-term tourism growth.

Keywords: Cultural events, Tourism, Pop culture events, Destination development, Japanese pop culture

1. Introduction

Events are essential drivers of tourism, acting as catalysts for attracting visitors and fostering intercultural exchange (Getz and Page, 2020). Particularly, events featuring exotic popular content with strong cultural distinction and niche appeal are effective in boosting tourism and promoting development in host destinations (Seaton et al., 2017; Severino and Silva, 2023). These events increase cultural visibility and global recognition, enhancing tourist numbers and fostering cultural appreciation.

This paper presents a conceptual model based on Japanese pop culture events, which feature Japanese animation (anime), comic books (manga), fashion (cosplay), and more (Kawamata et al., 2017). These events exemplify how diverse cultural experiences drive tourism, generating economic benefits and promoting cultural exchange (Tajima et al., 2018). The model highlights the interaction between tourism and events, impacts on host destinations and on the culture of origin destination, and strategic communication practices that distinguish these events globally (Severino et al., 2024).

To extend the model's application, this study explores its use for other emerging cultural trends, particularly South Korea's K-pop. As K-pop gains global prominence, its events offer interactive experiences through music, digital platforms, and fan engagement (Kim et al., 2021). This paper examines the potential to generalize the model to diverse cultural contexts, focusing on how these events can enhance destination appeal and promote sustainable tourism growth.

2. Conceptual Model of Japanese Pop Culture Events and Tourism

Severino et al. (2024) model explores the relationship between tourism and cultural events, with Japanese pop culture events serving as prime examples of how culturally distinctive experiences attract tourists and elevate host destinations.

The model identifies three key components that facilitate the interaction between tourism and cultural events:

1. Tourism and events: The model highlights the synergy where cultural events stimulate tourism by offering unique experiences (Negruşa et al., 2016). Japanese pop culture events, featuring animation, music, and fashion, appeal to a wide audience and stimulate economic activity tied to tourism (Tajima et al., 2018).
2. Impacts on the host destination and on the destination of culture origin: Beyond immediate economic benefits, these events enhance international visibility and long-term tourism growth for both destinations, from the host destination of the event and the destination of culture origin (Kawamata et al., 2017). "Contents tourism", where tourists explore locations featured in media, further enriches the destination's cultural landscape (Seaton and Yamamura, 2015).
3. Communication and differentiation strategies: The model underscores the importance of digital marketing, storytelling, and user-generated content, such as cosplay, in promoting cultural uniqueness and engaging audiences (Masterman and Wood, 2006; Lamerichs, 2013).

This model fosters tourism development while promoting "otaku tourism", encouraging international visitors to explore Japan's cultural elements featured in media (Okamoto, 2015). The framework's adaptability allows its application to various contexts, maintaining core principles of cultural distinction and strategic communication.

3. Model Generalization Requirements

To generalize the conceptual model of Japanese pop culture events to other cultural contexts, five essential criteria are identified. These ensure that distinct cultural phenomena can effectively leverage event tourism for growth and development:

- Cultural distinction and exoticism: The culture must be perceived as unique and intriguing, offering experiences that differ from mainstream global culture. Japanese pop culture achieves this through captivating aesthetics and a blend of traditional and modern elements, attracting international tourists (García, 2011; Otmazgin and Otmazgin, 2016). The model can be applied to other cultures that offer similarly distinct characteristics.
- Diversity of experiences for varied audiences: Events should provide diverse experiences to appeal to different demographics. Japanese pop culture spans multiple forms, such as anime, manga, and music, attracting a broad audience (Craig, 2020; Freedman and Slade, 2018). A similar diversity of experiences is necessary in other cultural contexts to ensure broad tourism appeal.
- Authenticity of cultural representation: Events must authentically represent the culture, reinforcing emotional connections for participants (McCartney and Osti, 2007). Japanese pop culture events integrate contemporary and traditional elements, adding cultural value (Seaton and Yamamura, 2015). Generalizing the model requires maintaining authenticity in representing the target culture.
- Imagination and re-creation of ideologies: Events should offer immersive experiences that allow participants to engage deeply with cultural themes (Gjorgievski and Trpkova, 2012). Japanese pop culture events create environments for strong personal connections through narratives and characters (Tajima et al., 2018). The model is adaptable to other cultures that offer similar engagement opportunities.
- Active participation and creative engagement: Active fan participation, such as cosplay, adds depth to the cultural experience (Reysen et al., 2018). This aspect enhances the tourism appeal of Japanese pop culture events (Kawamata et al., 2015). To generalize the model, other cultures must promote opportunities for fan creativity and interaction.

These criteria allow culturally distinctive events to drive tourism growth, enhance visibility, and promote cross-cultural understanding. Figure 1 illustrates how the model can be adapted to different cultural contexts while maintaining core characteristics that support tourism growth and cultural identity.

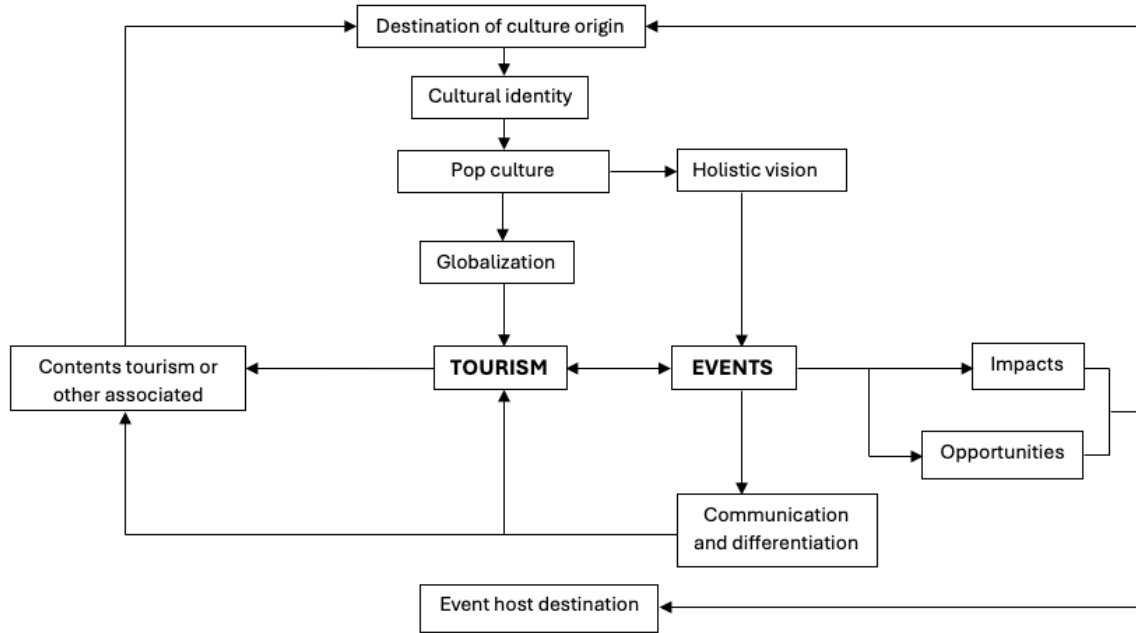


Figure 1: Generalized Model of Cultural Events and Tourism

4. The Case of South Korea Pop Culture and Application of the Generalized Model

The global success of K-pop in events, an element of South Korean pop culture, illustrates how the conceptual model can apply to other emerging cultural phenomena. K-pop events, such as concerts, attract large international audiences and share characteristics with Japanese pop culture events, including cultural distinction, audience engagement, and authentic storytelling (Kim et al., 2022). K-pop leverages digital platforms like social media to connect with global fans, enhancing its reach and fostering a sense of community (Kim et al., 2021).

While K-pop's focus on music-centric activities may limit event diversity, it still aligns with the model's criteria for cultural distinction and exoticism (Messerlin and Shin, 2017). Expanding into other facets of South Korean pop culture could diversify the experiences offered, enhancing appeal to a broader audience.

K-pop plays a key role in promoting tourism in South Korea, with fans frequently visiting sites linked to their favourite stars (Oh et al., 2015). The "Korean Wave" or "Hallyu" reflects the rise of South Korean pop culture, expanding beyond music into films, television series, and online gaming, further solidifying South Korea's status as a global hub for cultural experiences. This phenomenon has fostered a distinct cultural identity that is widely recognized and could easily be leveraged in events featuring multivariate themes (Sunyogita, 2024).

K-pop's digital engagement and active fan participation align with the theoretical framework, demonstrating its capacity to adapt to diverse cultural contexts, provided that its unique features are strategically leveraged and supported by effective marketing efforts. Thus, investing in a diversity of experiences and fostering creative engagement can further maximize the cultural potential and its global appeal.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of Japanese pop culture and K-pop demonstrates the potential to extend the conceptual model to other cultural phenomena, as long as key criteria, as cultural distinction, diverse experiences, authenticity, personal connection, and active participation, are met. The model's flexibility allows its application across cultural contexts, attracting international audiences through the unique appeal of these trends.

Generalizing the model provides a valuable framework for promoting cultural tourism globally, enabling emerging cultural trends to replicate the success of Japanese pop culture and K-pop. By adhering to established criteria, destinations can leverage cultural events to attract tourists, foster intercultural understanding, and support sustainable tourism growth (Severino et al., 2024).

However, validating the model's applicability across different contexts remains essential. Pilot projects will help test its effectiveness, with continuous adaptation and empirical research ensuring its relevance in an increasingly dynamic global tourism landscape.

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