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The Importance Of Events On Destination Brand Image Enhancement –The Case Of Bukhara

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ABSTRACT

Festivals and cultural events have become an important part of the of destination branding strategies. More and more places are increasingly using events and cultural festivals to enhance their image positively and boost tourist flow. Cultural events and festivals have always had a special place in society. Although event tourism has not emerged recently, interest in cultural events in tourism literature has grown tremendously over the last few decades as they have become a key element in attracting tourist destinations. Destinations have also begun to see strategic destination branding as one of the ways to attract a large number of tourists. Therefore, the research in this area can be considered very relevant for the industry. This article examines the importance of various public events in the branding process of destinations and analyzes the impact of “Silk and spices” festival on image and brand of Bukhara tourism destination. The purpose of this study is to explore how visitors evaluate the impact of cultural events and festivals on enhancing the tourist image. The Silk and Spices Festival is undoubtedly one of the most popular Uzbek cultural festivals held annually internationally. Methodological questionnaires were developed to conduct the research. Questionnaires in the form of paper surveys were taken from international and local tourists who visited the Silk and Spices Festival to learn about the impact of this festival on the image of Bukhara. The findings show that there is a positive link between this cultural event and the city’s image.

KEYWORDS

Destination branding, cultural events, festivals, destination image, event tourism.

INTRODUCTION

Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 19.05.2017 № DP-2980 "On measures to accelerate the development of tourism potential of Bukhara city and Bukhara region in 2017-2019" was signed.

The resolution stipulates the following tasks to be fulfilled by holding festivals such as "Silk and Spices", "Melon Festival", "City Day", "Oriental Cuisine", "Bukhara Craftsmen":

- 1) Conducting a comprehensive advertising campaign and promoting the Bukhara brand;
- 2) Organization of information types for representatives of foreign tourism organizations and mass media and promotion of existing tourist potential on popular and popular foreign TV channels;
- 3) Posting articles on the history of the region, monuments and relics on special websites and popular social networks. [1]

According to the resolution, the promotion of the tourism brand of Bukhara region through the holding of festivals will play an important role in ensuring the sustainable growth of the tourism industry in the region. In recent decades, cultural events and international festivals have become an integral part of destination branding strategies. Regions are increasingly using cultural events and festivals to enhance their prestige and promote tourism. Many destinations around the world are creating portfolios of events as a strategic initiative to attract visitors and develop their brand.

Today, cultural festivals and events are seen as part of the tourism product, events are an important part of the tourism industry and are accepted as an industry by the local government that creates it. [5] Events are considered as one of the important factors in attracting tourists. It is advisable for the destination management organization to consider investing in special activities as part of its branding and local image enhancement

strategy. Events are organized to promote tourism by adding value to the destination.

Festivals can bring development to the economy, improve the life of a society, and especially create a positive image and brand of destination. Thanks to the contribution of the festivals, the destination becomes more attractive and increases the ability to attract tourists. [6] As a result, there will be a return visit of guests to the destination. The success in attracting visitors through events has increased consumers' interest in destination. Events can have a multifaceted impact on marketing, for example, the use of large-scale events is particularly advantageous in attracting customers to the local population. Events are a source of great success for the destination, expanding marketing activities and maximizing the benefits of the destination. Therefore, defining the role of the event in destination marketing will help tourism managers to identify strategies aimed at developing tourism through cultural events, to increase the competitive advantage of the destination. It is understandable that there is a need to periodically assess brand impact, recognizing that events can make a significant contribution to brand development. [10] Changes in brand perception can occur over time, not immediately. Therefore, it is recommended that brand surveys be conducted approximately every 2-3 years [18].

METHODS AND RESULTS

The face-to-face survey was conducted to organize the opinion of the participants of the Silk and Spices Festival, which took place on May 28-29-30, 2021, about the festival and the image of the city. The survey allowed for the verification of two types of data. First, it was essential to gather information about visitors to determine the main purpose of the silk and spice festival. Second, their perceptions of the role of this cultural event in enhancing the image of Bukhara were assessed. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic situation around the world, the participation of international tourists in the

survey was low. This may have some effect on the accuracy of the survey results.

The first information that emerges from the questionnaire regards the origin of the

tourists (figure 1). Data reveals that their origin is mostly domestic in number 93 (86%), while foreign visitors are only 14% in number 15.

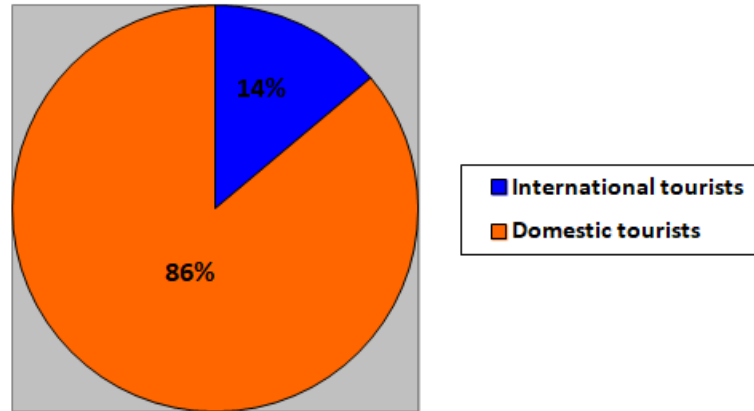


Figure1:Origin of the tourists

With regard to the foreign visitors (figure 2), the largest international audience come from

Russia, Kazakhstan and Tadjikistan while a smaller portion of respondents live in France, Turkey, Indonesia and Afganistan.

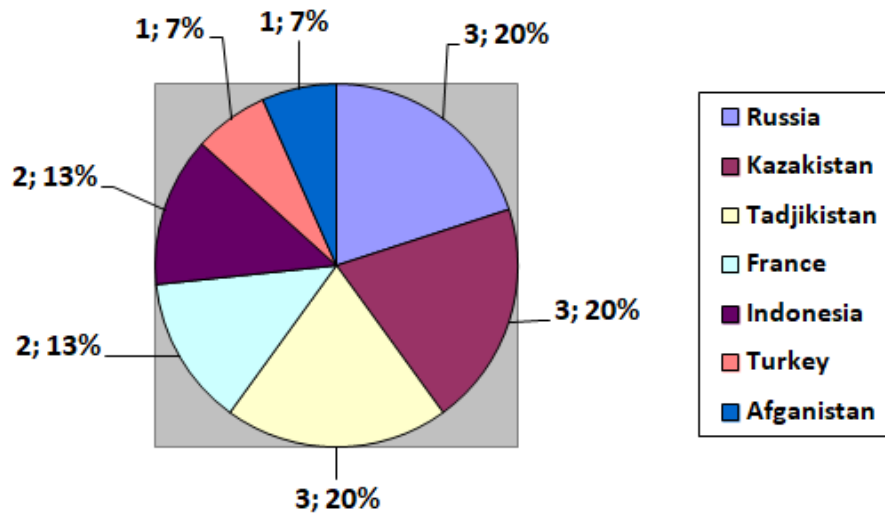


Figure 2:Origin of international tourists

According to the research question, the proportion of men participating in the Silk and Spice Festival is slightly higher than that of female respondents. 62 respondents were male (57%) and the remaining 46 were female (43%) (figure 4).

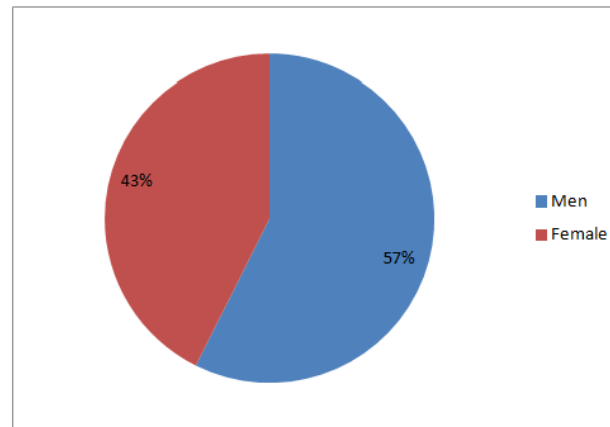


Figure 3: Tourists gender

The data show that the majority of domestic respondents learned about the Silk and Spice Festival through radio, TV, and newspapers

(59%) (figure 4). The main sources of information for international tourists were friends (60%).

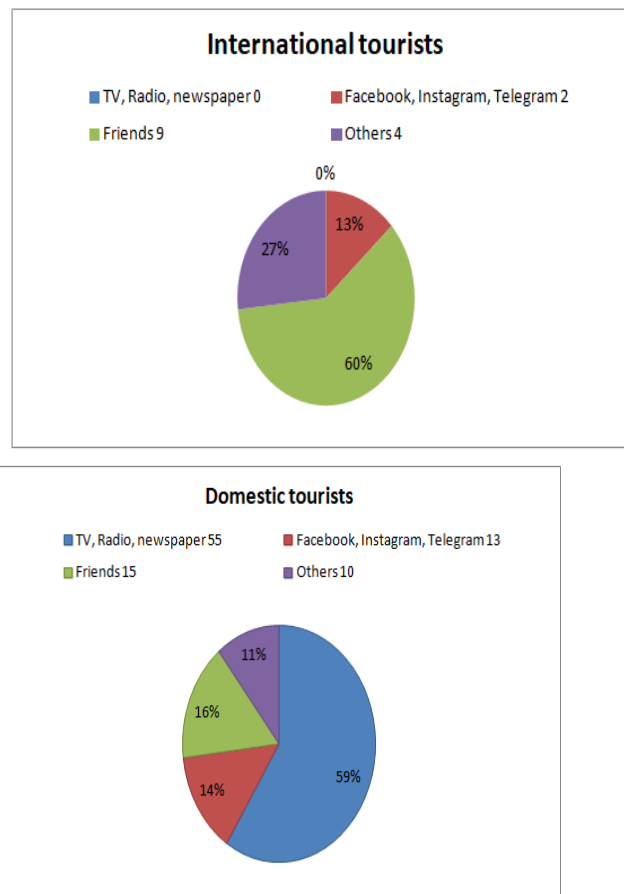


Figure 4: How did you found out about Silk and Spices Festival?

As concern the motivations for attending Silk and Spices Festival, 70% of Uzbek respondents and 13 % of foreign respondents stated that Silk and Spices Festival was the main reason for visiting Bukhara. A smaller part of respondents specified that they have visited Bukhara for other reasons, but they

already knew Bukhara Festival deciding to participate before their arrival (13% of domestic visitors and 33% of foreign visitors). A few number of respondents didn't know about Silk and Spices Festival before their arrival and they decided to participate when they arrived in the area (Figure 5).

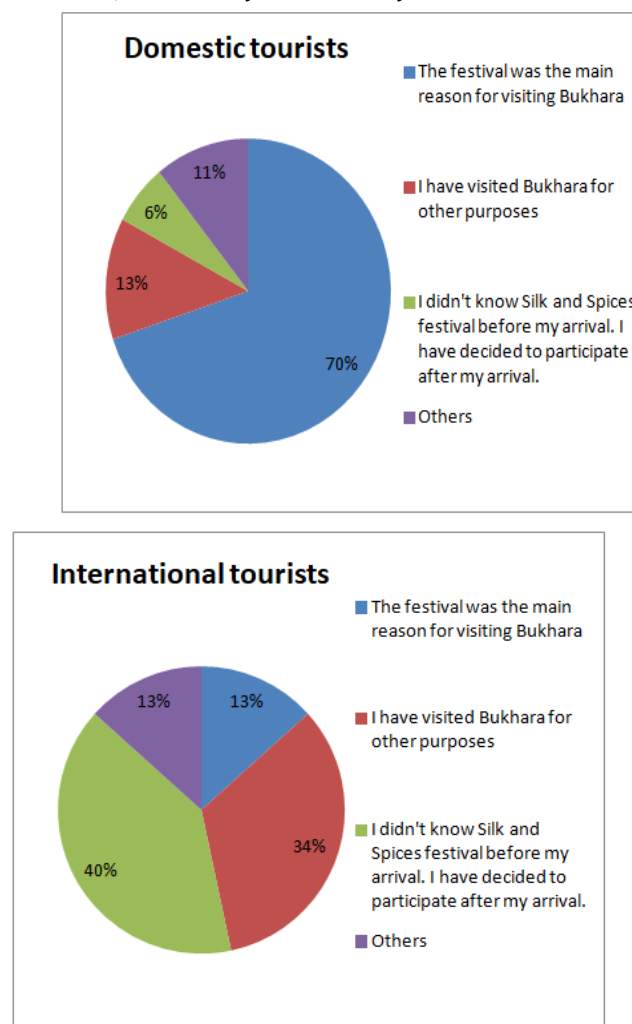


Figure 5: What was the role of Silk and Spices Festival in your decision making process to visit Bukhara?

The second type of findings is represented by the perception of the visitors on the impacts that Silk and Spices Festival has on the process of image destination enhancement. Regarding the contribution that Bukhara Festival gives to the

enhancement of Bukhara tourist image, the majority of respondents agreed that this cultural event plays a fundamental role. Indeed, 40% of Uzbek respondents agree and 58% strongly agree. Among foreign visitors 41% agree and 47% strongly agree (figure 6).

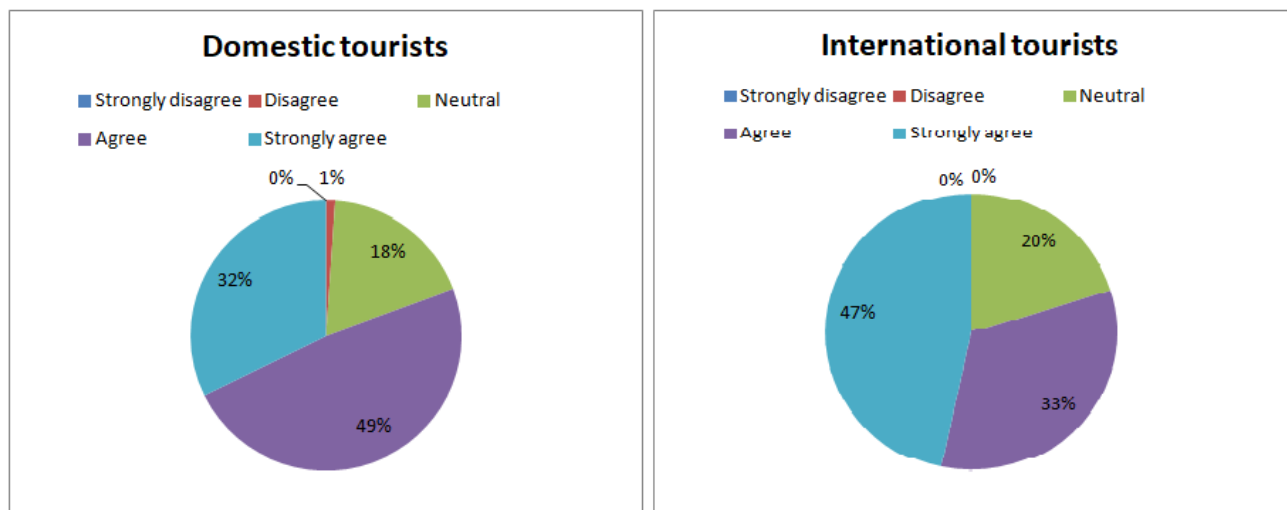


Figure 6: To what extent do you agree that Silk and Spices Festival contributes to enhance the image of Bukhara?

Also regarding the capability of Silk and Spices Festival to represent a tourist Brand that identifies the City of Bukhara, most of the respondents (figure 7) strongly agree (43% of

Uzbek respondents and 20% of foreign respondents) or simply agree (27% of domestic respondents and 33% of foreign respondents).

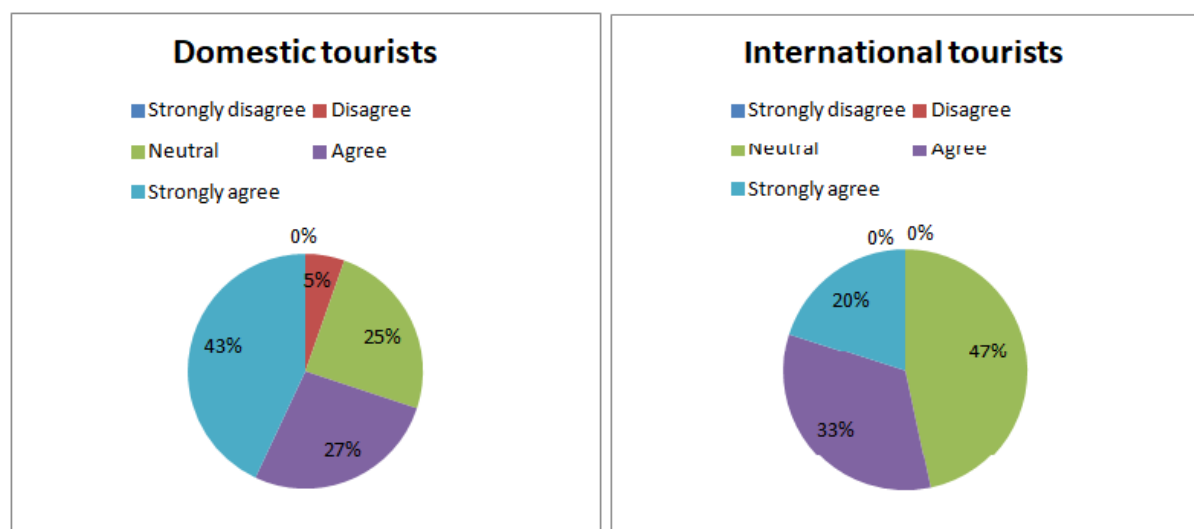


Figure 7: To what extent do you agree that Silk and Spices Festival represents a brand that identifies Bukhara?

Finally, in answer to the question “to what extent do you agree that Silk and Spices Festival is a key element in attracting tourists in

this area?” Uzbek visitors stated that they strongly agree (81%) or simply agree (5%). On the other hand, foreign visitors have expressed

a more neutral opinion on the role of Silk and Spices Festival as a main pull factor of this tourist destination.

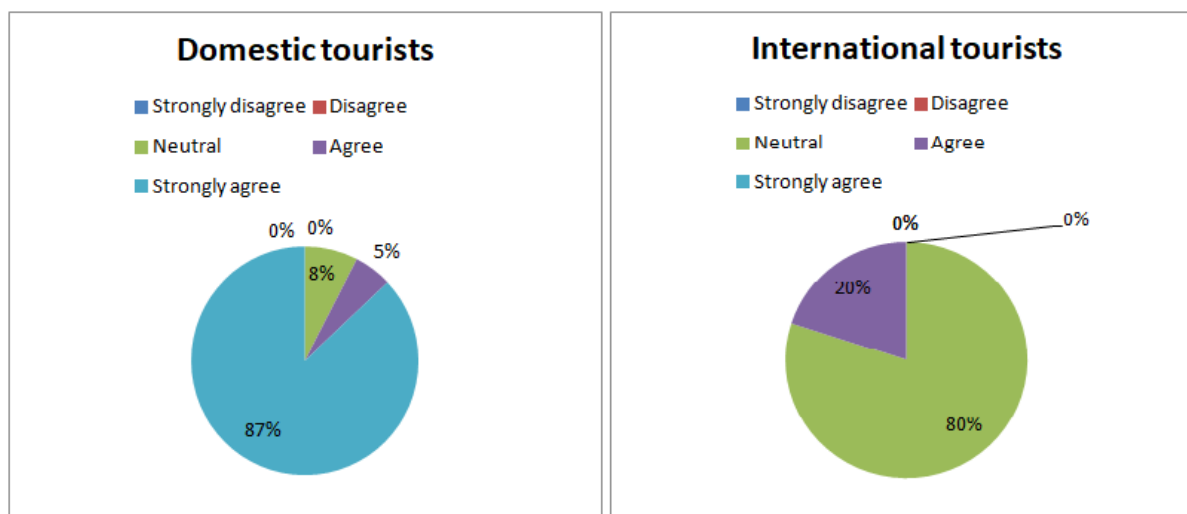


Figure 8: To what extent do you agree that Silk and Spices Festival is a key element in attracting tourists in this area?

DISCUSSIONS

Every year, many different events encourage tourists to visit the host cities. This is because in recent times, cultural events and festivals have become a central part of people's lives. [14] As events have led to an increase in leisure and revenue, this has led to a rapid increase in the amount of public events, celebrations and entertainment.[3] Thus, more and more destinations are trying to determine events potential in the implementation of various economic and tourism goals, as well as in improving their image. [9] Indeed, in many destinations around the world, portfolios of events have been created as a strategic initiative to attract visitors and develop their brand. [4] According to the World Trade Organization, the brand of the destination reflects the dynamic interaction between the main assets of the destination and the perception of potential visitors. It is therefore clear that the views of visitors should play a

fundamental role in driving the image of destination and branding processes. [16]

Events can be seen as a type of cultural tool that can provide unique experiences. [14] They are spatially planned events and can be the key to the success of a tourism destination. [8] Tourists are becoming more and more interested in cultural aspects and are choosing a place where they can offer interesting cultural experiences. [2]

A relatively new strategy for city and destinations is to use events in the strategic creation of a brand. [7] Events are one of the attractive features of destination and therefore they should be included in the branding strategy.[11] This means that the contribution of the events needs to be evaluated not only in terms of its direct

financial benefits, but also in terms of its relevance to the value of the destination brand.

The decision to hold cultural events is usually considered in the context of its impact on the local economy. [15] Destination measures can be used for the following purposes:

- a) Increasing the flow of tourists;
- b) Improving the image of the destination and information about it;
- c) Strengthening tourism development;
- d) Reduction of seasonal fluctuations and extension of the tourist season;
- e) Positive impact on economic development;
- f) Creating new job places;
- g) To satisfy the citizens of the destination.

The destination brand is defined as a dynamic concept that results in a set of thoughts, ideas, and impressions that are unique to an individual. [13] Tourists attending the event will take part in the event as actors. [12] Although the experience of attending an event is a moment, it will be remembered and it can contribute to the improvement of the image of destination. According to Waitt, hosting an event does not have to overcome the problems associated with the image of the destination, but in making some changes, expanding the scope of the image of the destination, as well as local and international identity helps to create. In particular, cultural events and festivals have emerged as a means of improving the appearance of cities, adding life to the city streets and giving citizens a sense of pride in their city. [17]

Despite much research on the link between event and destination images, there are still unexplored questions about the prospects of

visitors and the impact of their participation in events. Thus, a more empirical examination of visitors' views and opinions about cultural events and festivals is necessary to determine their role in enhancing the image of the destination.

CONCLUSION

This article examines the views of scholars on how to improve the reputation of destinations through cultural events, stimulate urban development, and increase the chances of attracting visitors and investment. Additionally, the study was conducted to determine the perceptions of tourists visiting the Silk and Spices Festival. Visitors' perceptions are important because as the tourism industry becomes increasingly competitive, tourist destinations need to differentiate themselves to be more attractive to potential visitors and tourists. The data collected using the compiled questionnaire allowed to develop some final considerations regarding the main features of Silk and Spices festival visitors and the types of tourism created based on these objectives. The results of the survey show that the majority of visitors come from Uzbekistan (86%) and foreign countries (14%). Many local tourists reported about the Silk and Spices Festival through radio, TV, and newspapers (59%), while foreign tourists reported it mainly through acquaintances (60%).

The study also identified some elements that confirm the positive relationship between events and the image of destination. The majority of local tourists (70%) said that the Silk and Spices festival was the main reason to visit

Bukhara. But a large proportion of foreign tourists (40%) said they did not know about the festival before visiting. As a result, the festival is little known to foreign visitors and needs additional promotional activities.

The majority of visitors (49% local, 33% international) agreed that the Silk and Spices Festival will contribute to raising the image of Bukhara. They also expressed confidence that the Silk and Spices Festival could serve as a key tool in promoting the brand of Bukhara tourism (47% domestically, 33% internationally). Most tourists noted that they did not find any harmony between the Bukhara tourism brand and the festival brand. It follows that the destination brand and the event brand should be in proportion to each other. International visitors (47%) recognize the importance of this cultural festival in enhancing the image and attractiveness of Bukhara. This study reaffirms that cultural events have become an important part of the destination image and branding processes. However, there are some limitations to the research.

- a) Due to the fact that the survey was conducted during the global covid-19 pandemic, the tourists who took part in the survey were mainly locals. Therefore, the answers given may not reveal the true state of the festival's impact on the destination brand;
- b) Since this study was conducted on a small-scale festival, there were some problems in obtaining sufficient responses.

It is assumed that if the study is conducted in a broader sample, the degree of generalization of the research results will increase and may give better results.

To ensure the authenticity and reliability of the findings, this study needs further research to assess the acceptance of Silk and Spices festival visitors over a much longer period of time. In addition, the repetition of this research in other destinations and other types of festivals will be the next promising direction. To prove these results and to explain in more depth the factors that determine the image of destination, it is possible to evaluate the available findings by focusing on the relationship between events and destination.

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