Research Paper

Tourist post-visit attitude towards products associated with the destination country

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ABSTRACT

Post-visit attitude towards products or brands associated with destination countries is an important outcome variable overlooked in the tourism literature. Drawing upon associative network theory of memory, this study aims to contribute to the extant literature by testing tourist post-visit attitude as an outcome variable of tourism experience, in addition to destination loyalty. A conceptual model was developed and tested through a survey of Chinese tourists who have recently visited Britain. Results suggest that both tourist satisfaction of destination attributes and overall satisfaction influence post-visit product attitude. Tourism researchers could thus adopt a wider perspective to explore the influence of international tourist experiences by conceptualizing the destination country as a destination for tourism, investment, education and immigration, as well as a political partner. This paper concludes with a discussion of destination managerial and policy implications.

1. Introduction

Considerable attention has been dedicated to developing and testing models of destination satisfaction and loyalty. Destination loyalty is often measured using revisit intention (e.g. Leong, Yeh, Hsiao, & Huan, 2015; Sirakaya-Turk, Ekinci, & Martin, 2015), however research suggests that revisit intention diminishes over time and actual repeat visits are rare (Jang & Feng, 2007; McKercher, Denizci-Guillet, & Ng, 2012). Tourism motivation is primarily about exploration, novelty seeking and wanderlust, and its consumption is relatively infrequent, in comparison to daily consumption activities (Crompton, 1979). As such, McKercher et al. (2012) call for more customer-centric research to examine tourist post visit behavior beyond the tourism destination sphere. The concept of nation brand may help to broaden the area for research in tourism marketing. Nation branding advocates marketing a country like a commercial brand to build national identity and public diplomacy; to attract tourists, international students, and foreign direct investment; and to support exports of products and services (Anholt, 2005; Dinnie, 2015; Kotler & Gertner, 2002).

Two of the major components of Anholt Nation Brands Index are tourism and exports, in addition to other ones such as political, cultural, commercial and human assets, as well as investment potential (Anholt, 2005). Consumer attitude toward imports is an important topic in the international marketing literature. There have been studies investigat-

ing consumers' international travel and tourism experiences and their exposure to other cultures and lifestyles as the antecedents of world-mindedness and cosmopolitanism (Rawwas, Rajendran, & Wuehrer, 1996; Sampson & Smith, 1957; Skrbis, Kendall, & Woodward, 2004). These factors have been positively related to consumer attitude to imported foreign brands, products and services (Alden, Steenkamp, & Batra, 2006; Nijssen & Douglas, 2011). Yet historically there has been a lack of cross-fertilization across the disciplinary boundaries of tourism research and international marketing research (Elliot, Papadopoulos, & Kim, 2011). Attempts to draw the two different research fields together have only started to emerge recently in studies that have linked destination image, product-country image and general country image (Elliot et al., 2011; Nadeau, Heslop, O'Reilly, & Luk, 2008; Ryu, L'Espoir Decosta, & Andéhn, 2016). These studies' findings suggest that a positive product country image or attitude will influence a consumer's intentions to visit a country or destination as a tourist. However, the question of whether tourism experience directly influences product attitude remains unexplored, and it needs to be addressed to advance research across the two subject areas of tourism and consumer studies (Ryu et al., 2016).

The present study aims to address the above gap in the literature by drawing upon associative network theory of memory to examine tourist satisfaction's effect on attitude towards product and brand associated with the destination county. It adds this post-visit product and brand

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attitude as a new outcome variable to an existing destination loyalty model and tests it with data collected from a survey of Chinese tourists who have visited Britain. By doing so, the study attempts to make three important contributions to the literature. First, the paper reveals that tourism satisfaction has a cross-over effect on the general consumption sphere, specifically tourist's positive attitude towards destination country's products and brands; Second, by drawing upon the theory of associative network theory of memory, the study provides potentially fruitful avenues for future research in destination marketing and management; Third, both the empirical evidence and conceptualization provide practical implications for destination management strategies and government policy.

2. Conceptual background and hypotheses

2.1. Tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty

Satisfaction can be defined at both attribute-specific and overall levels. Attribute-specific satisfaction involves a tourist's cognitive evaluation of destination attributes and is similar to post-visit cognitive destination image (Zhang, Fu, Cai, & Lu, 2014). Overall satisfaction relates to the holistic assessment of a series of experiences at destination (Johnson & Fornell, 1991; Meyer & Schwager, 2007). Perceived value can also be defined as an overall construct (Zeithaml, 1988), or as a multi-dimensional construct comprising functional, emotional value and social value (Sanchez, Callarisa, Rodriguez, & Moliner, 2006; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001).

Past studies have suggested that the major antecedents of destination loyalty are satisfaction (Ali, Kim, Li, & Jeon, 2016; del Bosque & Martín, 2008; Meleddu, Paci, & Pulina, 2015; Prayag, Hosany, & Odeh, 2013) and perceived value (Chen & Chen, 2010; Sirakaya-Turk et al., 2015). Destination loyalty is frequently defined as positive behavioral intentions that include plans to revisit and willingness to recommend (Chen & Chen, 2010; Chi & Qu, 2008; Forgas-Coll, Palau-Saumell, Sánchez-García, & Callarisa-Fiol, 2012; Leong et al., 2015; Sirakaya-Turk et al., 2015; Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

In the tourism marketing literature, there have been extensive empirical studies on the drivers and antecedents of destination loyalty (Dolnicar & Ring, 2014; Leong et al., 2015). The theoretical underpinnings of this stream of research can be traced back to the general 'Attitude-Behavior Paradigm' in social psychology, such as the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), and later the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) as well as the 'Cognitive-Affect-Behavior' model (Oliver, 1993). The model illustrates how satisfaction results from tourists' interaction with a destination and its service providers. Overall satisfaction deriving from the evaluations then leads to future behavioral intentions and behavior (del Bosque & Martín, 2008). Cognitive destination evaluation can have both direct or indirect effects on destination loyalty through the mediation of overall satisfaction (Chen & Chen, 2010; Cronin, Brady, & Hult, 2000).

In general, the empirical results of tourism research have supported the linkage between destination image/attribute level satisfaction, perceived value, overall satisfaction, and future destination related behavioral intentions, with perceived value and satisfaction acting as mediators (Ali et al., 2016; Prayag et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2014). Destination attribute satisfaction is generally recognized as having a positive impact on perceived value (e.g. (Chen & Chen, 2010; Hutchinson, Lai, & Wang, 2009)) as well as overall satisfaction (De Rojas & Camarero, 2008; Denstadli & Jacobsen, 2011; Žabkar, Brenčič, & Dmitrović, 2010). Therefore, we proposed the following hypotheses:

H1. Destination attribute satisfaction has a positive effect on overall satisfaction.

H2. Overall satisfaction has a positive effect on destination loyalty.

H3. Destination attribute satisfaction has a positive effect on destination loyalty through the mediation of overall satisfaction.

2.2. Post-visit attitude, associative network theory and tourism experience

Social cognition theory (McGuire, 1969) suggests that an attitude refers to the 'psychological tendency, expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor' (Eagly & Chaiken, 2007, p. 1). It is believed that attitudes are formed through a hierarchy of effects which are commonly expressed as: (1) exposure/attention; (2) reception/encoding; (3) cognitive response; (4) attitude; (5) intention; and (6) behavior (Simonson, Carmon, Dhar, Drolet, & Nowlis, 2001). Sakarya, Eckman, and Hyllegard (2007) used the term 'consumer receptivity' to refer the sum of consumer's attitudes toward foreign goods and services. Elliot et al. (2011) operationalize consumer receptivity using three indicators: 'welcome more imports of (*products/brands associated with destination country*)', 'willing to buy (*products/brands associated with destination country*)', and 'proud to own (*products/brands associated with destination country*)'. This study adopted Elliot et al.'s (2011) operational definition but used a more commonly known term 'product attitude' to refer to tourists' post-visit attitude towards the products or brands associated with destination country (Sakarya et al., 2007).

Associative network theory suggests that our memory is an associative network that consists of nodes that are interlinked (Anderson, 2013). The links between any two nodes suggest an association in our mind (Henderson, Iacobucci, & Calder, 1998; Krishnan, 1996). This theory has been widely applied in branding and consumer research (e.g. Kelting & Rice, 2013; Puligadda, Ross Jr, & Grewal, 2012; Swoboda, Berg, & Schramm-Klein, 2013) however, it has not been sufficiently utilized by tourism researchers.

Tourists interact with many touch points at any destination they visit and as such their perceptions and feelings are developed with regards to a destination country in a holistic manner (Hosany & Witham, 2010; Meyer & Schwager, 2007). Tourists as consumers have direct exposure and heightened attention to the products, services and brands of a destination country.

Following associative network theory, a tourism experience that is stored in consumer memory can be activated when consumers access the products, service and brand originating from the destination country they visited previously. This is because the links and associations between specific nodes are based on past experiences (Mandler, 1978; Swoboda et al., 2013), including the tourism experience. Information about the destination, along with the country and its products, services or brands is stored in memory as a network of interdependent associations. Activation of nodes of tourism experience helps consumers to form attitudes toward the product, service, or brand associated with the country visited (Boush & Loken, 1991). Specifically, the activation of product, service and brand nodes triggers the activation of the country node and tourism experience node, through associative network linkages, and vice versa (Anderson, 1983; Puligadda et al., 2012). In other words, the linkages are bi-directional. The implication is that a positive tourism experience helps to form a positive attitude towards the products, services and brands originating from the destination country.

Applying the associative network theory of memory in the case of this study, we can conceive the node of Great Britain as a tourist destination that is associated with the nodes of architecture/buildings, natural attractions and historic sites/museums. For Chinese tourists, they may associate Great Britain with other European countries such as France or Germany. Britain as a tourism destination could also be associated with a destination for international investment, education or immigration. Britain as a country may be associated to a political partner of China. Positive tourism experience of Britain may activate its associative link with British products, services and brands such as Burberry, Cadbury or Rolls-Royce. Past studies have revealed a cross-