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Examining the structural relationships of destination image, perceived value, tourist satisfaction and loyalty: case of Mauritius

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Abstract

Tourists' perceptions of destination image, perceived value, tourist satisfaction and loyalty are vital for successful destination marketing. The literature on travel and tourism reveals an abundance of studies on destination image, perceived value and tourist satisfaction, however their relationships with destination loyalty have not been thoroughly investigated in small island destination. Consequently, the aim of the study was to investigate the relationship among destination image and perceived value and to empirically test the constructs that are likely to influence tourist satisfaction, which in turn affect tourist loyalty. The conceptual model was developed on the basis of existing theoretical and empirical research in the fields of marketing and tourism. The empirical data was collected in an island tourism destination - Mauritius. A total of 370 questionnaires were returned and the data were analysed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The theoretical and managerial implications were drawn based on the study findings, and recommendations for future researchers were made.

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Keywords: destination image, perceived value, tourist satisfaction, destination loyalty, Mauritius

1. Introduction

Destination image has become a popular area of investigation among tourism researchers as it has been found to influence destination choice, satisfaction, and post-purchase behaviour (Chon, 1990; Um & Crompton, 1990; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Oppermann, 2000; Bigné, Sánchez, & Sánchez, 2001; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Castro, Armario, & Ruiz, 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008; Prayag, 2009; Zhang et al., 2014). Destinations are

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compelled to enhance their images in order to increase tourism receipts, income, employment and government revenues among other contributions of international tourism. Destination image is therefore seen as a critical factor in tourists' final evaluation of a destination (Cai, Wu, & Bai, 2004; Castro et al., 2007) and their future behaviour (Bigné et al., 2001; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). A review of the tourism literature shows that destination image and its relationship with satisfaction and behavioural intentions have attracted much academic interest (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008; Prayag, 2009). Understanding and predicting tourists' intentions to revisit specific destinations are important. Despite the increased interest in destination image, the interrelationships between the attributes of destination image, tourist satisfaction and tourist behavioural intentions in the context of an island destination have not been sufficiently researched. It is therefore important to extend the findings of destination image to different destination settings to broaden the understanding of these causal relationships.

In the marketing literature, perceived value has been characterised as key to explaining consumer behaviour (Ostrom & Iacobucci, 1995; Oh, 2000; Petrick, 2004). Yet perceived value of tourist destination is not well explored (Petrick, 2004; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Pandža Bajs, 2013). The current study thus extends the existing destination marketing literature by presenting an integrated model that could shed new light on the understanding of the antecedents and consequences of destination image towards tourist perceived value, satisfaction and destination loyalty.

By understanding the causal relationships between destination image, perceived value, tourist satisfaction and loyalty, destination tourism managers would better know how to build an attractive image and improve their marketing efforts to maximize the effective use of their resources. This study therefore proposed a model which investigated the relationships between destination image, perceived value and tourist satisfaction to predict loyalty in an island destination. The theoretical model was tested with structural equation modelling (SEM).

2. Conceptual background and hypotheses

Destination image can be defined as a tourist's general impression of a destination (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991), that is, it is 'sum of beliefs, ideals and impressions' that a visitor has toward a certain place (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 1996; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Kozak & Andreu, 2006; Assaker & Hallak, 2013). The image is a portrayal of the visitor's attitude towards a number of cues related to the destination attributes (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). Destination image in the mind of the visitors plays an important role in their travel purchase decisions and subsequently, stimulating their visiting intentions (Oppermann, 2000; Pike, 2004). The main elements considered by visitors in a destination are natural and scenic resources, accessibility, cultural resources, security, night life and entertainment, and quality/price ratio (Bigné *et al.*, 2001; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008). Milman & Pizam (1995) describe the destination image as consisting of three components: the product, for instance the quality of the attraction; the second one as the behaviour and attitude of the destination hosts; and thirdly the environment: weather, scenery, and facilities. Island destinations are immersed in images of the "exotic" associated including both tangible and intangible elements such as pristine beaches, white sand, blue sea, rivers, landscape, biodiversity, brown skin and colourful culture to attract Western visitors (Lockhart, 1997; Prayag, 2009; Seebaluck, Naidoo & Ramseook-Munhurrin, 2013). Beaches are considered as one of the major attractions of the tourism industry and are one of the most important motivators for tourists to visit island destinations (Philips & House, 2009; Prayag & Ryan, 2011).

Most marketing strategies aim to create an image or reinforce positive images in the mind of the visitors within the target market (Chon, 1990; Pike, 2004). Customer loyalty is an important goal in the consumer marketing community as it is a key component for a company's long-term viability or sustainability. Chen & Tsai (2007) found that destination image indirectly influences satisfaction via the trip quality-perceived value path and has both direct and indirect effects on behavioural intentions. Chi & Qu (2008) developed a conceptual model to explain destination loyalty by examining the causal relationships among destination image, tourist attribute and overall satisfaction and destination loyalty. Their results supported the proposed destination loyalty model, which advocated that destination image directly influenced attribute satisfaction; destination image and attribute satisfaction were both direct antecedents of overall satisfaction; and overall satisfaction and attribute satisfaction in turn had direct and positive impact on destination loyalty. However, their study did not examine the effect of tourists' perceived value on the destination loyalty model. Based on the review, the first three hypotheses, therefore, would be:

H1. The higher the destination image, the higher the perceived value

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