



Linking the dots among destination images, place attachment, and revisit intentions: A study among British and Russian tourists



Nikolaos Stylos^a, Victoria Bellou^b, Andreas Andronikidis^c, Chris A. Vassiliadis^{c,*}

^a The University of Wolverhampton Business School, Arthur Storer Building, Nursery Street, Wolverhampton WV1 1AD, England, United Kingdom

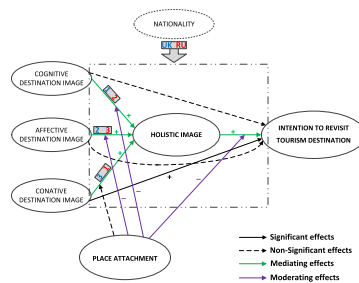
^b Department of Economic Studies, University of Thessaly, 43 Korai Str. 38333 Volos, Greece

^c Department of Business Administration, University of Macedonia, 156 Egnatia Str. 54636 Thessaloniki, Greece

HIGHLIGHTS

- All three image components and holistic image are crucial for predicting tourist revisit intention.
- The relative importance of image components differs between British and Russian tourists.
- Holistic image mediates the effect of image components on revisit intention.
- Place attachment moderates the effects of images on revisit intention.

GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT



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ABSTRACT

Limited evidence suggests that the incorporation of both image components (cognitive, affective, and conative) and holistic image is meaningful for predicting tourists' revisit intentions. Extending this line of research, the present study aims to unravel the relative influence that each component of image has directly and indirectly, via holistic image, on revisit intentions. In doing so, we incorporate two national samples (British and Russians) of diverse tourist profile and significantly different levels of visitation frequency to investigate place attachment as a moderator. Evidence from 1362 British and 1164 Russian tourists indicated that all image components have a positive indirect effect on revisit intention via holistic image, while conative has also a direct one. As expected, the image components rank differently for British and Russian tourists. The indirect effects of destination images on revisit intention, except conative, are conditional and, interestingly, most of these are stronger for tourists with low PA.

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1. Introduction

Destination images are central to the tourists' decision making process, attracting hence researchers' constant attention (e.g. Beerli & Martín, 2004a; Tseng, Wu, Morrison, Zhang, & Chen, 2015; Chen,

Lai, Petrick, & Lin, 2016). They have been examined as antecedents of tourists' intention to visit (e.g. Alvarez & Campo, 2014; Hung & Petrick, 2012; Whang, Yong, & Ko, 2016) and revisit a destination (e.g. Assaker, Vinzi, & O'Connor, 2011; Cheng & Lu, 2013; Chew & Jahari, 2014), offering practitioners the opportunity to appropriately design, deliver and promote the destination product (Hsu, Cai, & Li, 2010; Um & Crompton, 1990). Interestingly, however, there is a latent debate as to the examination of components of image for predicting tourists' intentional behaviors over holistic image. As

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: n.stylos@wlv.ac.uk (N. Stylos), vbellou@uth.gr (V. Bellou), a.andronikidis@uom.edu.gr (A. Andronikidis), chris@uom.edu.gr (C.A. Vassiliadis).

regards components, the vast majority of researchers have adopted the typology of Gartner (1994) (i.e. cognitive, affective, and conative image) and have basically examined the direct or the indirect effect of the components of image on tourists' visit and revisit intention (e.g. Baloglu & Love, 2005; Chew & Jahari, 2014; Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). Concerning holistic image, a number of researchers has recently incorporated only holistic image, suggesting that it may better capture tourists' imagery impressions (Brown, Smith, & Assaker, 2016; Prayag, Hosany, Muskat, & Del Chiappa, 2015). The researchers that have adopted both components of image and holistic image are fewer (e.g. Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Beerli & Martín, 2004a; Bigné, Sánchez, & Blas, 2009; Lin, Morais, Kerstetter, & Hou, 2007), principally agreeing with Ahmed (1991) and Echtner and Ritchie (1993), who postulate that both holistic image and components of image need to be examined as they can be different.

In almost all cases that components of destination images have been investigated, researchers focus only on cognitive and affective image, excluding conative (Zhang, Fu, Cai, & Lu, 2014). It is only recently that Stylos, Vassiliadis, Bellou, & Andronikidis (2016) concluded that conative is essential for delineating tourists' intention to revisit a destination. Still, the relative importance of the three components remains unclear. As Bigné et al. (2009, p. 716) write "no study has been made of which image dimensions exercise the greatest influence over the tourist's future behavior intentions". Extending this line of thinking, the present study seeks to delineate the relative significance of each destination image component when predicting tourists' revisit intentions, both directly and indirectly, via holistic image. In doing so, the present study adopts a cross-cultural approach, incorporating two groups of tourists that are largely different, both in general and towards the destination under investigation (Chalkidiki, Greece). In particular, British tourists tend to be more loyal and more likely to return to a destination (Kozak, 2001), compared to Russian tourists who are less destination loyal and more eager to see more of the world, probably because they are less experienced travelers (Kozak & Martin, 2012). As regards Greece, and Chalkidiki in particular, British tourists comprise a 'traditional' tourist group, whereas Russians comprise a relatively new but growing tourist group (European Travel Commission, 2010). Evidently, British tourists are more likely to have visited the Greek tourism destination under investigation more times than their Russian counterparts. This approach could better unravel the nature and potential interrelationships of imagery associations developed by tourists of different origins when evaluating tourism destinations, allowing hence stronger evidence regarding the relative importance of all three components of destination images over revisit intentions.

Moreover, given that the two populations under investigation differ in terms of visitation frequency and that visitation frequency has a strong positive relationship with place attachment (PA) (e.g. George & George, 2004; Halpenny, 2010; Lawrence, 2012; Moore & Graefe, 1994), we also examine the moderating role of PA in an attempt to offer richer insights regarding tourists' revisit intentions. PA is a pivotal tool in understanding tourist behavior (i.e. Gross & Brown, 2008; Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2004; Lee, Kyle, & Scott, 2012; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Ramkissoon, Smith, & Weiler, 2013). As Lee, Graefe, & Burns (2007) note, "place attachment plays a formative role in explaining behavioral and conative phenomena" (p. 467). In fact, King, Chen, & Funk (2015, p. 10) argued that the strength of PA is that it could act as a moderator since "Attitude strength research indicates the psychological significance one ascribes to an attitude represents the level of caring and concern attached to the attitude object". All hypothesized relationships appear in Fig. 1.

The contributions of this study are multiple. First, it highlights

the significance of investigating all three components of image (i.e. cognitive, affective and conative) to predict tourists' behavioral intentions. Second, it fills the gap of knowledge on the relative importance of these three components of image for tourists' decision making process, testing the suggested model across two tourist populations. Third, it argues over the value of incorporating the combined effect of components of image and holistic image when examining behavioral intentions, joining the limited number of researchers already suggesting so. Important to note is that by testing relationships across two substantially different national tourist populations, this study also addresses the concern of researchers (e.g. Malhotra, Peterson, & Kleiser, 1998; Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2015) who posit that significant differences may exist between western and non-western samples, allowing hence safer conclusions. Last but not least, it highlights the fundamental role of PA when predicting revisit intention of tourists, revealing which way, and to what extent PA regulates the causal relationship between the three distinct components of destination image, holistic image, and revisit intention. Since so far only a handful of research examine PA as a moderator in any context (King et al., 2015; Ram, Bjork, & Weidenfeld, 2016), the present study also adds on the moderating role of PA in the tourist decision making process in general and specifically in the effect that components of image have on tourists' revisit intention via holistic image.

2. Literature review

2.1. The profile of British and Russian tourists

Researchers have argued that the significance attributed to destinations and their aspects may vary based on individuals' values relating to national culture (i.e. Aaker & Schmitt, 2001; Kim & McKercher, 2011; Smith & Bond, 1999). Previous research has also long theorized the heterogeneous nature of tourist motivation (i.e. Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977; Park & Yoon, 2009; Plog, 1974). In addition, differences exist in terms of how tourists from different nationalities attach importance levels to travel motivations (Jang & Cai, 2002; Kozak, 2002; Beerli & Martín, 2004a; Pearce, 1991).

In this vein, Jang and Cai (2002) concluded that the most important motives for British tourists who travel to overseas destinations were "knowledge seeking", "escape", "family and friend togetherness". Kozak (2001) suggested that British tourists' intentions to visit a holiday destination in the future are formulated on the basis of their previous experiences and level of overall satisfaction. In a study investigating travel motivation of tourists from different nationalities towards summer destinations, British tourists were found to value "having fun" and "mixing with other tourists" more than tourists of any other nationality (Andreu, Kozak, Avci, & Cifter, 2005). Similarly, Wickens (2002) found that all participants were excited with the beauty of the places they visited in Chalkidiki, Greece and "... had a fundamental wish for familiarity at the level of the basics (like toilets, cleanliness, and the like)" (p.836), and concluded that the main factors that motivated British tourists visiting Chalkidiki were "the wish to escape from everyday life", "the pursuit of pleasure", and "ontological security" (p. 842).

UK is one of the fastest-growing source of the tourist market globally (ITB Berlin, 2014), and with a 5% increase in outbound tourism in 2014 it features as a top international performer. Moreover, UK belongs to the group of non-eurozone outbound tourist markets that appear to be developing stronger than any other corresponding Eurozone market (ITB Berlin, 2014). Concerning Greece, British tourists are the second largest tourist market, comprising 10.3% (1,846,333 tourists) and 9.5% (2,089,529) of the total market respectively for 2013 and 2014. Greece ranks sixth

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