Testing an integrated destination image model across residents and tourists

Dimitrios Stylidis [a], [*], Amir Shani [b], Yaniv Belhassen [b]

[a] *The Business School, Middlesex University London, UK*
[b] *Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Eilat Campus, Beersheba, Israel*

HIGHLIGHTS

- The need to confirm the applicability of an integrated destination image model to local residents is highlighted.
- The hypothesized relationships were tested using local residents and tourists in the resort city of Eilat.
- The cognitive, affective and the overall image evaluations positively affect intention to recommend.
- Among tourists, the affective component exerted a greater influence than the cognitive on overall image and behavior.
- Thefindings help explain how differences between the respective images of each group arise.

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Tourism research has yet to confirm whether an integrated destination image model is applicable in predicting the overall destination image and behavioral intentions of local residents. This study examines whether the cognitive, affective and overall image - hypothesized to be predictors of behavioral intentions - are applicable to residents and tourists in the resort city of Eilat. The proposed model allowed for the distinct effect of each image component on overall image and behavior to be closely examined. The findings support the applicability of the model to local residents and also showed that among tourists, the affective component exerted a greater influence than the cognitive on overall destination image and future behavior. These findings have theoretical and practical implications for research on destination image.

© 2016 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

1. Introduction

Destination image has been one of the most investigated topics in the marketing scholarship in tourism studies (Cherifi, Smith, Maitland, & Stevenson, 2014; Fu, Ye, & Xiang, 2016; Stepchenkova & Li, 2013; Sun, Ryan, & Pan, 2015). There is a growing body of research within this context that recognizes the significance of examining the image that local residents have of the place (i.e., city, town) where they live (Henkel, Henkel, Agrusa, Agrusa, & Tanner, 2006; Schroeder, 1996; Stylidis, Sit, & Biran, 2016). In line with

this research agenda, residents' image of the destination where they live is valuable for understanding their attitudinal and behavioral intentions, such as their support for tourism development in their area (e.g., Ramkissoon & Nunkoo, 2011; Schroeder, 1996; Stylidis, Biran, Sit, & Szivas, 2014) or their intention to recommend their town or city as a viable tourist destination (e.g., Bigne, Sanchez, & Sanz, 2005). Moreover, residents' image and their corresponding behavioral intentions are known to considerably affect tourists' image formation, decision making and buying behavior, due to residents' key role as advocates and marketers of their place to others (e.g., Bigne et al., 2005; Leisen, 2001; Schroeder, 1996; Walls, Shani, & Rompf, 2008).

A common bias, however, within tourism marketing literature is its preoccupation with the examination of the cognitive and affective components that construct the image tourists have of destinations, perceived to be critical factors in determining the success of a tourism destination. There is empirical evidence that, like

* Corresponding author. The Business School, Department of Marketing, Branding and Tourism, Middlesex University London, The Burroughs, Hendon, London NW4 4BT, UK.
E-mail addresses: d.stylidis@mdx.ac.uk (D. Stylidis), shaniam@som.bgu.ac.il (A. Shani), yanivbel@bgu.ac.il (Y. Belhassen).

among tourists, the overall image residents have is determined by cognitive and affective components with a notable theoretical emphasis on the important role of the cognitive component in influencing the overall image residents have of the destination (e.g., Henkel et al., 2006; Schroeder, 1996; Sternquist-Witter, 1985; Stylidis et al., 2016).

Accordingly, the current study aimed to examine whether a) an integrated destination image model - considering both the affective and cognitive components of image - is applicable in predicting the overall destination image and behavioral intentions of local residents, and b) use the proposed model to juxtapose the results on the cognitive, affective and overall image across residents and tourists of a destination. The application of the model to study residents and tourists at one popular tourist destination allowed for the distinct effect of each image component on overall image and behavior to be closely examined among the two groups. The proposed model, in particular, was tested on residents and tourists in the Israeli resort city of Eilat, which was selected as the setting of this study for several reasons. First, research on the image of tourist destinations in the Middle East has been limited, and Eilat is a key destination in the region. Second, Eilat enjoys a high rate of repeat visits by Israeli tourists, and an in-depth understanding of the images that both tourists and residents have of Eilat is important to maintain such a high rate of repeat visits. Next, while tourism is a major contributor to the local economy, the city faces intense competition from the nearby resort towns of Aqaba in Jordan and Taba in Egypt. It is therefore necessary to investigate how some of the key stakeholders' (i.e., residents and tourists) overall image of Eilat as a tourist destination is formed and plan to improve the competitive positioning of the destination. Finally, the planned relocation of the city's airport is expected to double the volume of air passengers over the next 25 years, and it will also free up a large area in the center of Eilat for residential and hotel development (Ergas & Felsenstein, 2012). This study, therefore, will also benefit the planning process vis-à-vis tourism in Eilat, which is gradually expanding.

2. Theoretical background

Given the purpose of this study, stakeholder theory seemed the most suitable conceptual framework. Freeman (1984, p.46) defines a stakeholder in an organization as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives." When applied to the tourism context, stakeholder theory asserts that attention should be paid to the interests of all those who affect or are affected by tourism development. Critical stakeholders in tourism are considered the tourists, tourism sector, residents, and local government officials (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009). Stakeholder theory has been widely applied in the tourism literature, including collaboration on tourism planning (e.g., D'Angella & Go, 2009) and understanding residents' attitudes toward tourism (e.g., Byrd, Bosley, & Dronberger, 2009). However, limited application of the theory has been seen within the body of knowledge on destination image, namely concurrently investigating how local residents and tourists perceive a tourist destination. Researchers emphasize on the need for additional studies to embrace residents' values and perceptions into the tourism planning and marketing process (Sharpley, 2014).

Destination image is generally defined in the literature as the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions a person has of a destination (Crompton, 1979; Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993). Lawson and Baud Bovy (1977) supported that destination image is "the expression of all objective knowledge, impressions, prejudice, imaginations, and emotional thoughts an individual or group might have of a particular place" (p.10). Dichter (1985, pp.4—5) further suggested

that "image is not only the individual traits or qualities but also the total impression an entity makes on the minds of others" (see also Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). These definitions reveal the complexity of this concept and the need to consider both the cognitive and affective components involved in the formation of the overall image of a destination.

The distinction between the cognitive and affective component is a methodological and conceptual tool that facilitates careful examination of the image (e.g., Chew & Jahari, 2014; Lin, Morais, Kerstetter, & Hou, 2007; Martin & del Bosque, 2008; Wang & Hsu, 2010). The cognitive component of the image refers to a person's beliefs and knowledge about a destination and its attributes, which together help form an internally accepted mental picture of the place (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Pike & Ryan, 2004). It also includes a set of attributes that mainly correspond to the resources of a tourist destination (Stabler, 1995). Those resource attributes involve, among others, the scenery, climate, accommodation facilities, restaurants, and historical and cultural attractions. All these can induce an individual to visit a specific destination.

On the other hand, the affective component of the image denotes a person's feelings toward and emotional responses to a destination (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Shani & Wang, 2011). According to Gartner (1993), it becomes operational during the evaluation stage of destination selection. The notion that the two components should be studied separately is supported by a number of studies in environmental psychology (e.g., Holbrook, 1981; Walmsley & Young, 1998; Ward & Russel, 1981). As geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1974, 1977) pointed out, any conceptualization of a place should include the meanings and values that people ascribe to it. Likewise, the study of Yuksel, Yuksel, and Bilim (2010) also exemplified the need to incorporate both cognitive and affective evaluations when examining the destination image. To capture the affective component of the image, four semantic differential scales (unpleasant-pleasant, sleepy-arousing, gloomy-exciting, and distressing-relaxing) have commonly been used (e.g., Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Chew & Jahari, 2014).

In line with a stream of researchers, the first level of response to a place is affective and this governs subsequent actions toward that place (Ittelson, 1973, pp. 1—19; Walmsley & Young, 1998). Studies in environmental psychology, for example, have empirically confirmed that higher levels of affection lead to more positive cognitive evaluations of a place's attributes (e.g., Billig, 2006; Rollero & Piccoli, 2010). For the vast majority of researchers, though, people's affective evaluation of a place largely depends on their knowledge of that place (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Boo & Busser, 2005; Russel & Pratt, 1980). Indeed, this hypothesized direction of the relationship between the cognitive and affective components has been empirically documented in previous destination image models (e.g., Beerli & Martin, 2004; Li, Cai, Lehto, & Huang, 2010; Lin et al., 2007). Lin et al. (2007), for instance, reported that tourists develop feelings about a destination after they have cognitively evaluated it. Similarly, therefore, to past research the cognitive component of destination image is hypothesized in this study to exert an influence on the affective component of image.

Researchers also agree that a place has an overall image, a notion that refers to people's holistic impressions of a destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). Akama and Kieti (2003) suggested that the success of a destination in attracting tourists may depend more on the overall image than on any specific image characteristic. The findings of tourism studies have provided enough evidence to support a) that both the cognitive and affective evaluations have direct impacts on the overall image, and b) the mediating role played by the affective component between the cognitive component and the overall image of a tourist