



# Novelty seeking, image, and loyalty—The mediating role of satisfaction and moderating role of length of stay: International tourists' perspective



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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 12 October 2016

Received in revised form 2 April 2017

Accepted 12 April 2017

Available online xxxx

### Keywords:

Novelty seeking

Destination image

Tourist satisfaction

Destination loyalty

## ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationships of novelty seeking and destination image with tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty, as well as the mediating effect of satisfaction and moderating effect of length of stay. The results of our analysis using the PROCESS model tool developed by Hayes (2013) and Hayes and Preacher (2013) and a sample of 508 international tourists visiting the United Arab Emirates (UAE) confirmed the importance of novelty seeking and destination image in predicting tourist satisfaction in a destination and destination loyalty. In addition, we find that tourist satisfaction positively mediates the relationship between novelty seeking and destination image and that length of stay negatively moderates the relationship between novelty seeking and destination loyalty. These findings are beneficial to both destination managers and the government in their efforts to improve and promote the UAE as an attractive and unique destination.

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## 1. Introduction

Tourism has become an important foundation of the United Arab Emirates' (UAE) strategy to diversify the national economy (Hvidt, 2013; Shayah, 2015). In particular, the tourism industry is an important part of the country's service sector, which contributes much to the economy (Hvidt, 2013; World Travel & Tourism Council, 2015). According to Hajiloizis (2015), the UAE generated around \$23.4 billion in visitor exports in 2014, and this figure grew by 1.4% in 2015, supported by some 14.8 million international tourist arrivals (World Travel & Tourism, 2014). Thus, the UAE government has emphasized the need to develop different strategies that will make it one of the world's favorite destinations (Morakabati, Beavis, & Fletcher, 2014). The goal of the "Dubai Tourism Vision 2020" initiative is to attract 20 million tourists per year by 2020, double the international arrivals from 2012. In addition, it is forecasted that the number of international arrivals will increase to >37 million by 2025, generating revenues of \$35 billion (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2014). To achieve these goals, it is important for destination managers to focus on the tourists' loyalty, as it is a key element in tourism management. There is a continued emphasis on destination loyalty, and its success can be explained by repurchase rather than first purchase; in addition, any brand survival is based on loyalty (Assael, 1984). Therefore, it is crucial for destination managers, including those in the UAE, to understand what makes tourists loyal to

the UAE as a destination, so they can develop strategies, such as regarding offers, services, and communication, to exceed tourists' expectations (Gursoy, Chen & Chi, 2014).

Tourists' destination loyalty is defined as the intention to revisit a destination and recommend it to others (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Despite the extensive studies that have been carried out on destination loyalty (Akroush, Jraisat, Kurdieh, Al-Faouri, & Qatu, 2016; Gallarza, Saura & Moreno, 2013; Kim, Holland & Han, 2013; Vinh & Long, 2013), there are still unanswered questions about how to make tourists loyal in the long run (Campón, Alves & Hernandez, 2013; Zamora, Va'squez-Pa'rrega, Morales & Cisternas, 2005). In addition, recent studies have indicated that destination loyalty is still considered an emerging field, and thus, further research is imperative (Campón-Cerro, Hernández-Mogollón & Alves, 2016; McKercher, Guillet & Ng, 2012).

To this end, many studies have tried to identify the antecedents of destination loyalty. For example, past studies have revealed the effects of satisfaction (Bajs, 2015; Ramseook-Munhurrin, Seebaluck & Naidoo, 2015; Rasoolimanesh, Dahalan & Jaafar, 2016), destination image (Zhang, Fu, Cai & Lu, 2014), service quality (Akroush, Jraisat, Kurdieh, AL-Faouri and Qatu, 2016), experience (Wu & Pearce, 2016), emotion (Toyama & Yamada, 2012), destination attachment (Prayag & Ryan, 2012), and perceived value (Ramseook-Munhurrin, Seebaluck and Naidoo, 2015) on destination loyalty. The present study considers the mediating effect of tourist satisfaction on the relationship of novelty seeking and image with loyalty. In this study, satisfaction is chosen as a mediator over other factors because it is considered the most widely used measure for loyalty (Campón-Cerro et al., 2016; Toyama & Yamada, 2012), and the literature shows that satisfaction is considered

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a mediator between destination loyalty and its determinants (Mohamad, Ghani & Izzati, 2014; Nilplub, Khang & Krairit, 2016). As such, further investigation is crucial to determine any differences in the impact of tourist satisfaction on destination loyalty across different countries, including the UAE, for which, to the best of our knowledge, no study on these issues has been conducted.

According to previous research, even though tourists seek novelty to revisit a destination, they prefer to revisit a destination that also has a good image (Assaker, Vinzi & O'Connor, 2011). However, few studies have investigated the relationship of novelty seeking and image with tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty in developing economies such as the UAE. Furthermore, previous studies have suggested that length of stay plays a significant role in the relationship between novelty seeking and destination loyalty. The argument is that the longer the stay in a novel destination, the lower the destination loyalty (Toyama & Yamada, 2012). Nevertheless, this hypothesized moderating effect of length of stay on the relationship between novelty seeking and destination loyalty has not been empirically studied.

To help address this gap in the literature, this study aims to examine the direct relationship of novelty seeking and image to tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty, to investigate the mediating effect of tourist satisfaction on the relationship of novelty seeking and image with loyalty, and lastly, to investigate the moderating effect of length of stay on the relationship between novelty seeking and destination loyalty.

## 2. Conceptual background and hypotheses

### 2.1. Tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty

Over the years, the concept of satisfaction has been measured and defined in different ways (Oliver, 1980). For example, Oliver (1997) defined satisfaction as the overall evaluation of the level of fulfillment, ranging from unpleasant to pleasant. In the tourism context, researchers such as Truong and Foster (2006), Chen and Chen (2010), and Chi and Qu (2008) defined satisfaction as the outcome of the difference between what is expected and what has been experienced, while Pizam, Neumann and Reichel (1978) defined satisfaction as the difference between pre-travel expectations and post-travel experiences. In other words, a tourist is satisfied if the outcome of the comparison between expectations and experiences is the feeling of pleasure, specifically a positive, memorable feeling upon leaving a destination (Agyeiwaah, Adongo, Dimache & Wondirad, 2016; Baker & Crompton, 2000; Reisinger & Turner, 2003; Su, Cheng, & Huang, 2011). On the other hand, when the level of experience does not match or exceed the level of expectations, a tourist is dissatisfied and left with the feeling of displeasure (Reisinger & Turner, 2003). Arnould and Price (1993) challenged Pizam, Neumann & Reichel's (1978) definition of satisfaction, arguing that the most satisfactory experiences can be those that are least expected, or are unexpected. Parker and Mathews (2001) further expanded the definition of satisfaction, indicating that satisfaction is a personal affair since it means different things to different people, and previous studies similarly concluded that satisfaction differs from one individual to the other (Choi & Chu, 2000; Poon & Low, 2005). This argument reflects the importance of satisfaction in general and specifically in tourism management, and accordingly, the tourism industry is determined to focus on factors enhancing tourist satisfaction as a key to the industry's success. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the field by looking into some other factors (i.e., novelty seeking and image) that affect tourist satisfaction.

Empirical research has reported that tourist satisfaction is a strong antecedent of destination choice, decision to revisit, and recommendation of the destination to other tourists (Bajs, 2015; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Ramseook-Munhurrin et al., 2015; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2016; San Martin & Del Bosque, 2008). Previous studies have agreed that if tourists are satisfied with a destination, the likelihood of revisiting and recommending it to others increases (Nilplub et al., 2016; Toyama &

Yamada, 2012). In addition, other studies have found that willingness to pay more, intensity of service experience, and loyalty are significantly influenced by satisfaction (Bigné, Gnoth, & Andreu, 2008; Macintosh, 2007), and this finding helps explain why satisfaction and loyalty are seen as key antecedents of performance and profitability in the tourism industry (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Mohamad, Ghani & Izzati, 2014; Wang, Zhang, Gu, & Zhen, 2009). Focusing on these two factors can help destination managers improve tourist products and services (Fornell, 1992).

Based on the above literature, the following hypothesis is formulated:

**H1.** Tourist satisfaction significantly and directly affects destination loyalty.

### 2.2. Destination image, tourist satisfaction, and destination loyalty

Destination image is defined as a tourist's general impression of a destination (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991) and is the sum of the tourist's impressions, ideals, and beliefs about the destination (Andreu, Kozak, Avci, & Cifter, 2006; Assaker & Hallak, 2013). This image is a representation of the tourist's behavior towards a set of signals related to the destination characteristics (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003) and plays a significant role in the tourist's visiting intentions and purchase decisions (Oppermann, 2000; Pike, 2004).

Destination image and loyalty are both important to the overall success of a destination (Ramseook-Munhurrin et al., 2015). However, tourist satisfaction is the interlinking concept that joins these two ideas together. Chi and Qu (2008) and Prayag, Hosany, Muskat, and Del Chiappa (2017) hypothesized a model that links the three concepts in a linear format (i.e., destination image → tourist satisfaction → destination loyalty), and the results of their studies confirmed the proposed model's soundness, indicating that a positive destination image leads to a sense of satisfaction, which in turn contributes to the degree of loyalty. However, despite this model's interesting perspective, there is a lack of studies focusing on the causal relationships among destination image, tourist satisfaction, and destination loyalty. Hernández-Lobato, Solis-Radilla, Moliner-Tena, and Sánchez-García, (2006) also looked at the relationship between destination image, tourist satisfaction, and destination loyalty in their study of American tourists visiting Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo, Mexico, in an attempt to uncover the role of destination image constructs in increasing destination loyalty through tourist satisfaction. The results of their study showed that destination image had a positive relationship with visitors' loyalty to a destination. Thus, these results emphasize the importance of a positive image in promoting tourist revisitiation to a destination.

Zhang et al. (2014), in their meta-analysis of 66 independent studies, proposed a research framework to study the relationship between destination image and visitor loyalty and found that a significant influence of the former on the latter. Particularly, they found that the overall image perception of a destination has a strong impact on visitor loyalty. However, they indicated that future research should utilize more advanced techniques such as structural equation modeling to analyze the mediating effects and to avoid biases created by usual analytical techniques. Therefore, this research utilizes structural equation modeling to test the mediating effect of tourist satisfaction.

In summary, previous studies have pointed out the potential linkages between destination image, tourist satisfaction, and destination loyalty. For managers, understanding the tourists' impression of a destination and their satisfaction in their experience in the destination play a major role in determining the degree of loyalty. Based on this argument, hypotheses 2, 3, and 4 are formulated as follows:

**H2.** There is a positive and significant relationship between destination image and loyalty.

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