



Research Paper

The loyalty of young residents in an island destination: An integrated model



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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the factors that influence the loyalty of young residents as tourists in their home destination in the context of domestic tourism. The interest in studying the loyalty of this particular population segment stems from their consumption potential, their influence, and for the triple role they can play as tourists in the destination, as residents in the destination and as collaborators with local tourism companies. The setting for this study is one of growing domestic tourism in a destination made up of islands, the Canary Islands (Spain). The importance of this kind of research for island destinations arises from the negative impacts of tourism that island destinations suffer more than others, often with negative repercussions on loyalty. This paper studies the role of tourism companies, the product, the place and the young residents themselves in the formation of loyalty. A sample of 678 young residents from the Canary Islands responded to an ad hoc questionnaire of 22 items. The descriptive analysis highlights that young residents value to varying degrees all the variables included in the model (tourism companies, place, product and tourist variables). The discriminant analysis shows that there are no significant differences in the perceptions of young residents according to gender, island of residence or the number of trips made within the destination, which confirms the generational nature of the study and the possibility of extrapolating the results. Using the causal model proposed, the formation of loyalty among young residents is explained. In this model, the variables related to the company and the product hardly influence loyalty formation among young residents when these variables are integrated into the same model with place variables (identity, attachment and familiarity). These variables initiate the chain of cause and effect that culminates in the formation of satisfaction and loyalty among tourists, relegating company and product variables to the background.

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1. Introduction

Tourism has gained ever-growing relevance with significant direct and indirect effects (positive and negative) at an economic, social and environmental level in both continental and island destinations (Sun, Chi, & Xu, 2013; Sánchez, García, & Marchante, 2014). However, owing to increasing competition, greater consumer demand, tourism enterprises are having to invest more and more effort in forming loyalty among tourists. In this context, loyalty is understood as the intention to visit the destination again or recommend it to other people (Ozdemir, Çizel, & Çizel, 2012, p. 115), and is especially important in the case of sun-and-sand

destinations that are at a stagnant or mature stage in their life cycles (Oreja, Parra, & Yanes, 2008).

Residents living in tourist destinations have the potential to be loyal domestic tourists of the destinations in which they reside (Ballantyne, Hughes, Ding, & Liu, 2014; Su & Wall, 2015). Mainly due to the economic and financial crisis that both Europe and the United States suffered, some destinations have become 'tourism safe havens'. Moreover, residents' loyalty has contributed to revenue generation and a deseasonalization in demand (Wang & Xu, 2015). However, despite the interest in and importance of domestic tourism, studies on the loyalty of residents are scarce, especially in the case of island destinations (Sharpley, 2014). This is surprising bearing in mind that positive perceptions among residents may lead to positive effects on their satisfaction and loyalty to the destination: the opposite has also been shown to be the case (Laszlo, Sherman, & Ellison, 2005).

Regarding young residents holidaying in their local destination,

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the loyalty of this segment has rarely been studied in the tourism literature. This is despite numerous studies showing that responsible and sustainable tourism development should be carried out with young residents in mind (e.g. Parker, Charles, & Schaefer, 2004; Jaafar, Noor, & Rasoolimanesh, 2015). In fact, this is a paradox, considering that young residents are a large segment of the population and are, by nature, consumers of both sport and leisure tourism products (Wu & Pearce, 2013).

Although interest in residents as tourists in their home destination has increased, it is still difficult to find studies on residents in island destinations (Sharpley, 2014). Generally, these destinations are characterized by their small populations, as well as by the high costs of transport, and the scarcity of market and infrastructures. Additionally, the literature has demonstrated that island tourist destinations may experience negative economic, cultural, social and environmental effects due to the development of tourism, making it more difficult to achieve loyalty (e.g. Dodds, 2007).

Tourists' loyalty has mainly been studied considering variables related to companies, the product, the tourists themselves and to a lesser degree to the place. However, few studies have carried out an integrated analysis of all these variables collectively. This is an important factor given the complexity of tourism in general and the formation of loyalty in particular: an idea that is in agreement with the proposal of Pearce (2015), who affirms that no simple models exist for loyalty when dealing with destination management.

To respond to this knowledge gap, this paper aims to study the formation of loyalty among young residents in a tourist destination. First, the theoretical framework of loyalty formation among tourists is presented. Subsequently, the research method used and results are described. Although it may seem logical that the economic crisis or the proximity of young residents to their destination may explain the increase in domestic tourism and loyalty of this segment, this paper does not analyze these possible effects. Rather, the focus is on an integrated study of the effect that explanatory variables identified in the literature have on the loyalty of young residents.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Consumer loyalty

Consumer loyalty is one of the central issues for academics and professionals in marketing and management because it facilitates the creation and maintenance of beneficial long-term relationships with consumers (Pan, Sheng, & Xie, 2012; Toufaily, Ricard, & Perrien, 2013). Loyal consumers develop attachment and commitment to the company, are willing to pay more for products and are not attracted by alternative competitive offers (Evanschitzky et al., 2012; Aksoy, 2013). However, efforts made by companies to achieve loyalty do not always meet expectations (Henderson, Beck, & Palmatier, 2011), largely due to the use of inadequate theoretical and operational approaches (Keiningham, Cooil, Aksoy, Andreasen, & Weiner, 2007).

Although there is no consensus on the definition of consumer loyalty, the construct is usually approached from an attitudinal perspective or from a behavioral standpoint (Krasnova, Veltri, Spengler, & Günther, 2013). From the attitudinal perspective, loyalty is a positive willingness to make a new purchase from the same supplier or to recommend it to other consumers. From a behavioral standpoint, loyalty is defined as the actual purchase behavior and recommendation (Yi & Jeon, 2003; Hair, Bush, & Ortinau, 2003). Consumer loyalty is generally defined using the first approach: that is, as the stated intention of repeating a

purchase or recommending the product or the supplier (Oliver, 1999). This perspective can better account for the commitment of the consumer and the study of antecedents and consequences (Melnyk, van Osselaer, & Bijmolt, 2009; Watson, Beck, Henderson, & Palmetier, 2015).

Several authors have highlighted a range of variables that explain consumer loyalty, such as market orientation (Steinman, Deshpande, & Farley, 2000), quality of service (Deng, Lu, Wei, & Zhang, 2010), perceived value (Yee & Faziharudean, 2010), trust (Dagger & Brien, 2010), image (Iglesias, Singh, & Batista-Foguet, 2011) and satisfaction (Coelho & Henseler, 2012), among others.

2.2. Definition and relevance of loyalty in tourism

Tourist loyalty has largely been treated in the literature as an extension of consumer loyalty (Baloglu, 2001; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). This construct refers to the intention or willingness of a tourist to repeat the trip or to recommend the destination to other people (Chen & Gursoy, 2001; Ozdemir et al., 2012). Furthermore, in contrast to the unidimensional considerations of loyalty in the past, nowadays loyalty is recognized as being multidimensional, that is, it possesses affective, cognitive and conative content (Forgas, Palau, Sánchez, & Callarisa, 2012).

There are factors that make loyalty difficult to define, measure and manage. One is that there is no single definition for loyalty, instead there are three (McKercher, Denizci, & Ng, 2012). First is vertical loyalty, which means that tourists are loyal to a specific element of a tourist destination considered as a product (a hotel, for example) or the destination as a whole. Second is horizontal loyalty, in which tourists are loyal to an intermediary in the distribution channel (e.g. loyalty to various hotels). Finally is experiential loyalty, where tourists are loyal to a particular style of holiday and not to others, which leads to the selection of one destination over others (preferences for golf or skiing holidays, for example). Professionals and researchers must therefore clarify this aspect when studying and managing tourist destinations. In this paper, the destination is defined as the Canary Islands as a whole.

Other aspects need to be added to the above definitions. Tourism is an industry based on intangible services, the purchase of which involves risk (Um, Chon, & Ro, 2006). Thus, certain factors like the national or international character of the trip, distance to destination, the life-cycle phase of the destination, the record of repetition, the relationship between tourists and local tourism companies, and tourists' nationality can all affect loyalty (McKercher & Denizci, 2010). Added to these, there is also the possibility that the repetition of the trip may be linked to custom and habit rather than being actually associated with loyalty. Additionally, owing to the non-linear relationship between satisfaction and loyalty, many satisfied tourists state that they will neither return to the destination nor recommend it (Um et al., 2006; Campo & Yagüe, 2007). Finally, the literature on loyalty highlights that repetitive methods and concepts in the study of loyalty have prevented conceptual, methodological and practical boundaries from being overcome (McKercher et al., 2012).

In the literature on tourism, loyalty is considered a strategic variable. Despite its importance, studies on tourism loyalty are relatively recent and have focused almost exclusively on identifying the diverse benefits that loyalty provides to tourism companies and other stakeholders, and the factors that enhance it (Lee, Graefe, & Burns, 2007; Zhang, Fu, Cai & Lu, 2014). The benefits of tourist loyalty include the following. First, repeated trips to the same destination lead to increased revenues, profits and profitability of tourism companies. In many cases loyalty is a direct indicator of tourist satisfaction and an indirect one of other variables, such as value, reputation, perceived quality or market orientation. Moreover, the recommendation to visit the destination

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