



Impact of the destination image on cruise repeater's experience and intention at the visited port of call



Djamel Toudert^{*}, Nora L. Bringas-Rábago

Departamento de Estudios Urbanos y del Medio Ambiente, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, Carretera Escénica Tijuana – Ensenada, Km 18.5, San Antonio del Mar, 22560, Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico

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ABSTRACT

The image incidence of the destination visited by cruise ships in the lived experience, the satisfaction, and the consumption intentions of repeat visitors has been scarcely discussed in tourism literature. However, repeat visitors to the destination represent a great opportunity to increase cruise visitor spending at ports of call. This tends to be inferior to the spending on board or to that in the destination by a tourist traveling by other means. In this sense, a research model is proposed to explore the causal relationships mentioned above in the context of cruise ships that docked at the port of Ensenada, Baja California during a period of three months in 2013. The research methodology consists in formulating a set of hypotheses for a model sustained by empirical data obtained from a two-stage probabilistic sample design and analyzed with Partial Least Squares path modeling (PLS). The results indicate that destination image significantly influences visit experience which has a decisive influence on satisfaction and on the consumption intentions of the repeat visitor. For this segment in particular, the findings highlight the importance of strengthening the experience above satisfaction to expand and diversify consumption.

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1. Introduction

The cruise industry is characterized by a continuous growth which is highlighted by the possibility to stop at about 1000 ports of call, and the expectation of taking 23 million people on a voyage; in 2015, it represented 4% more passengers than in 2014 (Cruise Lines International Association [CLIA], 2015b). During 2013, this global industry generated 117 billion dollars and 891,000 jobs with approximately 38% of total output, and 41% of jobs located only in the United States (CLIA, 2015b). This expansion of the industry continues to place the Caribbean in a dominant destination position with a third of a market share identified –among others – by a 21% growth of the specialty bands from 2009 to 2014 (CLIA, 2015b). In the framework of this circuit, the United States is placed as leader in supply and consumption, registering 26% growth in cruise tourism and 14% in the gross domestic product from 2009 to 2013 (CLIA, 2015b).

Mexico and its ports have benefited from the growth of the cruise ship industry in the region. These ports received an annual

average of 2046 cruises and 5.3 millions passengers from 2010 to 2014 (Secretaría de Comunicación y Transporte [SCT], 2016). The economic impact of cruise ship visits during the 2014–2015 cruise-year was estimated at a total passenger on-shore expenditure of 429.7 million dollars and 14,044 jobs as total employment (Business Research & Economic Advisors [BREA], 2015). Under these national figures, Ensenada's port of call is left with 9.7% of the jobs generated, 14% of visitors, and 11.5% of on-shore spending, holding a second place in the national ranking just behind the port of Cozumel (BREA, 2015).

Beyond the tourist attractions that make Ensenada's port of call a destination of choice, the less than 70 miles from the border with the state of California gives an added value emanated from the implementation of the "Jones Act" (Observatorio Turístico de Baja California [OTBC], 2013). With this regulation, cruises in the off-coast circuits in California are required to dock at foreign ports when a proportion of its crew has a different nationality from the flag of the vessel. This becomes an example of taking mutual advantage of geographical proximity which enables companies to comply with cabotage regulation, and in this case allowing the port of Ensenada to receive a large influx of visitors (Cruise Ensenada, 2008).

From another perspective, the geographic proximity induced by

^{*} Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: toudert@colef.mx (D. Toudert), nbringas@colef.mx (N.L. Bringas-Rábago).

the border context presents itself as an exciting dimension of familiarity which is constructed by repeating visits (Gursoy and McCleary, 2004; Toudert and Bringas-Rábago, 2015a, 2015b). This origin-destination proximity translated into a temporal reference which could mean the duration of the trip also mediates when choosing and buying cruise trips (Decrop and Snelders, 2004, 2005). For these kinds of trips, Gabe et al. (2006) underlined the importance short distances have within origin-destination trips for deciding to return to the visited ports of call. The incidence in tourism literature that sometimes links destination image to the lived experience, visitor's satisfaction, and intentional behavior (Baloglu, 2001; Barroso-Castro, Martín-Armario, & Martín-Ruiz, 2007; Bigné et al., 2001; Chen and Tsai, 2007; Chon, 1992; Puh, 2014) does not seem to be validated for all contexts of repeat visitors in on-shore destinations (Chesworth, 2006; Gabe et al. (2006); Klein, 2003; Marusic et al., 2008; Sanz-Blas and Carvajal-Trujillo, 2014).

From this perspective as well, the lack of sufficient evidence requires further exploration of the impact of such constructs in the consumption intentions of repeat visitors in ports of call (Sanz-Blas and Carvajal-Trujillo, 2014; Sanz-Blas et al., 2015). In fact, these causal links are important for Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) who seek to increase the expenditure generally considered as low (Andriotis and Agiomirgianakis, 2010; Gibson and Bentley, 2007; Larsen et al., 2013).

The lived experience during the stay defines a transcendental aspect of repeat visitor's loyalty destination (Choi and Chu, 2001; Ekinici et al., 2000). Repeat visitors are generally characterized by a different consumption trajectory from first timers who were less likely to expand and diversify their experiences in the destination (Assaker, Vinzi, & O'Connor, 2011; Bigné et al., 2009; Petrick, 2004b). In tourist literature, a satisfied experience is considered a good precedent to satisfaction with the destination which affects repetition of consumption and recommendation to friends and family (Chen and Chen, 2010; Cronin et al., 2000; Kozak and Beaman, 2006; Oliver, 1997; Petrick, 2004d). However, in the case of repeat visitors, the trajectory from lived experience to intentional behavior may obviate its passing through satisfaction which is often reflected in a weak or non-existing determinant linkage (Assaker et al., 2011; Bigné et al., 2009; Petrick, 2004b; Pranic et al., 2013). From this perspective, it would be important for both reflection and action to validate the content of these relations in the context of repeaters in the ports of call.

This study aims to assess the validity of a research model structured by two causal trajectories. The first begins with a destination image defined by a second order construct occurring in satisfaction at the destination, lived experience and intentions (Baloglu, 2001; Barroso-Castro et al., 2007; Chen and Tsai, 2007; Chon, 1992; Puh, 2014). Although this formulation has growing support in tourism literature, in the case of cruise ship visits to ports of call such links were addressed only in two occasions (Sanz-Blas and Carvajal-Trujillo, 2014; Sanz-Blas et al., 2015). Under this scarcity context of available evidence, up to this point, repeat visitors in the destination do not have a study antecedent, granting this research proposal a subsequent academic and operational interest. The second trajectory of the model proposes to link in a causal triangulation framework the lived experience, satisfaction with the destination, and visitor's intentional behavior. For this linkage in particular, despite having consistent support in tourism literature (Bigné et al., 2001; Ekinici et al., 2000; Petrick, 2004d), it has been poorly studied in the ports of call visited by cruise ships (Andriotis and Agiomirgianakis, 2010; Duman and Mattila, 2005; Gabe et al., 2006; Pranic et al., 2013), and it has not been referred yet in the repeat visitor context in those destinations.

2. Literature review and hypotheses

The literature on places visited by cruise ships has shown a growing interest on repeaters in the destination and their future intentions for consumption (Andriotis and Agiomirgianakis, 2010; Brida and Risso, 2010; Brida et al., 2012c). However, for these tourism contexts, we only have the research conducted by Sanz-Blas and Carvajal-Trujillo (2014) that focused on exploring image impact of the port of call in visitors' loyalty. In this sense, this exploration takes on a double interest; the first will generate a comparative reference with the existing evidence, while the other, for the first time, inquires repeaters to the visited destination by cruise.

2.1. Image of visited destination by cruise

Due to the diversification of tourist destinations competing among themselves for a market share, image of the visited destination has become one of the central elements to be evaluated within tourism offer. (Baloglu, 2001; Barroso-Castro et al., 2007; Chen and Tsai, 2007; Puh, 2014). This assessment is generally a complex process that may start with selecting a travel destination; it extends its incidence during the stay and continues its impact until the end of the visit by shaping the visitor's future consumption intentions (Gallarza et al., 2002).

Given that image assessment is difficult to estimate in the overall tourism sector, for cruises it becomes even more complex. Ahmed et al. (2002) and Meng et al. (2011) described an image influenced by both cruise and on-shore destination. Lofgren and Wittel (2005) stated that the first impression of a visitor is generated on board the ship and can affect what is perceived during the rest of the trip. However, despite all this complexity, the on-shore destination image manages to influence, so that travelers descend from their boats in a port of call, and maybe by doing so they will return to visit in the future (Chesworth, 2006; Gabe et al., 2006; Klein, 2003; Marusic et al., 2008).

From the tourism marketing literature perspective, in order to define destination image in the context of its various listed facets, without agreement, Gallaza et al. (2002) used two components of attitude: the cognitive and the affective. The latter was also not involved concurrently in all the studies to conform what is known as the overall destination image (Bigné et al., 2009). Alongside the comprehensive approach of the overall destination image, some studies focused on the functional part defined by the cognitive dimension, and others on the emotional motivation that expresses the affective component (Baloglu and Brinber, 1997; Beerli and Martín, 2004a, b; Lee and Lee, 2009).

In general terms, at least from the work of Baloglu and McCleary (1999a, 1999b) and Stern and Krakover (1993), it was established that the cognitive and affective dimensions impact decisively on the formation of the overall destination image; while Beerli and Martín (2004b) underline a coincidence to be considered in the theoretical field and refer to the cognitive dimension as a precedent of the affective in the image formation.

In regards to the on-shore destination image, the multi-attribute perspective used by Sanz-Blas and Carvajal-Trujillo (2014) consists of four almost similar dimensions: tourist resources, urban environment, infrastructure and atmosphere of the city, and socioeconomic environment. Except in the case of the socioeconomic environment dimension which was found not significant, the rest were all-decisive in shaping the image of the destination. The same results were also corroborated by Beerli and Martín (2004a, b), while Puh (2014) found that the infrastructure dimension was not decisive in image formation.

For this study, the dimensions considered were tourism

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