Cognitive and Affective Destination Image in Tourism Marketing

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Recently, there has been growing interest in approaching destination brand marketing from a psychological perspective ever since the tourism industry became rated as the second highest source of revenue for economies globally, contributing a total of 8.27 trillion dollars to the global economy in 2017 (Statistica, 2018). Destination marketing managers face some major challenges today as they recognize that what people think about a destination's image is more important than what a marketer knows about the destination. Another challenge is the intense competition they face from regional and international rivals, which share the same customer base, resulting in a particular destination losing its market share to them. The escalating competition requires destination managers of all such tourist destinations to revisit their strategies for destination competitiveness and destination image to overcome competitive challenges (Waseema, 2017). The essay recommends effective destination marketing strategies to managers based on the premise it establishes that cognitive image is more influential than the affective image when promoting a destination image. The essay begins by introducing the image models and presents a review of scholarly literature on the subject, comparing and contrasting their findings. Then, it argues, based on the findings, why a cognitive image is preferable and more useful than an affective image by discussing the merits of both models. Finally, it provides recommendations to marketers in the Maldives based on the cognitive model to influence tourists' potential travel-related decision-making and choices through successful marketing campaigns and image building based on the cognitive image.

Theories And Concepts

In a tourism context, images play a vital part in travel destination choices. As services in the tourism industry are often unquantifiable, images sometimes tend to be even more significant than reality. Destination image's commonly cited definition is "the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has a destination" (Mariutti, 2013). In several fields, researchers agree that the image construct includes both affective and cognitive evaluations (Kim Seongseop, 2009). The beliefs or preknowledge about a certain destination evaluate its cognitive image, and the attachment or feelings towards a place evaluate its affective image. The basis is thereby formed from a cognitive evaluation of the destination image, on which the affective responses are built later as a function of the cognitive evaluation. The overall image is formed by combining the two image evaluations and its unique image that forms as a result of exclusive, original or singular aspects of the destination. The

cognitive image is evaluated on prior knowledge acquisition and information and considered more likely to last longer and generate a stable effect (Kim Seongseop, 2009).

Literature Review

To study the influences of cognitive images and affective images on tourism and destination images, extensive literature was reviewed to compare and contrast the available studies on the subject. José Manuel (2017) assessed the influence of cultural events and structural elements and placed brands on destinations' overall image results, suggesting that affective image does not contribute as much to forming an overall destination image as the cognitive image does. It is significant that the place brand influenced both the affective image and cognitive image, whereas the event brand did not influence the destination image much.

A central issue in tourism is the image of the destination's cuisine. Woori Jo Phillips (2013) looked into American tourists' plans to visit South Korea and try Korean food based on the country's knowledge and the image they have of South Korean cuisine. It seems from the study that cognitive country image indirectly influenced attitudes toward consuming Korean food, but the affective image of Korea directly influenced them when it comes to cuisine. Moreover, Seehyung Kim (2008) also suggested that building a destination image is impacted less by the cognitive construct as much as it is by the affective construct. On the other hand, Chun-yang Wang (2010) suggested that the overall tourism destination image, in the case of China, is echoed by both affective image and cognitive image. It is significant that satisfaction itself has an indirect impact on behavioral intentions.

The relationship between cognitive image and destination image on how they influence each other has been investigated by many researchers. Chung-Hsien Lin (2007) examined the role of affective and cognitive components in the construction of destination inclinations in Taiwan from 1,020 residents of Taichung. An important factor was that the affective image itself was impacted by the cognitive image, and because of that, it seems that a significant indirect effect is caused by the destination's cognitive image on the overall destination image by influencing its affective image. Moreover, Alessandro De Nisco (2015) analyzed the association between affective and cognitive country image, tourism satisfaction, post-visit intentions, and destination image at the end of a tourist Italy visit. It is possible that the presence of important correlations between product images and tourism exists through which cognitive images influence destination image, while affective image possibly leads to post-visit intentions for tourism.

Many recent studies have focused on Egypt's destination image. Omneya M Yacout (2015) examined the role of cultural dimensions and demographics in the choice of information sources on tourism and in the building of a destination image. It can be argued that in forming a cognitive image, the internet's role in imagining a destination plays a greater role than travel agents. Moreover, the cognitive image was also considerably connected to the three cultural dimensions and demographics. This was further reinforced by Héctor San Martín (2008) when the correlation between the perceived

image of a tourist location and psychological factors was found through a study of 807 visitors traveling to a holiday destination. The study's backing for the effect of psychological factors, i.e., cultural values and motivations, on the image individuals may have before visiting a particular tourist destination is an important factor in understanding the significant effects of the cognitive image.

The study of film projection has also become an important aspect of destination image studies. Hyounggon Kim (2003) designed an experiment to evaluate whether the extent of watching a particularly popular film altered affective and cognitive images of the destination it represented, as well as a prior acquaintance with it or an increase in interest in visiting it. A positive correlation was found between movies, a form of popular culture, and cognitive destination image. Thus, it can be argued that the cognitive image a film forms can be a significant factor when people choose a destination. Another related issue was photography posted on travel websites, which can play an important role. Hany Kim (2015) investigated how photographs taken by Korean and American tourists on a Russian tour that were posted on travel websites affected travel intentions. It is significant to find from the study that hidden affective characteristics in the photos had a stronger impact than cognitive features on tourists' plans, but it was also possible that some cognitive elements also created lasting effects.

Brand associations have been extensively studied in recent years. Hailin Qu (2011) proposed that the overall destination image is an arbitrator between tourists' future behaviors and brand associations, such as their recommendations to others or planning to revisit. Another related issue was whether the known predictors of the destination image are applicable to residents and tourists and impact their behavioral intentions (Dimitrios Stylidis, 2017). Using questionnaires from a sample of 450 tourists and residents in Eilat over a period of 1 year, the findings confirmed the applicability of the model and found the affective component to have been exerting a greater influence than the cognitive on future behavior in this case. On the other hand, Kirstin Hallmann (2015) developed a model to study what defines a winter sports destination's overall image and how intentions to revisit are affected by it. Cognitive image components incorporated in the study influenced sports tourists more in their decision to visit a winter sports destination, an important factor that suggests the possibility of the cognitive image having a deeper impact on destination choice, especially for sports tourists.

Discussion

An overall analysis of the two main destination image components and a few associative components from the literature studies suggests that despite the importance of affective image in developing the likelihood of tourists choosing to visit a particular destination more, it is actually cognitive image building that shapes perceptions to a larger extent. This is supported by several studies reviewed earlier. The pre-image people hold about a destination is a determinant of their willingness to visit the place and recommend it to their family and friends through word of mouth or by posting comments and photos on social media sites. An important factor is recommendations that could effectively motivate other persons to visit the place by attending the event (José Manuel, 2017).

The first factor is the perceptions regarding personal safety, good restaurants, suitable accommodation, unique architecture or friendly people, which all depend more on the cognitive image (Seehyung Kim, 2008), and secondly, its effect on perceptions of Power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and individualism in a destination that becomes an important factor (Omneya M Yacout, 2015). Moreover, cognitive image building also takes preference because it manages not only to influence destination image individually, but a lasting cognitive image also affects the affective image evaluation of tourists (Alessandro De Nisco, 2015) (Chun-yang Wang, 2010). Thus, what makes a cognitive image more important in development by marketers is that people are disposed towards preferring those natural destinations for which the cognitive image is stronger.

On the other hand, however, both affective and cognitive image components affected the preference for developed destinations (Chung-Hsien Lin, 2007), but that only reinforces our view that cognitive image building takes preference. Moreover, the cognitive image is more influential on the overall image, also because of the fact that the post-visit image of the place also affects that destination's cognitive image, leading to revisits (Hailin Qu, 2011). Thus, it is more important because the individuals' beliefs about the destination form the basis of their mental representation of that tourist and relate to the tourist destination's tangible attributes, such as landscape, cultural attractions, and inner well-being in the mind of the visitor (Héctor San Martín, 2008).

Another related issue is the way cognitive image components relate to natural scenic beauty, wildlife habitat, plant life, natural attractions, recreational facilities, healthcare facilities, additional facilities and general visitor management and accommodation. It can be argued that they greatly affect the destination's cognitive image, according to how the tourists rate the destination and impact their visits more than the affective images (Kirstin Hallmann, 2015). Thus, it is possible that they are more important to be considered in such a situation. Secondly, tourist images that promote something that is uniquely distinctive in nature or features of a destination have a greater effect on the destination's cognitive image and, therefore, are important to highlight when promoting a destination (Hany Kim, 2015). Thus, it can also be argued that the unique image directly correlates to the cognitive image, strengthening our view that tourists are affected more by cognitive images of destinations.

Conclusions

In a world that is increasingly competitive today, it is crucial for tourist places to distinguish themselves from one another. To do so, they need to be knowledgeable and reflective of their own weaknesses, strengths and needs, and at the same time, the environment's competitive nature, in order to differentiate themselves from other destinations. Cognitive images have a significantly high impression on the formation of a destination image, especially on the attractiveness of the destination, quality of experience in that destination, and environment and destination value. These determinants must be well thought out, therefore, when creating a tourism policy for these destinations.

Recommendations

Marketing efforts to create a strong image for a tourist destination's promotional campaign must focus on the transfer, creation and acceptance of this image. As the Maldives is a popular tourist destination whose economy is completely based on tourism, destination marketing managers in the Maldives hospitality industry can organize cultural events because tourists at events in smaller, heritage-rich locations and structural or permanent elements have more influence on the cognitive image. The dominant role of cognitive image in the building of destination image should signal destination managers the need to preserve local historical heritage, culture, traditions, architecture and historical monuments as unique and differentiating elements. The product material should focus on Maldives' safety, cuisine, and accommodations; it should show that the people are tourist-friendly and hospitable and highlight the uniqueness of a destination's architecture. They should also emphasize tourism service quality and the availability of tourism resources.

The physical facilities, the appearance of personnel, and the readiness or willingness of professionals or employees to deliver service or quickly take corrective actions when something unexpected happens should all be exhibited in the marketing campaigns, along with physical characteristics such as facilities for activities, natural scenery, shopping, and various forms of nightlife or entertainment. Information on different destinations within the Maldives or an event or place taking place within cities should also be easily accessible and readily provided online. A person available in a tourism center who is easily contactable for information during convenient hours is also quite helpful, as research suggests. Young tourists do not prefer conventional media such as magazines and depend largely upon the Internet. Therefore, marketing communication that is aimed at young tourists should depend more on interactive media to be able to connect with them more successfully.

The role of television shows or films in promoting the Maldives' destination image should also be considered, as they tend to appeal to middle-income tourists and offer them information not available through other media. Specific attention to the country's impression as a secure and safe environment must also be paid in this regard. Marketing and branding literature should especially highlight Maldives' breathtaking scenery through videos and photographs, which should be professionally captured while also promoting those captured by amateur tourists that highlight unique features about the place, as this improves the cognitive destination value. It is possible that due to the diversity of modern tourism, what works for one region may not work for the other, so it is quite helpful to have events incorporating unique elements that distinguish the Maldives from competitor events such as those held in Seychelles, which will strengthen or reinforce the visitor's link to it.

Cultural/historical attractions can develop place attachment through place dependence and place identity. Moreover, the destination marketers' ability to ensure experiences on-site should, at the very least, meet, if not surpass, the visitor's initial expectations and also plays a large role. Cultural distance is also a factor as individuals' confidence in a tourist destination is often more towards places with cultures comparable to their own cultural values. Hence, promoters in the Maldives should

create specific communications for each group of tourists and segment the market to different tourist types. A more favorable affective image will be achieved for each segment as a result of the tourist destination, thus complementing its cognitive image.

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