

Special Issue on

Consumer behavior in travel and
tourism

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TOURISMOS

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CONTENTS

EDITORIAL	xii
A BRAND EXPERIENCES' CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR VISITORS' ATTITUDINAL LOYALTY	
<i>Androniki Kavoura & Aikaterini Stavrianea</i>	1

The paper examines the antecedents of visitors' attitudinal loyalty to a place, introducing the concepts of brand experiences and place identity that have not been conceptualized in the tourism context. The available literature on place identity, brand experiences, satisfaction and loyalty was reviewed, leading to this conceptual model. The paper discusses the use of brand experiences and place identity in the tourism sector in order to further enhance the knowledge of visitors' loyalty. This is an area, relatively understudied and not fully developed in the tourism sector. Brand experiences and place identity can be significant elements in explaining attitudinal loyalty in the tourism sector. The examination of their role can lead to important implications for marketers of a company or an organization, since it can provide a better understanding of the visitor's consumer behavior. This paper presents a conceptual model of visitors' loyalty incorporating place identity, place brand experiences and satisfaction as antecedents of loyalty, further enhancing our knowledge of visitors'

loyalty. To date, no studies in the tourism context have attempted to conceptualize such a model.

PLACE BRANDING PROCESS: ANALYSIS OF POPULATION AS CONSUMERS OF DESTINATION IMAGE

Marta Plumed, Tatiana Iñiguez Berrozpe & Carmen Elboj Saso 22

In tourist marketing and branding strategies considering residents' perceptions is essential as promotional actions must convey an image that adequately represents the place and its inhabitants. This research considers that a destination brand cannot be successful if the residents' perspective is not taken into account. Thanks to a quantitative study of the case of Zaragoza (Spain), a model of research is presented to analyse the residents' brand attitude, perception of usefulness, and perceived image. The results confirm that the inhabitants' attitude is the main variable to get a good destination image through a place branding strategy, which will depend on the brand's perceived usefulness.

Thus, the present paper verifies the importance of considering residents' perspective in destination image management due to they are both the first producers and consumers of their own place image.

THE SENSORY DIMENSION OF CONSUMER EXPERIENCES IN RURAL TOURIST DESTINATIONS

Dora Agapito, Júlio Mendes, Patrícia Pinto & Hugo de Almeida 43

Despite being well documented that the so-called five senses impact consumer behavior, research following a holistic approach to all modalities of sensory experiences in rural tourist destinations is still scarce. Nevertheless, rural areas are characterized by a rich and diverse collection of endogenous resources, ideal for conceptualizing unique multi-sensory tourist experiences involving and benefiting all destination stakeholders. Hence, this paper proposes a theoretical framework based on the idea that the process of analyzing sensory aspects of consumer experiences as perceived by tourists while experiencing the countryside may contribute to carefully marketing sensory-themed tourist experiences in rural destinations.

Accordingly, considering that rural destinations are calling both for cooperative and creative offerings and communication strategies, this paper discusses the potential of using sensory-informed themes in profiling tourists, a process that assists rural destinations in the planning of the integral tourist experiences aiming at the optimal use of local resources.

LESBIANS AS TOURISTS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF TOURIST MOTIVATIONS IN MEXICO

Carlos Monterrubio & Mercy D. Barrios

64

This paper is an exploratory research of the tourist motivations of lesbians in a context different from those previously studied. Evidence from Western countries suggests that sexuality plays a quite important role in tourism by homosexuals, at least for gay men. By recognising that males and females experience tourism differently, this study aims to contribute to an expanded and more specific understanding of lesbians as tourists in the context of Mexico. Based on qualitative interviews – unlike previous findings based on empirical evidence – this study suggests that sexuality is not as important for determining lesbians' tourism experiences as has been commonly argued. In this study, other aspects, particularly cultural experiences, seem to dominate in lesbians' tourism motivations. While this study does not, by any means, discard the importance of sexuality in lesbian tourism motivations, it does postulate that other factors are as important as sexuality in shaping the tourism experiences of lesbians, at least in a non-Western context.

THE CLASSIFICATION OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS BASED ON CULTURAL ACTIVITIES-BASED SEGMENTATION: THE CASE OF PENANG, MALAYSIA

ShidaIrwana Omar, Gelareh Abooli & Badaruddin Mohamed

91

This study evaluates the perceptions of cultural tourists regarding the importance and performance of Penang's attributes. Both activities-based analysis and importance-performance analysis were used. The former was applied to identify cultural tourists from all international tourists to Penang; whereas the latter evaluated their perceptions concerning Penang's attributes.

The findings reveal that Penang's cultural tourists primarily perceive the image of Penang according to its World Heritage Site status.

Additionally, Penang's cultural and historical uniqueness were the second most important attributes, having satisfactory performance, ranking just after the island's image.

A discussion of the results and suggestions for further studies are presented.

VISITOR'S SATISFACTION MEASUREMENT IN ANIMAL PARKS: THE CASE OF PARC SAFARI IN QUÉBEC, CANADA

Mohamed Reda KHOMSI & Dominic Lapointe

112

The measurement of visitor satisfaction of a zoological park, where wildlife is free and not in captivity, is an issue that receives growing interest in recent decades. The postmodern lifestyle we adopt causes this type of park to be considered as a last stand against the urbanization of the area. Through this study, we attempted to measure visitor satisfaction of a zoological park located in Quebec that provides a circuit where visitors can get direct contact with wildlife in its natural environment.

The results of the study demonstrated the importance of the proximity to the animals in the assessment of visitor satisfaction. However, the price remains the main explanatory component of satisfaction, followed by the overall appearance and park cleanliness.

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF CONFERENCE ATTENDEES' POST-PARTICIPATION BEHAVIOUR

Anahita Malek

133

With a specific focus on the conference segment of the MICE industry, this study extends the growing body of knowledge by testing a modified version of approach adapted from Severt et al. (2007) to a new classification of conference type (international and academic). A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from 497 international conference attendees. The results of the multiple regression analysis showed that performance and satisfaction, respectively, have a direct positive significant relationship on post-participation intentions of international conference attendees. The mediating effect of satisfaction is also supported. The results of this study can be considered as an important tool for conference organizers, universities and associations to attract future international academic attendees and improve the overall quality of their academic events.

WAITING TIMES AT THEME PARKS: HOW MANAGERS INTERPRET WAITING

Gilda Hernandez-Maskivker, Gerard Ryan & Maria del Mar Pàmies 158

This paper explores how managers of theme parks interpret waiting times from a services marketing perspective. In-depth interviews are undertaken in order to uncover manager's perceptions of waiting.

'The inevitability of waiting times', 'the negative interpretation of waiting times' and 'neutral waiting times' are three themes that emerge from this qualitative study.

A deeper analysis of the waiting experience may contribute to enhanced strategies for managing waiting in theme parks, improved evaluations of the service and increased customer satisfaction. Finally, some practical tips for practitioners are proposed in the form of management takeaways.

INCENTIVE PROGRAMS: CONSUMER-DRIVEN SOLUTIONS IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Erin Harris & Carol Kline 185

Incentive programs are a common tool used by businesses and other organizations to encourage specific behavior in customers and employees. This research note provides detailed information on how incentive programs may be an effective tool for encouraging sustainable travel-related purchases. A discussion outlining the existing research on green consumerism and consumer-driven solutions for encouraging sustainability is followed by industry and academic information on incentive programs. A focus group study then builds on this existing knowledge by looking at young professionals from Raleigh and Greenville, North Carolina to determine the effectiveness of incentive programs at encouraging green consumerism while traveling. Analysis of the resulting dialogue confirmed incentive programs may be an effective tool for encouraging sustainable travel-related purchases. Based on this result, recommendations provide design and logistical considerations that are important to take into account when trying to create an effective incentive program for sustainable tourism marketed to young professionals.

JOURNAL AIMS AND SCOPE	195
NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS	201

EDITORIAL

Although the study of consumer behavior spans many decades, today's changed environment requires that marketers revise existing theories and frameworks to a new world in which resources are finite and consumers are more spending savvy (Kotler, 2011). On the one hand, it is necessary to recognize that individuals may behave differently in diverse situations, and may consume various products in distinct ways. On the other, consumer behavior is dynamic: the environment within which consumers behave is constantly changing- social attitudes vary. Therefore marketers should base their understanding, segmentation and targeting of consumers on personalized data about these individuals (Evans, Jamal, Foxall, 2009).

In addition, the world is getting smaller in terms of travel, communication, trade and population movements, so market diversity should be taken into consideration, especially the cultural differentiations coming from cognitive elements and beliefs, values and norms, as well as signs, signals and symbols (Johnson, 1962). The services market, including travel and tourism services, is shaped by cultural characteristics of consumers, as well as guest countries' cultural specificities. Thus, travel and tourism, due to their particular characteristics, may be shaped by different factors and relationships (Pizam and Mansfeld, 1999). The need to understand the unique dimensions and consumer behavior in these industries is paramount in order to effectively compete in an increasingly challenging environment (Pizam and Mansfeld, 1999).

Research on consumer behavior in travel and tourism is growing, but the knowledge and understanding achieved in this area is not yet in line with the economic importance of this industry (Crouch, Perdue, Timmermans and Uysal, 2004). In addition, many studies in consumer behavior, including those in tourism, investigate the perceptions, attitudes and behavior of individuals in limited geographical contexts. This is a concern because despite the global access to information, products and services that technological breakthroughs have brought about, a divergence of cultural values and consumption systems around the world continues to be prevalent (de Mooij and Hofstede, 2002). Thus, we should ask ourselves to what extent theories and frameworks derived from and tested in specific countries and environments may be relevant to other geographical contexts. Knowledge that can be applied by practitioners in a particular situation

requires comprehensive research that covers not only varied geographies, but also diverse consumer groups.

The papers, included in this special issue, are chosen in order to provide an overview of some of the significant consumer behavior topics that are more meaningful in tourism and travel. This collection of papers discuss a wide range of topics that include place branding, sensory experiences, tourist motivations, sustainable tourism behavior, etc., providing insights into the ways that individuals choose, perceive and experience tourism and travel. The collection of articles is also valuable in that it discusses examples that are based on different geographical contexts, including Spain, Mexico, Canada and Malaysia. The insights obtained are not only relevant from a theoretical perspective, as they advance the state of knowledge of consumer behavior in tourism, but they are also useful for practitioners. The cases discussed are a good example of bridging the gap between theory and practice, by offering practical suggestions to destination managers based on sound research. The following section will present the outline of this special issue.

STRUCTURE OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

The special issue starts with the topic of place branding, which represents an important theme in the tourism consumer behavior literature. Place Brand is seen as a network of associations in the consumers' mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioral expression of a place, which is embodied through the aims, communication, values, and the general culture of the place's stakeholders and the overall place design (Keller, 1993; Zenker and Braun, 2010). In the first article, Kavoura and Stavrianea present a conceptual model of visitor's attitudinal loyalty to a place, discussing how brand experiences and place identity provide an enhanced knowledge of consumer's loyalty behavior in tourism. The authors proposed model builds on the sense of place literature and provides insights into how tourists experience brands and convey identity to a place. In order to successfully market a destination, a better understanding of the factors that lead to loyalty towards a place is paramount.

Continuing with the topic of place branding, Plumed Lasarte, Iñiguez Berrozpe and ElbojSaso delve into the issue of how residents' perceptions of the destination need to be taken into account for a successful place branding strategy. These authors present an empirical model that examines the factors influencing the local population's acceptance of the territorial

brand, and how these perceptions of the inhabitants concerning the place in turn affect the brand image of the destination. This study, carried out in Zaragoza, Spain, reinforces the importance of engaging residents in the place branding activities and calls for further research to be carried out in other different geographical and cultural contexts.

Following this article, the topic of sensory experiences in tourism is next introduced. Agapito, Mendes, Pinto and Almeida discuss rural tourism experiences focusing on the dimensions pertaining to the five senses. The authors propose that examining sensory aspects of the tourist experience in the rural environment may provide a better understanding of how tourists perceive the countryside, which in turn may be used to better market rural destinations. According to Dean MacCannell (1989) contemporary tourism constitutes a modern ritual, one that is analogous to the performance of sacred rites in premodern societies and it entails the Western subject's search for 'authenticity' in 'other cultures', 'other places', and 'other historical periods'. The article proposes a model based on the sensory appeal of the destination. In this regard, focusing on the perceptions of the destination by the tourists through all five senses may also help create memorable tourism experiences that are essential to the success of the destination.

The study of tourist motivations is another mainstream topic in the tourism consumer behavior literature. However, although many investigations into tourist motivations exist, not many of them have attempted to explain the rationales of homosexuals' travel. Additionally, most of the research in this area has focused on consumers from Western developed countries. Thus, with their exploratory research, Monterrubio and Barrio provide an important contribution to the literature as they expand the understanding of the motivations of lesbian tourists as a specific traveler group, taking into consideration the culture of Mexico as the background for the research. Using in-depth interviews, the study distinguishes itself from previous research by suggesting that sexuality is not as important in determining tourist experiences of lesbian tourists as stated in prior research in Western-based contexts. In this sense, the authors argue that travelers' behavior, and in particular that of homosexual travelers, needs to be studied in developing countries, as new insights different from those obtained from samples from developed countries may be obtained in this manner.

In addition to motivation, tourism destinations may use different types of segmentation methods to help them address diverse tourist markets. This is the focus of Omar, Aboali and Mahomed's study, as it evaluates the perceptions of cultural tourists and attempts to classify them according to cultural-activities based segmentation. The authors also use an importance-performance analysis in order to analyze the attributes of Penang in Malaysia, identifying those aspects of the destination that may be used to target tourists more effectively.

The next paper deals with the topic of visitors' satisfaction in animal parks, through the case study of Parc Safari in Quebec, Canada. While consumer satisfaction is an important variable, widely studied both in the general consumer behavior and tourist behavior literature, Khomski and Lapointe offer a different perspective as they analyze the issue within the context of animal parks in which wildlife is free. Although the research provides conclusive evidence concerning the importance of the proximity of the visitors to the animals as a source of satisfaction, it also determines that price and appearance and cleanliness of the park remain the foremost explanatory constituents of satisfaction.

While the previous papers have dealt with the behavior of leisure and cultural tourists, Malek's study is concerned with the post-participation behavior of conference attendees. The author tests a model of post-purchase behavior, determining that performance and satisfaction are significantly related to the intention of the attendees to recommend the conference and participate again in the future. The research is based on a sample of international attendees to several conferences in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, providing significant insights to conference organizers and suggestions for future marketing of international conferences.

In their paper on waiting times at theme parks, Hernandez-Maskivker, Ryan and Pàmies evaluate this important topic from the perspective of the managers and their particular interpretation. The research, based on a qualitative study of theme park managers' opinions, not only emphasizes the importance of negative perceptions of waiting but also considers the strategic implications and the practical aspects of dealing with the issue. Thus, several challenging issues related to the problem of waiting are identified, and managerial implications are suggested.

Finally, the special issue closes with a research note that addresses the role of incentives in encouraging sustainable travel behavior. In their study on consumer driven solutions in sustainable tourism, Harris and Cline investigate in detail the perceptions of young professionals concerning incentives programs that address green consumerism while traveling. The research is qualitative in nature, based on focus groups, and aims to answer the question of whether incentive programs are effective tools for encouraging sustainable travel purchase decisions, and which specific programs are most appealing. The authors conclude that there is a market readiness for such programs and call for further research on this important topic. Following Kotler (2011), Harris and Cline defend the need to create marketing solutions that address the sacrifices that consumers necessarily make to select sustainable travel products.

CONCLUSION

This special issue considers a wide-range of interesting topics related to contemporary marketing perspectives of the tourism and travel industry, and reveals trends in consumer behavior studies. Together, these papers provide a meaningful overview of the state of research in consumer behavior in travel and tourism and constitute an important source of knowledge in the field.

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A BRAND EXPERIENCES' CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR VISITORS' ATTITUDINAL LOYALTY

Androniki Kavoura

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The paper examines the antecedents of visitors' attitudinal loyalty to a place, introducing the concepts of brand experiences and place identity that have not been conceptualized in the tourism context. The available literature on place identity, brand experiences, satisfaction and loyalty was reviewed, leading to this conceptual model. The paper discusses the use of brand experiences and place identity in the tourism sector in order to further enhance the knowledge of visitors' loyalty. This is an area, relatively understudied and not fully developed in the tourism sector. Brand experiences and place identity can be significant elements in explaining attitudinal loyalty in the tourism sector. The examination of their role can lead to important implications for marketers of a company or an organization, since it can provide a better understanding of the visitor's consumer behavior.

This paper presents a conceptual model of visitors' loyalty incorporating place identity, place brand experiences and satisfaction as antecedents of loyalty, further enhancing our knowledge of visitors' loyalty. To date, no studies in the tourism context have attempted to conceptualize such a model.

Keywords: place identity, brand experiences, loyalty, satisfaction, tourism marketin

In the highly antagonistic market of leisure and tourism, customer loyalty and satisfaction have become even more important. Understanding the way visitors choose a place, evaluate superior brand experiences, become delighted, attached and loyal to a place is, therefore, a highly significant goal for every place brand marketer. These issues have recently attracted the attention of those academicians and practitioners in the tourism sector who are interested in shaping their value propositions and communication messages even more carefully, and in treating the visitors of a place well (Beckman, Kumar and Kim, 2013; Hanna and Rowley, 2013). People consume products and services and they share experiences before buying them, during the purchase process and while they consume them in various contexts (Skinner, 2008; Brakus *et al.*, 2009: 52; Agapito *et al.*, 2013). Further research on the meaning of brand experiences should take place, since the experiences provided by brands, especially in the cognitive, affective and social context, may affect consumer behavior; thus, research on the experience concept, especially in the services industry, is encouraged (Brakus *et al.*, 2009). In fact, further research will allow for the incorporation and examination of the significance of all dimensions. Do place brand experiences influence tourists' choices about a place? Do they influence place attachment for this specific place?

People connect socially and emotionally with specific places and they want to continue to be intimate with these places; this is what place attachment represents (Hidalgo and Hernández, 2001: 274; Yuksel *et al.*, 2010: 274; Williams and Patterson, 1999; Kyle *et al.*, 2004; Prayag and Ryan, 2012: 343; Casakin *et al.*, 2015). Yuksel *et al.* (2010: 274) argue that place attachment has an 'emotional connection' through 'both direct and/or indirect experiences', and therefore it needs to be further examined (Casakin *et al.*, 2015). Since the literature has shown that not much research has taken place on this topic, this paper aims to examine the emotional significance that a person attributes to a place. If social ties - as well as emotional attachment with an area - grow, people develop a sense of belonging that is significant to them. The connection that a visitor can develop with a place is reinforced through place identity, place attachment, and the experiences with the place brand. Destinations are amalgams of many tourism products and services that are promoted and consumed by a

system of factors (Buhalis, 2000; Kazancoglu and Dirsehan, 2014; Govers, 2015).

The attachment that people have for different settings and environments may influence consumer behavior, including loyalty (Yuksel *et al.*, 2009). Also, according to the literature, consumers with greater brand experiences will develop higher levels of brand loyalty (Iglesias *et al.*, 2011; Nam *et al.*, 2011; Prayag and Ryan, 2012; Kazancoglu and Dirsehan, 2014). The paper proposes that brand experiences have positive direct and indirect effects on loyalty. The desired outcomes are mediated by the visitors' overall satisfaction, but are also affected by the degree to which the visitor feels engaged and committed, as part of the place brand.

Thus, the paper argues for the role of place identity and brand experiences in association with tourists' satisfaction and loyalty, and presents a conceptual model of visitor's loyalty that incorporates brand experiences, satisfaction and place identity. The study investigates (i) the effects of brand experiences on satisfaction and place brand loyalty, (ii) the relationship between place identity and tourists' loyalty, and (iii) the role and effects of place identity on satisfaction and loyalty. According to the literature and extending the previous research of Brakus *et al.* (2009) who examined the effects of brand experiences on satisfaction and loyalty, a proposed model of the antecedents of visitor's loyalty that incorporates brand experiences, satisfaction and place identity is conceptualized.

Place attachment and place identity are interesting concepts which add to current research on places as brands. Brand is associated with different target groups and their mental representations and evaluations (Keller and Lehmann, 2006), as well as with brand associations (Aaker, 1996, 2014). In their study of the categorization and conceptualization of experience, Pine and Gilmore (1998) put forth a framework of experiences by categorizing them across two dimensions, customer participation and connection or relationship with the environment - that is the degree that a customer is connected to an event. According to their study, the four realms of experience are entertainment, educational, esthetic and escapist.

Schmitt (1999) distinguished experiences based on what the consumers can see, how they feel, think or behave and whether they join a specific group. However, the literature focuses on what is on offer from the supply side and

not on what people actually want or what they understand. In fact, the senders of communication messages through advertisements of a place or a region, should specify what they want to project to the rest of the world, so as to have a consistent message to reach the demand (Konečnik and Go, 2008: 178-179).

To date, no studies in the tourism context have attempted to conceptualize such a model, which would further add to the knowledge on visitors' loyalty. Better understanding of place attachment through place identity may advance the knowledge of the sense of place and its influence on the way visitors behave. The significance attached to place identity from the visitors' point of view needs to be further examined because it will shed light on how to market places. In that way, a more critical approach towards the implementation of marketing activities may take place, especially by state organizations, mainly in charge of managing the tangible and intangible assets of a state, region, city or place. Experiences, as complex phenomena that involve sensory, intellectual, affective and behavioral aspects (Brakus *et al.*, 2009), need better understanding by policy makers, marketers and advertisers in order to plan and manage all customer touch points to support visitors' experience (Brodie, 2009; Frow and Payne, 2009; Kazancoglu and Dirsehan, 2014).

The researchers searched well-known databases which were Science Direct, Scopus, Emerald, Eric, E-List for available literature and search engines such as Google Scholar. The specific keywords under examination were the ones which were associated with the abovementioned concepts.

PLACE BRAND EXPERIENCES

Brand experiences are perceived by each person according to many different stimuli which occur when the person is connected with the brand in a direct (physical experience) or in an indirect (virtual presentation in an advertisement) way (Brakus *et al.*, 2009: 52-53). Brand experiences exist even when a person may not be related with a product or a service (Lee and Kang, 2012).

Brakus *et al.* (2009) distinguish four aspects of brand experiences: affective, behavioral, sensory and intellectual, and discuss the different degree of influence that may emerge from them. This study applies these four experiential dimensions (Brakus *et al.*, 2009) to place branding in the tourism context, an investigation which has not been made before. Place brand experiences may include intellectual experience that can stimulate a visitor's curiosity to learn more about a place brand. Place brand experiences also refer to the relation created between a person and a brand when the person thinks about the brand (Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010). Consumers may use convergent thinking to analyze communication meanings about a specific area or employ divergent thinking about potential experiences they may have in a place; these are sometimes stimulated by slogans, web sites and other media communications (Brakus *et al.*, 2009; Fotis *et al.*, 2011; Hays *et al.*, 2013), or by other heuristics used by marketers that appeal to their needs.

The dimension of sensory brand experiences includes aesthetic and sensory qualities such as visual, auditory, tactile, gustative and olfactory stimulations (Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010). The visual stimulation is the most significant aspect (Schmitt, 1999; Schmitt, 2008). Colors, proportion, size and shape, architecture, landscapes, buildings, decorations, and light contribute to the provision of an aesthetic sense of a place brand (Uusitalo, 2010; Lew, 2011; Beckman *et al.*, 2013). A visitor also senses smells, tastes (local food), and sounds (music, local language) that are distinct in each place and are considered to be significant (Agapito *et al.*, 2013).

The behavioral aspect is associated with physical experiences, including the way one lives and how s/he uses a brand (Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010). Behavioral experiences that one chooses to have in a specific place illustrate the way one lives (Schmitt, 2008) and can encompass different types of experiences; these can either be associated with enjoyment, management of free time at night or enogastronomy (Bitsani and Kavoura, 2012; Beckman *et al.*, 2013).

Affective brand experiences include feelings and moods evoked by a brand, emotions that can be mild (moods) or intense (feeling and sentiments evoked by exceptional service experience for example) (Schmitt, 1999). Irrespective of the degree of influence, different emotions may result

inaffective experiences such as satisfaction, feeling of belonging to a group, happiness (Schmitt, 1999; Kim *et al.*, 2010). These feelings contribute to a person remembering a place brand (Gnoth, 2007; Beckman *et al.*, 2013). In their study about brand experiences, Brakus *et al.* (2009) also argued that participants referred to social aspect inferences such as “It’s like a membership in an exclusive, country-clubbish community”, “I am part of a smarter community” (Brakus *et al.*, 2009: 55). The authors nonetheless, brought together affective and social items (Brakus *et al.*, 2009: 58) but did not further examine the social context of brand experiences. This latter topic needs further analysis (Brakus *et al.*, 2009: 57). Accordingly, this paper aims to examine Brakus *et al.*’s aspects of brand experience, including its affective, emotional and social dimensions that are also present in place attachment.

PLACE IDENTITY-AN ASPECT OF PLACE ATTACHMENT

The aspects of place attachment are place dependence, place identity and affective attachment (Yuksel *et al.*, 2010: 275-276). Hidalgo and Hernández (2001, p. 279) and Gu and Ryan (2008:641) argued for the physical and social aspects of place attachment, determining that the social part is more significant; however, this is an issue which has not been fully investigated and needs further research (Prayag *et al.*, 2013). Much weight has not been put on the social dimension of place attachment and this research aims to examine this perspective based on the fact that the literature calls for further research on this topic.

One component of place attachment, that of place identity, has been examined by Proshansky (1978: 155) and is associated with “those dimensions of the self that define the individual’s personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals and behavioral tendencies and skills relevant to this environment”. Place identity is related to a sense of belonging and attachment (Hummon, 1986). According to Breakwell (1986, 1992, 1993), place identity is characterized by four principles: a person’s desire to maintain his personal

distinctiveness, continuity that is carried on through the importance places have for a person, self-esteem and self-efficacy which is associated to the functionality of the environment in which the person lives. Yuksel *et al.* (2010) in fact argued that the aforementioned is associated with one's self-identification, such as gender identification, where a place may be related to one person and may lead to emotional bonds with it.

The affective dimension of place attachment can be further researched since Yuksel *et al.* (2010: 282), Prayag and Ryan (2012: 342) and Casakin *et al.*, (2015) demonstrated its salience for the 'closeness' that a visitor has for a place. Affective attachment is the emotional tie with a particular setting, and is usually combined under place identity; thus, in the proposed model of this paper, the affective dimension will be examined under place identity. Place dependence, the other component of place attachment, is associated with the physical or functional attachment, and illustrates the importance of a place to provide the setting for desired activities (Stokols and Shumater, 1981; Kyle *et al.*, 2004: 125; Yuksel *et al.*, 2010: 275). In regard to the limited existing studies, place identity was found to have stronger effects than place dependence, the other dimension of place attachment (Kyle *et al.*, 2004; Yuksel *et al.*, 2010: 282). On the other hand, place dependence is associated with those elements of a place that contribute to someone's personal needs and objectives and do not exist in other places (Alexandris *et al.*, 2006). Attachment can be formed with buildings, landscapes, environments and nations, real places mythical, hypothetical and imagined (Yuksel *et al.*, 2010: 275). Thus, it is not only the physical boundaries of a place that may create attachment to a person or people. Places are abound of social relations that bring people together (Hidalgo and Hernández, 2001: 275; Casakin *et al.*, 2015; Hanna and Rowley, 2015).

Place identity is associated with what the location symbolizes (Yuksel *et al.*, 2010: 276). The role of place identity refers therefore, to a symbolic, emotional and affective attachment which involves bonding and experiences (Mlozi *et al.*, 2013). Place identity is associated with a sense of being a city person, a small-town person, of a country person (Hummon, 1986: 3), locating in that way, the self within a specific community which is spatially defined. At the same time, the sense of 'placelessness,' associated with a symbolic placement which is not only directly related to a residential

status (Hummon, 1986: 4; Hidalgo and Hernández, 2001; Casakin *et al.*, 2015), is acknowledged. The person situates himself/herself in the world, identifies with others, “forging in that way, a sense of belonging and attachment” (Hummon, 1986: 4, 6; Hidalgo and Hernández, 2001: 274) portraying the type of person someone is, based on values, interest and knowledge. In that way, people may identify with different forms of community - like a city or a nation (Hidalgo and Hernández, 2001: 274)-, develop feelings of attachment, such as that they “belong in that kind of community, that they are of this kind of person” (Hummon, 1986: 21), but still this is an area that needs to be further examined.

Most approaches in relation to the identity of a place take into consideration cognitive rather than sentimental factors (Iglesias *et al.*, 2011: 572). The use of both cognitive and emotional elements leads to the creation of a concise and holistic identity of a place, which will then lead to its branding. The aim of the current study focuses on the symbolic, emotional and affective bonds that people may have with a place. The proposed model employs the place identity dimension of place attachment.

SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY IN TOURISM

Satisfaction, as well as loyalty and its conceptualization and measurement, have been the object of extensive research in the service context (Buttle and Burton, 2002; Bennett and Rundle-Thiele, 2004; Stavrianea, 2010, Velasquez *et al.*, 2011). Loyalty has long been considered as a multi-dimensional concept (Rundle-Thiele, 2005a). Much of the research approaches consumer loyalty from two perspectives: behavioral loyalty (as repeat purchases), and attitudinal loyalty (Oliver, 1997). The latter, is associated with the psychological commitment that one makes in the purchase act, such as intention to purchase and to suggest such a purchase to someone else, without necessarily taking into account the actual repeat purchase behavior (Jacoby, 1971; Rundle-Thiele, 2005b). In the tourism literature, it is argued that the aforementioned is more appropriate to study travelers' loyalty, because travelers can be loyal to a place even when they do not repeatedly visit the place (Chen and Gursoy, 2001; Nam

et al., 2011). Taking also into consideration van Doorn *et al.*'s. (2010) study, which argued that customer engagement behaviors go beyond transactions and may be defined as "a customer's behavioral manifestations that a brand or firm focuses on, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers", in this research, loyalty is defined as attitudinal loyalty and is defined as the visitor's intention to visit or the willingness to suggest a place brand to another person. Interested parties such as stakeholders, destination management organizations, tourism marketers, the local community of a place who are associated with place marketing aim to fulfill visitors' satisfaction because of the strong relation between customer satisfaction and loyalty (Anderson and Fornell, 1994; Oliver, 1997; Mittal and Kamakura, 2001; Baker and Crompton, 2000; Bigne *et al.*, 2005; Stavrianea, 2010; Yuksel *et al.*, 2010; Yoon and Uysal, 2005) taking into consideration sustainability issues because these parties usually have limited knowledge and awareness about the sustainability of a destination while promoting it (Ozdemir *et al.*, 2015). The literature on satisfaction has significant differences ranging from cognitive to affective perspectives (Del Bosque and San Martin, 2008; Stavrianea, 2010). Satisfaction emerges when a person reaches a goal and the vehicles to do so can be based on products or services that offer different levels of fulfillment to the person (Oliver, 1997: 13).

In regard to place satisfaction, Stedman (2002) was among the first to conceptualize it. According to Stedman (2002), satisfaction for a place means that a person's needs are met in the place through quality offerings. When researching satisfaction the clarification of whether this construct is conceptualized as a facet (attribute-specific) or as an overall (aggregate) concept is needed; additionally, whether satisfaction is viewed as transaction-specific (encounter satisfaction) or as cumulative (satisfaction over time) becomes important (Hoest and Knie-Andersen, 2004; Dimitriades, 2006; Stavrianea, 2010). The literature has argued that overall satisfaction is a better indicator of future loyalty and behavioral intentions (Fornell *et al.*, 1996; Johnson *et al.*, 2001; Stavrianea, 2010; Nam *et al.*, 2011). In the present study, satisfaction is conceptualized as an overall, emotional response of the consumer to the place.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS DEVELOPMENT AND PROPOSED MODEL

In designing a model for tourist's loyalty for a place brand, several theoretical bases were taken into consideration. The focus is on the antecedents of visitor's loyalty. By incorporating in this framework Brakus' work on brand experience, including the dimensions that he proposed in 2009 as well as the concept of place attachment, this paper differentiates from previous models, such as the ECSI Index that was for example applied in Chitty et al. (2007). To date, no studies in the tourism context have attempted to conceptualize such a model.

The proposed conceptual model of place brand loyalty includes four latent constructs associated with six research propositions. The more positive the brand experiences are for the individuals and the more dimensions are assimilated, the more satisfied a visitor will feel. Brand experiences vary in strength and intensity (Brakus *et al.*, 2009) and also may vary in valence. A tourist can feel positive or negative, as well as along lasting or short-lived brand experiences which influence loyalty and satisfaction (Brakus *et al.*, 2009).

If people obtain exciting outcomes through the experiences they have with a place or a brand, we expect that those consumers or visitors -if we refer to the tourism literature- would want to repeat these experiences. Although we argue that brand experiences positively affect satisfaction and that the relationship between brand experiences and loyalty is mediated by satisfaction, in accordance with the literature (Brakus *et al.*, 2009), we also examine the direct effects of brand experiences on consumer loyalty. Thus, we expect that:

P1. Place brand experiences have a positive direct effect on a visitor's overall satisfaction.

P2. Place brand experiences have a positive direct effect on a visitor's loyalty towards the place brand.

A key consequence of satisfaction is loyalty. Research has verified the relationship between the two constructs, both theoretically and empirically, in various markets (Anderson and Fornell, 1994; Mittal and Kamakura,

2001; Stavrianea, 2010). Previous research in the tourism context shows that satisfaction leads to intention to return, willingness to pay more and willingness to recommend the place to others (Baker and Crompton, 2000; Bigne *et al.*, 2005; Yoon and Uysal, 2005). Therefore, we propose that:

P3. Satisfaction affects loyalty towards the place brand positively.

Conclusions about a place's identity and brand experiences occur in response to any contact with the place brand. The development and update of a place identity, though, is an inferential process (Proshansky, 1978). A place identity may be inferred from people related to the place brand (e.g. local residents, tourism professionals), or from the culture, the characteristics of the place, symbols or communications. An important addition to these inference factors could be brand experience. A cognition about a place's identity represented by memories, feelings, ideas, attitudes, values, preferences, meanings, behavior and experiences that are related to the variety and complexity of the physical setting (Kyle *et al.*, 2003) can be aided by the consumer's attention to specific sensory, affective, intellectual or behavioral experiences.

This information may contribute to the place's identity formation. We propose that the experience that a person has with a place will influence that individual's sense and understanding of the identity of that place. Thus, we argue that brand experiences have an effect on place identity. The higher the overall rating of brand experiences, the more probable that the consumer will enrich the place with identity associations. Therefore we expect that:

P4. Brand experiences have a positive direct effect on place identity.

In addition to the direct effects of place brand experiences on satisfaction and loyalty, the purpose of this paper is to examine the indirect effects and the role of place identity. Proshansky (1978) argues that a person's place identity is formulated based on influences and ideas related to the physical environment. Thus, we may argue that if one thinks that a place is part of his/her existence, s/he will be satisfied.

Nevertheless, the existing relevant research does not provide concurring results about satisfaction. Brocato (2006) contends that as satisfaction becomes more favorable, place identity and affective attachment should increase, while other researchers argue that judgements concerning customer

satisfaction could be influenced by the type and level of place attachment (Wickhman, 2000; Halpenny, 2006; Scott and Vitardas, 2008).Yuksel *et al.*(2010: 281) also supported the effect of place identity on satisfaction in regard to holiday experiences. Therefore, in this conceptual model we argue that place identity affects satisfaction positively.

P5 Place identity affects satisfaction positively.

Previous research has demonstrated the link between place attachment and loyalty (Brocato, 2006; Lee *et al.*, 2007; Simpson and Siquaw, 2008, Alexandris *et al.*, 2006), though the path between place attachment's dimension -place identity- and loyalty has not been fully examined (Yuksel *et al.*, 2010; Prayag and Ryan, 2012). A person is symbolically related to a place through place identity (Stedman, 2002) and there is a psychological connection that has evolved in time (Williams and Patterson, 1999), thus, a person may develop a form of emotional -symbolic attachment to a place, leading to place loyalty. In other words, the more an individual identifies with a place that reflects his/her own identity, the more loyal s/he will be. Therefore, we argue that:

P6. Place identity has a direct positive effect on loyalty towards the place brand.

Insert Figure 1 about here

This conceptual model incorporates visitors' loyalty, place identity, place brand experiences and satisfaction. Its contribution is further presented in the next section.

CONTRIBUTION OF THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL TO KNOWLEDGE

Consumer behavior research may well be linked with the sense of place in regard to travel and tourism. In the context of place marketing, loyalty remains an important indicator of successful place development; many studies exist on the antecedents of tourist loyalty, including, trip quality, place image, motivation, perceived value and satisfaction, in different settings such as countries, states, cities, islands (Bigne *et al.*, 2001; Chen and Tsai, 2007; Huang and Hsu, 2009).Only recently has the role of place

attachment and its dimensions as predictors of visitors loyalty been examined (Hwang *et al.*, 2005; Alexandris *et al.*, 2006, Yuksel *et al.*, 2010; Prayag and Rayan, 2012).

The significance attached to place identity from the visitors' point of view needs to be further examined because it will shed light on how to market places. In that way, a more critical approach towards the implementation of communication activities may take place, especially if this concerns the officially sanctioned promotional narrative initiated by state organizations, mainly in charge of managing the tangible and intangible assets of a state, region, city or place (Kavoura and Bitsani, 2013: 58; Kavoura, 2013: 69).

“Understanding how consumers experience brands is critical for developing marketing strategies for goods and services” (Brakus *et al.*, 2009: 52; Stavrianea and Kavoura, 2014) since “brand experiences are about delivering the brand promise and providing consistent action” (Iglesias *et al.*, 2011: 572). Experience considers the customer as a co-creator in a collective service interaction (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). Since experiences are complex phenomena that involve, at least four dimensions - sensory, intellectual, affective and behavioral (Brakus *et al.*, 2009) - policy makers, marketers and advertisers need to be able to make informed decisions regarding planning and managing the whole process at all these dimensions and all customer touch points to support visitors' experience (Brodie, 2009; Frow and Payne, 2009).

The way of narrating the brand is significant in order to provide such elements as emotions, feelings, affection in order to enhance brand loyalty when branding a place. As brand experiences may occur when the consumer gets into contact with the brand in a direct (physical experience) or in an indirect (virtual presentation or in an advertisement) way (Brakus *et al.*, 2009: 52-53), then the role of communication needs to be examined as well (advertisements, brochures, web sites). This suggests that place marketers and people in charge of planning communication campaigns and tourism policies would take into consideration these factors and apply new strategies to target, attract, satisfy and maintain tourists. Perceptions of place identity and reputation that influence decision-making and communication offerings by local marketers, for example in a rural area,

provide a valuable insight to the way marketing is undertaken (Giles *et al.*, 2013). Social media may be used by those involved with place marketing as a tool to reach a global audience (Hayset *et al.*, 2013) providing them with experiences over the internet about the place they are about to visit. In fact, social media are predominantly used after holidays for experience sharing, and as research has shown, it is trusted more than the official tourism websites, travel agents, and mass media advertising (Fotis *et al.*, 2011). Digital presence of place brands plays an important role since people use the web to collect information about a place, to make decisions, to book online services. In that way, co-branding is created based on the online communication among people who use social media to promote and express their personal experiences. As these experiences are projected via the online platforms of social media, images of places are virtually formed through electronic word of mouth (Hanna and Rowley, 2015; Govers, 2015). Thus, people having the role of customers create this value (Grönroos and Gummerus, 2014).

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

To date, no studies in the tourism context have attempted to conceptualize a model of visitors' loyalty antecedents incorporating brand experiences, satisfaction and place identity. This is the theoretical contribution of the paper since it will further enhance our knowledge of visitors' loyalty. We argue that the cultivation of a sense of place through the reinforcement of place identity and brand experiences may affect satisfaction and enhance a place's brand loyalty base.

The next step is to measure the effects of brand experiences and place identity on satisfaction and loyalty in a quantitative way so that communication and marketing strategies are targeted. The empirical research would shed light on the relations between brand experiences, place attachment and its dimensions in relation to satisfaction and loyalty, verifying the theoretical contribution that the model attempts to bring forth.

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PLACE BRANDING PROCESS: ANALYSIS OF POPULATION AS CONSUMERS OF DESTINATION IMAGE

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In tourist marketing and branding strategies considering residents' perceptions essential as promotional actions must convey an image that adequately represents the place and its inhabitants. This research considers that a destination brand cannot be successful if the residents' perspective is not taken into account. Thanks to a quantitative study of the case of Zaragoza (Spain), a model of research is presented to analyse the residents' brand attitude, perception of usefulness, and perceived image. The results confirm that the inhabitants' attitude is the main variable to get a good destination image through a place branding strategy, which will depend on the brand's perceived usefulness.

Thus, the present paper verifies the importance of considering residents' perspective in destination image management due to they are both the first producers and consumers of their own place image.

Keywords: *Marketing, branding, image, residents, identity, destination*

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INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, globalization, easy access to information, the presence of low cost travel companies and the economic crisis have created a highly

competitive tourist market, in which the different destinations try to convey a good image – whether new or strengthened – in order to be distinctive and positioned well in the target market. In this sense, place marketing strategies have been making efforts to develop an emotional relationship with the consumer (Murphy, Moscardo & Benckendorff, 2007). Within these actions, place branding is considered a key tool in destination marketing, providing a strong image of the place in which not only visitors but also investors and residents have become the main targets.

However, despite the effort for an increased awareness concerning the population's perceptions and attitudes, the perspective of residents is overlooked in favor of the common good and investors' interests (Renda *et al.*, 2014). As explained by Kavratziset *al.* (2010), residents are commonly treated in the relevant literature as a target market of place marketing and place branding efforts just in relation to the attraction of new residents, instead of considering them an active part of the whole marketing and branding process. In fact, according to these authors, the interest about how citizen's participation enhances the quality and the effectiveness of place marketing strategies is growing.

Previous studies have considered residents perspective at this respect. For example, Freire (2009) revealed that local people are relevant for a destination brand-building process as a distinguishing element between place brands. Zenker and Petersen (2010) took a step forward by analyzing how residents' identification is important to form a suitable place identity. The study of Zenker *et al.* (2010), on the other hand, analyzes the perception of residents (among other groups) as a target of a city brand. Nevertheless, none of them focus on how the perceptions and attitudes of the population towards the place brand can influence its effectiveness.

Similarly to organizations, also within destinations, the brand identity can guide stakeholders' behaviour to a positive attitude, but only if they believe in those brand values (Bregoli, 2012).

For the conveyed image to be congruent with destination's reality, considering the subjective vision of the residents is especially relevant. In order to ensure the social and cultural sustainability of the destination (Florek, 2012) and the acceptance of the brand (Eshuis & Edwards, 2013), it is essential that in the process of *place branding* there are no obvious dissociations between the image that the Government wants to convey and the internal image perceived by the inhabitants, which arises organically.

Thus, the present study is based on the hypothesis that the place brand will improve the image only if the population has positive perceptions of it. We use perceived usefulness (PU) and attitude as variables to examine

these perceptions and the link with image. This relationship is analysed through a case study, the city brand of Zaragoza (Spain), to derive conclusions and implications that could be useful to other destinations. Thus, a quantitative analysis was developed to study: (1) the perceptions of the residents of Zaragoza in relation to the usefulness that the brand and associated promotional actions have for their city in terms of potential benefits, (2) their attitudes towards the brand, and (3) how these two variables – PU and attitude – influence the image of the city.

RESIDENTS AS CONSUMERS OF DESTINATION IMAGE

According to Luque, Del Barrio, Ibáñez & Rodríguez (2009), place image is formed from the messages that the different consumers receive about a destination. Therefore, the communication of the image should be not only external but also internal, due to the destination's need to be not only attractive but also supported by its population (De Elizagarate, 2008).

Place image is not only derived from the destination's objective resources and values, but also from the subjective perceptions that different social groups hold about it, especially depending on the relationship they have with the place, so the perceptions of residents and non-residents will differ. This context becomes more complex because residents are consumers and part of the product at the same time, which makes destination image management a fundamental task (Pike, 2004).

This research focuses specifically on the importance of residents' perceptions in the establishment of a place branding strategy, since governments can manage and modify residents' attitudes for the public good through the branding process (Merrilees, Miller, & Herrington, 2009). The challenge in communicating the brand is joining the different images that the consumers have about the destination and the image that the tourist department wants to convey as a positioning tool of the strategic plan (Marrero & Tanda, 2003). Therefore, the brand should adequately represent the identity of the residents, whilst also trying to attract the attention of visitors. If the tourist department conveys an image which does not match residents' perception, there will be dissociation between the place and its population because, as described by Hankinson (2004), inhabitants are also consumers of the brand of their place of residence. This will have a negative effect on the internal consumption of the image due to a lack of coherence between the three key elements that authors such as Cheshmehzangi and

Heat (2012) adduce to the place branding process: image, uniqueness and authenticity. In particular, there is no authenticity if the population's perception is not reflected. Focusing too heavily on tourists can create conflict and ultimately alienate local groups (Beckman *et al.*, 2013). If the tourist department does not incorporate the inhabitants' perceptions of the brand developed in their territory, it can potentially destroy the culture of that place and therefore destroy one of the key features of the brand.

THE CASE OF ZARAGOZA

Zaragoza, the capital of Aragón, is situated in the north-east of Spain, being equidistant from the cities of Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia and Bilbao. According to Seisdedos (2012), with a population of nearly 700,000 inhabitants, its middling size makes it a perfect city for a case study, which also motivated the IE Business School¹ to choose Zaragoza's city brand as a case study to analyze the future keys in city marketing.

In 2008 the International Exposition "Expo 2008" took place in Zaragoza with the theme of "Water and Sustainable Development". Thanks to Expo 2008, but even before that, the city has experienced changes at every level: urban, infrastructural, economic and social. This has affected the image of the city and its citizens both nationally and internationally. Thus, the local public administration considered it the perfect opportunity to initiate a strategic city branding project.

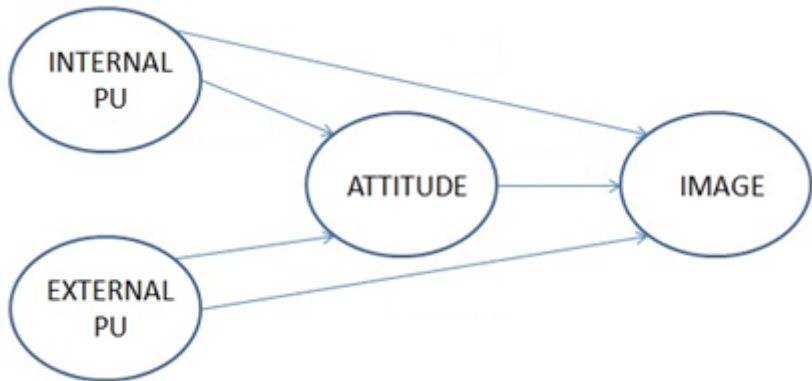
According to the local administration, the city needed a brand that could convey its transformation, identify and empathize with the citizens, attract potential residents, tourists and investors, and articulate in a coherent and homogeneous way. These aspects were the central key of a Strategic Plan of Communication and Marketing, aimed at helping Zaragoza to reach different targets and markets (Zaragoza Global, 2009). The city brand was intended to attract talent, investment, tourism, events, etc., but also to improve the internal image so that the inhabitants would identify with the "new Zaragoza", recognizing the changes and feeling proud of their city. Thus, the local administration considered place branding as the key tool of city marketing to attain its objectives.

THEORETICAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

¹<http://www.ie.edu/business-school/>

As explained, the present study considers that residents' PU related to the brand and its campaigns will determine their attitudes towards it and, consequently, it will affect the image of the city. Thus, the model of research (Figure 1) is presented.

Figure 1. Model of research



As the model shows, internal PU and external PU are considered separately. This approach was adopted because the actions developed inside and outside the territory have very different goals: the former focus on increasing the participation and involvement of the population within their place of residence, whereas the latter aim to promote the territory as a destination. Thus, it seems reasonable that inhabitants' PU will differ according to the type of actions.

The first definition of PU was provided by Davis (1989) who, focusing on a labour environment, defined it as “the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance” (p. 320). Thus, an object will have a high PU if the user considers that it means an improvement in the development of his/her work. Adapting the concept to destination branding, PU could be defined as the extent to which residents consider that a brand representing their place of residence provides benefits which could not be achieved without the existence of that brand and associated actions.

The theoretical importance of PU as a determinant of behaviour is found in several lines of research (Davis, 1989). According to Bhattacharjee (2001), it has an influence on population acceptance behaviours. Therefore, if the inhabitants do not perceive that the development of a destination brand implies benefits for their place of residence, i.e. if they do not perceive its usefulness, they will have a negative attitude toward the brand

and vice versa, indicating a direct relationship between the two variables. Both the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Bhattacharjee, 2000) posit the direct influence of PU on attitude.

In the field of social psychology, attitude is defined as the predisposition to act in a certain way in the presence of an object or a kind of objects (Shaver, 1987), whereas from the marketing perspective it is defined rather as a representation of the favourable or unfavourable evaluation of the object in question (Ajzen, 1991). Thus, brand attitude can be defined as the general evaluation of the brand by consumers (Wilkie, 1986, as cited in Keller, 1993). Although different brand attitude models have been presented, Keller's (1993) model is widely accepted. This model holds that brand attitudes depend on a group of associated characteristics and on their perceived benefits. Therefore, a positive perception of the brand – strengthened by evident improvements in the territory – can have a positive effect on place image (Trueman *et al.*, 2004).

Thus, considering that the branding actions developed within the territory and those developed outside the territory are differently perceived, and considering that PU will influence the attitude, the first hypotheses proposed are as follows:

H1: The PU of internal actions developed in relation to a destination brand has a positive effect on attitudes toward that brand.

H2: The PU of external actions developed in relation to a destination brand has a positive effect on attitudes toward that brand.

As previously mentioned, attitude determines behaviour and it is also a mediator between PU and behaviour, which in this research is that of the residents. From the marketing perspective, behaviour can be analysed through purchase intention or brand loyalty, but in destination branding the situation is somewhat different. The residents – as consumers – do not exhibit such behaviours as they do not engage in a similar decision-making process, nor do they “buy” any product or service. Thus, the analysis of their behaviour is closer to affective associations about what the brand represents: their place of residence. A good city image is not an abstract aesthetic phenomenon (Nasar, 1997). Images consist of networks of associations about places, products, objects or other people (Atkinson *et al.*, 1987). As a result, the image is analysed on the basis of PU and brand attitude, a positive image being the final objective of any place branding strategy (Govers, 2011).

A good image depends on the evaluation of people who regularly evaluate the city (Nasar, 1997). According to Avraham (2004) the strategies

to improve a city image should be: encouraging visits to the city; hosting spotlight events; turning negative characteristics into positive characteristics; changing the city's name, logo or slogan; cultivating the residents' local pride; solving the problem that led to the formation of the negative image; delivering counter-stereotypical messages; ignoring the stereotype; acknowledging the negative image; and geographic association or separation in the campaign. So we can see that residents' local pride is an important factor to have a good city image.

The different levels of *sense of place* felt by the various inhabitants in a place have been analysed and empirically verified by several environmental psychology studies (Hernández *et al.*, 2007; Lalli, 1992; Lynch, 1960; Stedman, 2002). Variation in the perception of image is a consequence of the complex and subjective process of the creation and internalization of the symbolic meanings that every person develops in relation to his or her place of residence (Belanche, 2012). This complexity in the analysis of destination image is increased by the wide range of factors that may influence its creation (Richards & Wilson, 2004).

On the basis of the above arguments and adapting them to this analytic context, the following hypotheses are proposed in relation to the consequences of the main variables:

H3: The PU of internal actions developed in relation to a destination brand has a positive effect on the internal image of the territory.

H4: The PU of external actions developed in relation to a destination brand has a positive effect on the internal image of the territory.

H5: Positive attitudes toward a destination brand have a positive effect on the internal image of the territory.

METHOD

Study design and sampling procedure

A quantitative research design was developed in order to collect opinions and perceptions of the city brand of Zaragoza from the point of view of the residents. The data collection was developed through a self-administered online questionnaire created at the website www.surveymonkey.com, which allows the elaboration and the storage of the obtained responses. With the aim of getting a relevant number of responses, the questionnaire was spread applying the snowball sample method, and the participants shared the questionnaire through social

networks and email, getting a greater and more varied number of participants.

Thus, data were collected from a sample of 450 residents in Zaragoza. Sampling stratification was applied, with random selection within each stratum. The strata groups were selected to give a broad demographic cross-section of residents for the city, according to the current distribution of the population related to age and gender (Table 1).

Table 1: Sample characteristics

	<i>Sample (%)</i>	<i>Population (%)</i>
<i>Age</i>		
18–30	30.7	24.7
31–40	20.3	18.2
41–50	17.6	16.6
51–65	18.9	19.9
> 65	12.5	20.6
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	49.3	47.7
Female	50.7	52.3

A literature review was undertaken to select the most appropriate measures for this analysis (Appendix 1). Thus, residents were asked to score the extent to which they agreed with different statements related to the perceived benefits of the brand in their city, their attitude toward Zaragoza’s city brand and the current image they held of their city of residence. A seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree) was employed.

As described, the selected test persons for this main study were residents of Zaragoza, regardless of whether they had been born in the city or not. They were contacted through different social networks with the request to participate in the survey.

A total of 450 respondents (49.3% female) took part in the online survey. The sample consists of 51% of residents aged 18–40 years old, 17.6% aged 41–50 and 31.4% aged 51 and over, as displayed in Table 1.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Establishing the validity and reliability of scales is fundamental in confirming the results of the research. Thus, exploratory analysis of validity and reliability was undertaken using the statistical software SPSS Statistics 19 and the software SmartPLS 2.0 for the development of the models.

RELIABILITY OF SCALES

The reliability of scales indicates the degree of trustworthiness, i.e. the probability of the results being different depending on the moment in which the research is developed, by studying the degree of random error (Sánchez & Sarabia, 1999). Cronbach's alpha coefficient is the most widely used measure of scale reliability (Nunnally, 1978). A scale is reliable when its items are highly correlated, indicating that the items are measuring the same concept. This allows the degree of reliability to be measured in relation to a minimum value, which in this study is 0.7 (Cronbach, 1970; Nunnally, 1978). All the constructs used in this research exceeded the minimum value, although for both internal and external PU items 5 were deleted to confer greater reliability. Reliability was also analysed through item-total correlations (Bagozzi, 1981), measuring the correlation of each item with the other items in the same scale. The correlation has to be greater than 0.3 (Casaló, 2008) and in this case, no items had to be deleted as they all exceeded the minimum value.

The unidimensionality of the scales, i.e. the weighting of the items in the proposed factors, was also evaluated. Avarimax rotation in factor exploratory analysis was developed (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998) using two indicators: Bartlett's test of sphericity, which has to be 0.0, and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test, the value of which should be above 0.6 (Hutcheson & Sofroniu, 1999). All the variables met the required criteria.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF CONSTRUCTS

The reliability of the constructs was verified, as recommended by authors such as Jöreskog (1971). The minimum value adopted for Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.6 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994) and all the variables reached a value higher than 0.9.

Analysis of the validity of constructs examines the correspondence between a conceptualization theoretically established and the proposed scale to quantify it (Flavián & Lozano, 2003). Both convergent and discriminant validity were analysed. Convergent validity concerns whether the items of the different scales fit the construct theoretically proposed and is confirmed if the factorial weight of each indicator exceeds 0.5 and if it is

significant at 0.1 (Sanzoet *al.*, 2003), measured through the average variance extracted (AVE) (Ping, 2004). An appropriate level of convergent validity is represented by an AVE value above 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) and it can be confirmed that all the constructs in this study are satisfactory, having values above 0.7.

Discriminant validity indicates the distance between constructs without a theoretical link. For this analysis, the AVE values (displayed diagonally in Table 2) are compared to the squared correlations between constructs (the rest of the values displayed in Table 2); these must be less than the AVE to confirm discriminant validity according to Realet *al.*(2006). The results show that all the pairs of constructs meet both requirements, as displayed in Table 2.

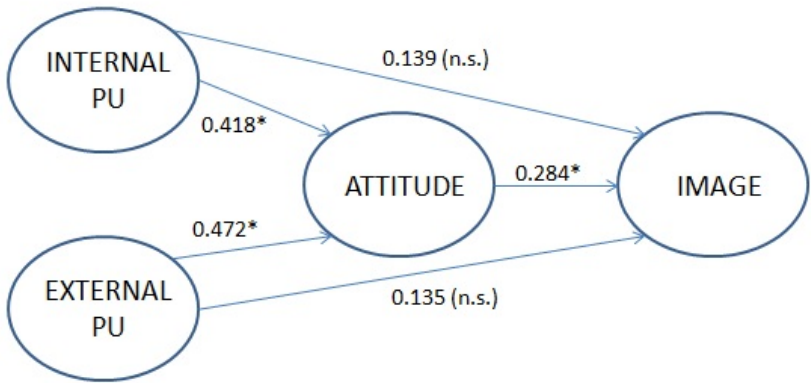
Table 2. Discriminant validity analysis

CONSTRUCT	ATTITUDE	IMAGE	EXTERNAL PU	INTERNAL PU
ATTITUDE	0.7873			
IMAGE	0.2479	0.7995		
EXTERNAL PU	0.6226	0.2152	0.8829	
INTERNAL PU	0.6023	0.2128	0.5745	0.8360

RESULTS

Having established the validity and reliability of the scales, the proposed hypotheses are tested. With that objective, a model was developed (Figure 1) using SmartPLS 2.0. Using a bootstrapping technique, the significance of the coefficients was tested using 500 samples. For the sake of thoroughness, only hypotheses with a minimum significance of 0.05 were accepted, meaning that H3 and H4 are rejected.

Figure 2. Model of research (results)



Note: * significant at 0.01; (n.s.) not significant.

The two first hypotheses referred to the effect of PU on brand attitude and the results demonstrate the existence of a positive and significant relationship between PU – both internal ($\beta = 0.418$; $p < 0.01$) and external ($\beta = 0.472$; $p < 0.01$) – and attitude, thus confirming H1 and H2.

Regarding H3, H4 and H5, related to the effects of the variables on image, the results vary. On the one hand, the effect of the PU of brand actions is not particularly significant ($\beta = 0.139$; $p > 0.05$ for internal PU, $\beta = -0.135$; $p > 0.05$ for external PU), resulting in H3 and H4 being rejected. This may be due to the indirect effect of PU on place image through attitude, which acts as a mediating variable between them. In fact, attitude does have a positive and significant effect ($\beta = 0.284$; $p < 0.01$) on place image, supporting H5. This confirms that the PU of branding actions does not improve inhabitants' image of their place of residence if their brand attitude is not improved, but that attitude is influenced by PU and does improve the image of the territory. In order to prove this indirect effect, Sobel's (1982) test was carried out, the results of which indicate that attitude is a mediating variable in the model (Table 3).

Table 3. Sobel test results

	INTERNAL PU	EXTERNAL PU
Sobel test statistic	2.316	2.634
One-tailed probability (significance)	$p < 0.05$	$p < 0.01$

To confirm this mediation effect, Baron and Kenny's (1986) regression approach was applied. The results (Appendix 2) confirm the total mediation of attitude over internal and external PU and image, verifying the aforementioned indirect effect.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The present paper contributes to the knowledge of the influence of residents' perception in the image of a territory by providing an analysis of the factors determining the inhabitants' acceptance of a territorial brand and its effects on the internal image of the place, which will be transmitted into the global image. For this purpose, the usefulness of the brand as perceived by the residents was analysed according to the potential benefits for the city.

We also examined brand attitude, focusing on how the two variables – PU and attitude – influence the image of the city. In this process, a new model of quantitative analysis has been proposed and applied in a case study of the perceptions of the residents of Zaragoza (Spain) concerning the city's brand, aiming to verify the five hypotheses presented.

It has been shown that the perception of usefulness in relation to brand actions confers an improvement in residents' brand attitudes, which also improves the image of the city (Bregoli, 2012). In this respect, our study contributes by confirming that PU itself does not affect the image if it is not through a change in brand attitude, i.e. the attitudes that people have toward the brand of their place of residence directly influence their perceptions of the territory (Eshuis & Edwards, 2013). These results verify that a destination brand can have an influence on the image of the territory if the residents perceive it positively; this will depend on the extent to which they think the brand is useful in their place of residence.

Regarding the theoretical implications, this study contributed to the analysis of the repercussions of a place branding strategy in the internal image of the territory. Numerous authors advocate the importance of residents' participation and opinion in the branding process (Renda et al., 2014; Kavaratzis et al., 2010; Freire, 2009; Zenker and Petersen, 2010; Zenker et al., 2010); however, there is still a lack of analysis focused on the inhabitants' perception and influence, as explained. The proposed analysis model takes a step forward in relation to the factors that can influence the brand perception and attitude. The general studies of this line of research

focus on the variables that can make an effect on the consumers' decision process (Hernández et al., 2007; Lalli, 1992; Lynch, 1960; Stedman, 2002) instead of just considering their perception, which will determine their attitude. In that respect, a novel contribution of this work is the use of the variable PU regarding a brand, instead of a product or service. The results of our research confirm that it is a variable that can be used in relation to a territorial brand, having a high influence in the brand attitude, which is essential for inhabitants' acceptance.

This paper also presents implications for management. As stated, place branding is one of the most selected tools to manage the territorial image. The advantages of creating a brand represent a suitable initiative to face current Government's challenges, including the motivation of the residents to feel proud, attached and involved with the place they live in. To engage residents, it is necessary to take into account the perceptions of the image of the destination (inner image) held by the local population (Beckman, *et al.* 2013). The participation of the inhabitants plays an important role (Lee, 2011; Paganoni, 2012) during the branding process and in some of the promoting actions. Thanks to that participation, the place brand's values also reverts to the local population's empowerment (Lee, 2011), assuring the socio-cultural sustainability of the place (Florek, 2012).

Nowadays, people tend to mistrust Government's activities and investments that involve uncertainty or do not show real results or visual improvements; such is the case of marketing and branding actions. Our research analyzes the variables that help residents to get a positive brand attitude, demonstrating that the PU is a strong influencing aspect. The residents need to perceive that these new public initiatives mean any benefit for their place of residence to be willing to appreciate them. The perception of usefulness reflects a complex concept whose interpretation might vary depending on the inhabitants' expectations and demands (Belanche, 2012).

Public administration as a coordinator of all the destination's stakeholders is essential to ensure effective destination branding, being the real source of competitive advantage, since it allows destinations to differentiate themselves (Bregoli, 2012). However, as it has been analyzed, coordination is also needed in the process of linking the dimensions of commitment to the brand and citizenship behavior of the brand, ensuring the internal brand strength.

Finally, this work has some limitations that on the other hand open some avenues for future research. This research refers to the developed study being addressed to residents in Zaragoza (Spain), meaning that any generalization of the findings should require caution. Results could be

different in other territories, since inhabitants could behave differently depending on their culture, country or the general attitude of the people toward Government's actions. In this sense, the replication of this study in other territories could reinforce the validity of both management contributions and findings. Even more interesting could be comparing perceptions and brand attitudes through cross-cultural analysis. Secondly, considering the multidisciplinary of the topic, many perspectives could be taken, although they fall into other fields of study. For instance, research in public management, sociology or political marketing could be also devoted to analyze these phenomena. Although this work refers occasionally to these aspects along the text, a great effort is needed to deliberately exclude extensive interpretations that distract or escape from the principal discourse flow. It would be helpful for future research to compile studies from different perspectives in order to provide readers with broader and more complete views of the objects of analysis.

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APPENDIX 1

Measurement scales

CONSTRUCT	ITEMS
Internal perceived usefulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I think internal actions are interesting - I think internal actions are useful - I think internal actions are necessary for Zaragoza - I think investing in internal actions is advisable - I think internal actions are beneficial for the city
External perceived usefulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I think external actions are interesting - I think external actions are useful - I think external actions are necessary for Zaragoza - I think investing in external actions is advisable - I think external actions are beneficial for the city
Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The city brand is a good idea - The city brand is necessary for the city - The city brand can benefit the city - I think the city brand is benefiting the city - The city brand conveys a positive feeling - The city brand develops interesting actions - I have a positive opinion of the city brand
Image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I love to live in Zaragoza - I think Zaragoza is worth knowing - I think Zaragoza is a good city to live in

APPENDIX 2

Attitude's mediating effect (internal PU)

INT PU-IMAGE		INT PU-ATT		INT PU-IMAGE, ATT-IMAGE			
standardized	t	standardized	t	standardized	t	standardized	t

coefficient		coefficient		coefficient		coefficient	
0.465*	6.233	0.776*	19.706	0.189 (n.s.)	1.595	0.351*	2.924

Note: *: significant at 0.01; (n.s.) not significant

Attitude's mediating effect (external PU)

EXT PU-IMAGE		EXT PU-ATT		EXT PU-IMAGE, ATT-IMAGE			
standardized coefficient	t	standardized coefficient	t	standardized coefficient	t	standardized coefficient	t
0.466*	5.905	0.791*	18.696	0.188 (n.s.)	1.410	0.350*	2.639

Note: *: significant at 0.01; (n.s.) not significant

Attitude's mediating effect: summary of results

Independent variable	Mediating variable	Dependent variable	Result
PERCEIVED USEFULNESS (internal actions)	ATTITUDE	IMAGE	TOTAL MEDIATION
PERCEIVED USEFULNESS (external actions)			TOTAL MEDIATION

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THE SENSORY DIMENSION OF CONSUMER EXPERIENCES IN RURAL TOURIST DESTINATIONS

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Despite being well documented that the so-called five senses impact consumer behavior, research following a holistic approach to all modalities of sensory experiences in rural tourist destinations is still scarce. Nevertheless, rural areas are characterized by a rich and diverse collection of endogenous resources, ideal for conceptualizing unique multi-sensory tourist experiences involving and benefiting all destination stakeholders.

Hence, this paper proposes a theoretical framework based on the idea that the process of analyzing sensory aspects of consumer experiences as perceived by tourists while experiencing the countryside may contribute to carefully marketing sensory-themed tourist experiences in rural destinations. Accordingly, considering that rural destinations are calling both for cooperative and creative offerings and communication strategies, this paper discusses the potential of using sensory-informed themes in profiling tourists, a process that assists rural

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destinations in the planning of the integral tourist experiences aiming at the optimal use of local resources.

Key Words: sensory tourist experience; rural tourist experience; theme; five senses; destination marketing

INTRODUCTION

Although sensory experiences have been extensively analyzed in consumer behavior research (Krishna, 2010), the sensory dimension of tourist experiences has been overlooked in the tourism literature (Agapito, Mendes, & Valle, 2013; Urry, 2002), especially in the context of rural destinations, where there is a clear lack of research on this specific topic (Agapito, 2013; Agapito, Valle, & Mendes, 2014; Dann & Jacobsen, 2003).

However, the endogenous resources available in rural areas offerspecificand rich sensory stimuli (Kastenholz, Carneiro, Marques,& Lima, 2012) considered to be vital in achieving the desired goal of the tourism industry in facilitating the co-creation of rich, unique, and memorable destination experiences effective in attracting visitors (Larsen, 2007; Mossberg, 2007; Tung & Ritchie, 2011) and competing for attention (Isacson, Alakoski, &Bäck, 2009; Ooi, 2005). In fact, facing growing competition and a demanding international market increasingly interested in living diversified and unique experiences, rural destinations and individual tourism businesses should find innovative and creative strategies to enhance tourist experiences in a sustainable way (Kastenholz, Carneiro,& Marques, 2012; Lane, 2009).

Currently, some researchers are stressing the need to consider multi-sensory information in understanding and planning tourist experiences (Gretzel&Fesenmaier, 2003, 2010; Pan & Ryan, 2009), an approach embedded in a multidisciplinary view of the senses. In fact, a wide range of academic areas has reflected on the crucial role of the senses in human knowledge and sense making of the world by providing information on the surrounding environment, mediating everyday experiences and influencing individuals' behavior (Damásio, 2009; Howes, 2005; Merleau-Ponty, 2002; Rodaway, 1994). In this context, despite the existence of other human

senses related to internal stimuli, marketing has directed special attention to the so-called five human senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch), specializing in capturing and conveying external stimuli (optical, acoustic, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile) to the brain (Goldstein, 2010; Zurawicki, 2010). Against this background, sensory stimuli are highlighted as central in the marketing of appealing consumer experiences (Gentile, Spiller, & Noci, 2007; Hultén, Broweus, & van Dijk, 2009; Krishna, 2010, 2012; Lindstrom, 2005; Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Schmitt, 1999; Schmitt & Simonson, 1997).

The diversity of tourists' motivations for choosing a rural destination for vacations results in a multiplicity of desired activities and perceptions (Roberts & Hall, 2001). Therefore, the use of meaningful themes integrating the multiplicity of rural resources and services may be useful in marketing rural tourist experiences in a sustainable manner (Agapito et al., 2014; Kastenholz, Carneiro, & Marques, 2012). Considering the importance of sensory elements in the process of staging the environment for desired individual experiences to emerge (Larsen, 2007; Ooi, 2005), the process of analyzing sensory tourist experiences as perceived by tourists is an appropriate means for understanding and meaningfully theming destination experiences (Ellis & Rossman, 2008; Mossberg, 2007; Pan & Ryan, 2009; Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Despite acknowledging the lack of a specific framework adapted to rural destinations, some researchers have highlighted the potential of using sensory themes in profiling rural tourists (Agapito et al., 2014; Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2010). Moreover, this process is considered as important in planning and promoting appealing sensory experiences to reference consumers fitting the destination identity by involving the community and tourists in a sustainable way (Kastenholz, Carneiro, & Marques, 2012; Santini, Cavicchi, & Canavari, 2011; Saxena, Clark, Oliver, & Ilbery, 2007).

Against this background, this paper aims to reflect on the role of the sensory dimension of tourist experiences in marketing sensory-themed tourist experiences in rural destinations by bringing a theoretical framework into the discussion. The proposed framework is based on previous research informed by a multidisciplinary view on the so-called five external senses. Relevant journal articles and books with a managerial approach to tourist experiences, focusing on the role of sensory stimuli, were identified by tracking references in online scientific databases. Particularly, empirical studies directing special attention to the five senses in the marketing and planning tourist experiences supported the reflection on the adaptation of

the existing research methodologies to the marketing of sensory-themed rural tourist experiences.

THE ROLE OF THE SENSES IN THEMING RURAL TOURIST EXPERIENCES

A marketing approach to tourist experiences in rural destinations should center on carefully facilitating rich, positive, and diversified experiences by achieving balance in preserving endogenous resources, residents' quality of life, tourism providers' benefits, tourists' quality of visit and, consequently, aiming at local sustainable development (Kastenholz, Carneiro, & Marques, 2012; Lane, 1994; Manente & Minghetti, 2006). Considering the existing opportunities for all stakeholders in actively co-creating tourist experiences in rural areas (Kastenholz, Carneiro, Marques, & Lima, 2012), potentially benefiting all those involved in the process, it is important to note that "the countryside is especially at risk from unmanaged – or ill-managed – tourism" (Lane, 1994, p.19).

In this context, marketing quality tourist experiences is an activity with the potential to benefit the destination in the longterm (Jennings & Nickerson, 2006). Firstly, the quality of local resources constitutes what initially attracts visitors to rural destinations. Thus, an increase in demand may result in more pressure to preserve destination assets (Clark, 1999). Secondly, unique and appealing sensory experiences are considered to have the potential to be priced as *premium* offerings (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), thus benefiting local providers (Kastenholz, Carneiro, Marques, & Lima, 2012). Thirdly, the process of exploring themes is a marketing tool that assists in conceptualizing engaging experiences addressed at specific tourist profiles (Agapito et al., 2014; Kastenholz, Carneiro, & Marques, 2012; Mossberg, 2007). Accordingly, and bearing in mind that rural areas lack the iconic features of urban destinations which result in offering very similar core products (Haven-Tang & Jones, 2010), the marketing of rural destination experiences should focus on unique endogenous resources, as well as on the local identity, in order to provide multi-sensory themed quality consumption experiences.

The identification of themes through sensory information related to destination experiences has also been explored in practice. The Aldeia da Pedralva is a rural tourism village project, situated in Southwest Portugal, which aimed to rebuild a deserted village. The thematic programs available in this lodging unit are based on the idea that staying overnight in this

village and engaging with specific rural and natural multi-sensory resources (e.g. mountain ranges, woods, pinewood, agricultural areas, cliffs and rock caves) stimulates particular sensory-informed experiences. Accordingly, the Aldeia da Pedralva's brand identity consists of a representation of the five human senses. The brand logo is composed by an eye encircled by elements pertaining to the senses of hearing, taste, touch, and smell (<http://www.aldeiadapedralva.com/>). Considering the fact that many resources are endemic to the region, the goal is to create conditions for visitors to live unique sensory-informed place experiences (Agapito, Mendes, & Valle, 2012).

SENSORY STIMULI IN CONSUMPTION EXPERIENCES

The role of sensory stimuli in originating sensations – the activation of the sensory organs (eyes, ears, nose, skin, and taste receptors) and transformation of the outside stimuli in neural signals – acting as the initiator of the human perceptual process, has been shown by psychology. Perception is essential to making sense of the world by giving meaning to sensations and consequently by influencing human action (Zimbardo, Johnson, & Hamilton, 2011). In this regard, perception can be defined as a “conscious sensory experience” (Goldstein, 2010, p.8), deriving from the “sequence of processes that work together to determine our experience of a reaction to stimuli in the environment” (p.5). Accordingly, marketing has been developed through addressing efforts, based on the stimulation of the five human senses, at engaging consumers (physically, intellectually, emotionally, and socially) by providing the appropriate environment for the desired personal consumer experiences to emerge (Carù & Cova, 2003; Gentile et al., 2007; Schmitt, 1999). The rise of the concept of sensory marketing is thus in line with the consolidation of the underlying concept of the *experience economy* (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), according to which what the consumers most value is the hedonic way of consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Hultén et al., 2009). Sensory marketing can thus be defined broadly as the “marketing that engages the consumer’s senses and affects their perception, judgment and behavior” (Krishna, 2012, p.332).

In this light, diverse empirical studies present recent findings from marketing linking sensations with market outcomes, such as consumer’s choice, memory and preference, providing some insights how each of these senses can be engaged by businesses to improve their system of offerings (e.g. Krishna, 2010). This view is consolidated by increasing developments in neuroscience offering important insights into consumer psychology

(Plassmann, Ramsøy, & Milosavljevic, 2012) and encouraging the development of new approaches highlighting the managerial aspects of sensory stimuli, such as neuromarketing (e.g. Zurawicki, 2010), or behavioral neuroendocrinology perspectives (e.g. Derval, 2010). Spence, Puccinelli, Grewal, and Roggeveen (2014) summarize the scientific evidence related to retail store atmospherics and their impact on the consumer experience and behavior. By reviewing the existing multisensory approaches to retail environment and their links to neuroscience principles, the researchers conclude that “various visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile, and gustatory atmospherics independently affect shoppers’ perceptions and behaviors, and their combined influence is likely even greater than the sum of their parts (2014, p.483). Furthermore, while acknowledging the multidimensionality of consumers experiences, so that a good experience should holistically and consistently involve individuals at different levels, empirical marketing studies show the pivotal role of the sensory component compared with other dimensions of consumption experiences. For example, Gentile et al. (2007) reveal that the value associated with the sensorial component is substantially higher when compared to the emotional, cognitive, pragmatic, lifestyle and relational components in co-creating value with the customer, whilst Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello (2009) conclude that the sensory dimension is the most relevant in terms of *brand experience* compared to the cognitive, affective, social and behavioral dimensions.

SENSORY STIMULI IN TOURIST EXPERIENCES

By extending the focus on the relationship between the body and people to places, the geographer Porteous (1985) conceptualized the concept of *sensescapes*, arguing that, similar to the notion of landscape with its primarily visual connotations, other senses can be place-related, resulting in *soundscape*s, *smellscapes*, *tastescapes* or *hapticscapes* (Dann, & Jacobsen, 2003; Urry, 2002). Hence, multiple sensory experiences emerged during geographical encounters (Crouch, 2002; Rodaway, 1994; Tuan, 1977). Whilst previous tourism studies have been centered systematically on the visual component of the tourist experience (Adler, 1989), current research aims to take a holistic approach to the five senses with a view to understanding their role in the global tourist experience (Agapito et al., 2013; Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2003; Kastenholz, Carneiro, Marques, & Lima, 2012; Pan & Ryan, 2009). However, although the consumption experience

globally entwines all the senses (Spence et al., 2014), the idea of *sensescapes* is referred to as sensory experiences of the surrounding environment, being each sensory modality particularized: *visual landscapes* for sight experience, *hearingscape* for auditory experience, *smellscape* for olfactory experience, *tastescape* for gustatory experience, and *hapticscape* for touch experience (Rodaway 1994; Tuan, 1977; Urry 2002). Accordingly, the frameworks for marketing and managing tourist experiences have raised the importance of stimulating the five external senses – sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch – in order to reach the hearts and minds of tourists (Agapito et al., 2013; Mossberg, 2007; Schmitt, 1999).

In this context, sensory stimuli integrate the external factors (environment, products, and human interactions) influencing the perceptions of tourist experiences that can be partially staged and coordinated around a theme in order to facilitate the integration of an experiential offering and, subsequently, to achieve positive outcomes (Agapito et al., 2013; Cutler & Carmichael, 2010; Ellis & Rossman, 2008; Mossberg, 2007). Particularly, sensory stimuli are addressed as environmental factors, composing the physical/virtual setting in which the consumption of products (tangibles and intangibles) takes place (Bitner, 1992; Neuhofer, Buhalis, & Ladkin, 2012). Moreover, research suggests that the surrounding environment is a facilitator of social interactions (human factors) (Walls, Okumus, Wang, & Kwun, 2011). From this perspective, research on tourism using the experiential approach stresses the crucial role of sensory stimuli in designing the *experiencescape*, i.e., the destination experience environment, leading to tourists' positive emotions, satisfaction, long-term memory and loyalty (Heide & Grønhaug, 2006; Larsen, 2007; O'Dell & Billing, 2005).

The variety of natural and cultural resources available in rural areas contributes to generating an environment in contrast to urban settings and valued for that reason. Indeed, the countryside is well known as comprising a collection of diverse undeveloped resources such as vegetation, soil, wildlife, water, and natural landscapes, and for being associated with cultural values pertaining to handicrafts, gastronomy and local traditions (Roberts & Hall, 2001). In addition, the countryside relates to economic activities linked to agriculture and fisheries; these attract tourists, whether seeking the rural idyll or wishing to experience the diverse outdoor tourist activities offered in rural settings (Butler, Hall, & Jenkins, 1998; Lane, 1994). As a result, the countryside provides not only rich visual stimuli but also other multi-sensory effects that can be experienced by tourists and consequently be managed by the destination in order to boost tourists'

overall experience (Agapito et al., 2012; Kastenholtz, Carneiro, Marques, & Lima, 2012).

FRAMEWORK FOR MARKETING TOURIST SENSORY-THEMED EXPERIENCES IN RURAL DESTINATIONS

The above multidisciplinary literature review evinces the primary role of the senses in consumption experiences and thus consolidates the idea that sensory elements can be used as a starting point for responsibly marketing sensory-themed tourist experiences in rural destinations. Before presenting the proposed framework (**Figure 1**), it is important to note that there is no consensus on the concept of rural tourism among countries and policy entities (Roberts & Hall, 2001). The concept ranges from comprising all tourism activities performed in a rural area (OECD, 1994), including less specialized forms of rural tourism, to the *purest* form of rural tourism, which is focused on the *rural* character of the destination (Lane, 1994). Since both forms result from different tourist motivations coexisting in rural areas, each destination should analyze their specific characteristics and market tourist experiences according to broader destination planning (Lane, 1994; Roberts & Hall, 2004). Given the complexity intrinsic to marketing rural tourism, Kastenholtz, Carneiro, and Marques (2012) conceptualize the rural tourism experience as a complex reality lived “by tourists and local residents alike, shaped by local resources and infrastructure, as well as by the specific rural tourism supply and eventually coordinated by a destination management/marketing organization, within a larger system of economic, cultural and social forces” (p.248). The phases identified in **figure 1** will be summarized and specific research targeted at investigating the topics in greater depth will be indicated.

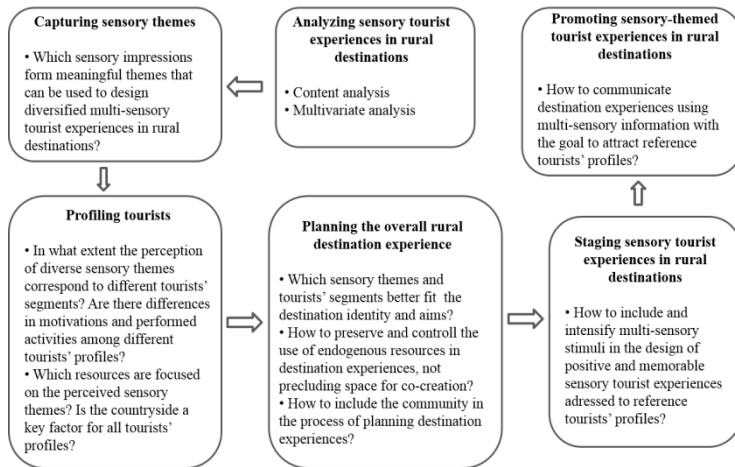


Figure 1 - Framework for marketing sensory-themed rural tourist experience

ANALYZING TOURIST EXPERIENCES AND CAPTURING SENSORY THEMES

The rural tourism literature identifies some themes mainly linked to the images that urban populations (the main visitors to rural destinations) associate with rural areas. A central theme is an idea stemming from a narrative that is being communicated (Moscardo, 2010). From a managerial perspective, it is the underlying concept around which a consumer experience is coherently organized in a particular place, connecting several services and products (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Common associations with the rural character relate to untouched landscapes, pastoral retreats, the traditional idyll, slower and authentic lifestyles, nostalgic environments, and closeness to nature (Butler et al., 1998). However, rural areas have increasingly become spaces of consumption as opposed to spaces of production, with agriculture losing its dominant position and social structures changing dynamically (Roberts & Hall, 2001), whilst tourists of a different profile are seeking rural areas in which to spend their holidays. This phenomenon has resulted in divergent experiences and perceptions of rural destinations (Kastenholz, Davis, & Paul, 1999), making the study of tourists' perceived themes relevant for marketing purposes.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS IN RURAL DESTINATIONS

Most of the research taking a managerial perspective to analyze sensory tourist experiences takes into account the phenomenological nature of the tourist experience concept and suggests the use of mixed methods (Agapito et al., 2013). Accordingly, the existing studies in rural areas providesome

empirical that sensory-informed themes can be found in the articulation of different sensory impressions (Agapito et al., 2014; Gretzel&Fesenmaier, 2003, 2010;Pan & Ryan, 2009). These empirical studies suggest, as a first step, to undertakea content analysis of reported sensory experiences (e.g., through open-ended questions, or travelogues), effectively drawing out embedded knowledge. In a second phase, a multivariate analysis (e.g., correspondence analysis orfactor analysis) of the coded sensory categories derived from content analysis permits the intersection of the sensory variables identified to capture sensory themes. Moreover, the procedure ofcrossing sensory impressions and variables related to the visitor (e.g. motivations) allows findingassociations between the sensory themes andthe individuals' profiles (cluster analysis).

In order to assess information that is not easily accessible in the consumer's mind, such as that pertaining to sensory experiences, and to use large samples enabling the extraction of the dominant bundles necessary to develop marketing strategies aimed at specific segments, Gretzel and Fesenmaier (2010) created the *Sensory Experience Elicitation Protocol* (SEEP). This instrument consists of a self-administered questionnaire containingopen-ended questions aiming to eliciting sensory impressions. These researchers concluded that visual impressions were not predominant and that multi-sensory information extracted from perceived tourist experiences was suitable for theming experiences in a rural destination in northern Indiana, in the Midwestern United States. In fact, the research findings suggest that “the sensory experience dimensions capture aspects of experiences that cannot be represented through other variables such as activity patterns or demographic characteristics” (Gretzel&Fesenmaier, 2010, p. 154).

By analyzing tourist travelogues, Pan and Ryan (2009) found shifts in senses in the perception of different destinations in New Zealand mainly induced by spatial changes in the perspective of journalists, showing that it is possible to associate different destinations with specific sensescapes and to manage sensory stimuli conveyed in destination experiences.

Specifically, the authors state that, regarding holidays in rural settings, it is the sound or silence of nature that helps activate aural senses. These findings were confirmed in the study of Agapito et al. (2014) which was conducted in rural lodgings in Southwest Portugal, where the auditory impression “birdsong” stood out. Preliminary results of this research showed consistency between the results of a Likert scale and a content analysis of the open-ended questions used for collect sensory impressions as perceived by tourists. Although, hierarchically, sight as a broad category produces the highest number of sensory impressions, while the touch has the lowest percentage of responses, these differences were not statistically significant (Agapito, Valle, & Mendes, 2012). In fact, this research suggests that all the five senses are important to tourists in order to have an intensive global experience in the rural area under study. After performing a content analysis of sensory tourist experiences as reported by visitors, the researchers conducted a multiple correspondence analysis followed by a cluster analysis using the coded sensory impressions. The results suggest four meaningful sensory-informed themes with respect to the experience lived in the tourist destination under study: generic beach-related experience, nature-based experience, balanced experience, and rural experience. Hence, this study concludes that “meaningful themes can emerge from an analysis of the sensory impressions of global tourists’ experiences in rural areas” (Agapito et al. 2014, p. 233).

PROFILING TOURISTS

The benefits derived from tourism market segmentation, a process that consists of finding homogeneous groups of tourists sharing similar needs and wants and requiring specific tourist product offerings and marketing mixes (Middleton & Hawkins, 1998), have been discussed extensively in the tourism literature and particularly in rural tourism studies (Park & Yoon, 2009). Given the diversity of tourists seeking rural destinations, niche markets might possibly emerge aimed at gaining competitive advantage and efficiently allocating marketing efforts towards profiles that afford greater attraction to the destination (Kastenholz, et al., 1999; Lane, 2009). Despite the benefits of finding niche markets, this should be a process undertaken with care since individuals are increasingly interested in participating in a wide range of activities in rural destinations, resulting in some difficulty in the identification of a product's core value (Roberts & Hall, 2004).

Some scholars note that commonly used demographic variables relating to market division, although useful in travel research, do not explain underlying motivations for travel since they look only at the characteristics of individuals (Plog, 1994). Other bases for profiling rural tourists for marketing management purposes have proved useful, such as the benefits sought, motivations or activities (Kastenholz et al., 1999; Park & Yoon, 2009). According to the literature, perceived appeals to the senses seem to be appropriate for the activity of profiling rural tourists, since a) perceptions of destination experiences implicitly incorporate personal interests and other psychographic characteristics, and b) sensations are at the core of perceptual processes (Goldstein, 2010; Larsen, 2007). In line with this idea, Gretzel and Fesenmaier (2010) show that although demographic variables do not significantly differentiate sensory-based clusters, activities performed in the destination influence overall destination sensory experience. In a similar vein, Agapito and colleagues' study (2014) conclude that the four sensory-informed themes suggested by a multiple correspondence analysis match to a four-solution cluster of tourists. With the exception of "country of origin", demographic variables do not significantly differentiate the perceived sensory-informed themes; however the tourists' profiles seem to differ according to the tourists' motivations for travel and the activities performed in the destination.

PLANNING AND PROMOTING SENSORY-THEMED RURAL TOURIST EXPERIENCES

With a view to providing long-term benefits to destination stakeholders, tourist profiles should be sustainably matched to the potential of destinations' resources, this being a process expected to increase the levels of satisfaction of both visitors and the destination community, mitigating the gap between expectations and experiences (Dolnicar, 2004). Against the tendency to evaluate resources in an individualistic manner, a holistic approach to the overall tourist experience in the countryside follows from the idea that it is important to generate synergies with different resources within the rural destinations (Cawley & Gillmor, 2008). As part of the character of rural destinations, communities should also be involved in the process of creating quality rural tourism offerings (Saxena et al., 2007), which contributes to increase tourists' confidence in taking longer rural holidays (Lane, 2009). Hence, rural destinations can effectively use their multi-sensory resources (e.g., fauna, flora, landscapes, material and non-material cultural heritage, and gastronomy) to conceptualize quality themed experiences that immerse visitors into perceived authentic local atmospheres, which are aimed at generating sustainable competitive advantage (Haven-Tang & Jones, 2010). Furthermore, bearing in mind that outdoor recreation in natural areas has aesthetic implications affecting the quality of the visitor experience (Pilcher, Newman, & Manning, 2009), targeting specific profiles of tourists facilitates easy management of outdoor activities.

Moreover, since small destination tourist organizations have insufficient budgets to develop marketing strategies with significant impact, the private and public sectors should collaborate. Neighboring regions associated with specific *sensescapes* may conceptualize offerings to different profiles of tourists together, in particular exploring niche markets (Morgan, 2010; Pan & Ryan, 2009; Roberts & Hall, 2004). Furthermore, sensory themes and information and communication technologies (ICT) should be considered together in order to boost destination experiences before, during and after travel (Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2003, 2010; Neuhofer et al., 2012; Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003). Furthermore, co-creative management in a network based on specific themes calls for creative industries (e.g., films, architecture, and music) to assemble unparalleled experiences in rural destinations (Kastenholz, Carneiro, & Marques, 2012; Mossberg, 2007). In addition, the institution of a destination management organization is crucial for encouraging cooperation between private and public sectors and

assuring that a destination has a coherent system of offerings (Manente&Minghetti, 2006).

Some researchers recommend that traditional forms of communicating the benefits of destinations should be revised and ICT could assist in promoting destination experiences based not only on visual but also on non-visual stimuli (Gretzel&Fesenmaier, 2003; Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Lee, & Tussyadiah, 2011; Hyun Lee, & Hu, 2009; Isacsson et al., 2009). Indeed, stimulating the senses is a tool with the potential to trigger intense emotions and thus sensory-themed communication based on consumer sensory experiences is important with respect to boosting brand attachment (Gretzel&Fesenmaier, 2010). Collaborative marketing strategies may result in sensory-based creative communication events, such as the development of multi-sensory routes addressed at diverse tourist profiles (Pan & Ryan, 2009) or the use of local gastronomy to promote interactive tourist sensory experiences (Daugstad, 2008; Quan& Wang, 2004; Sidali, Kastenholz, & Bianchi, 2013; Silkes, Cai, & Lehto, 2013).

CONCLUSION

Despite the importance of the senses in consumer experiences being clearly identified in literature, this paper acknowledges the lack of research on the sensory dimension of rural tourist experiences. Hence, this paper proposes and discusses a framework which is based on previous research and focused on carefully marketing sensory-themed tourist experiences in rural destinations. The analysis of perceived sensory tourist experiences in the countryside is considered an appropriate starting point for this process since according to diverse academic fields, sensations are a precondition to human perception of the surroundings and thus sensory stimuli are considered to underpin the provision of satisfying environments, whether physical or virtual, for the consumption of tourism products and services, while boosting human interactions (Agapito et al., 2013; Howes, 2005; Krishna, 2012; Tung & Ritchie, 2011).

The proposed framework is based on the experience economy paradigm, posing that sensory appeals are suitable for theming tourist experiences, resulting that the process of analyzing sensory themes perceived as meaningful allows to understanding which endogenous resources are highlighted by specific groups of tourist. The segmentation of tourists based on sensory-themes followed by the procedure of profiling tourists according to motivations and the activities performed in the destination can help

policy makers and tourism providers to address destination offerings and communication strategies to specific groups of tourists which are more likely to have responsible behavior while at the destination (Kastenholz et al., 1999). As a result, sensory themes may be used to conceptualize and promote creatively rural tourist experiences to reference tourist profiles, exploring both the idea of the multi-phase nature of tourist experiences and the potential of ICT (Agapito et al., 2014). For example, the process of integrating geographic information systems and GPS technologies with the internet could enable sensory-informed routes to be mapped interactively facilitating ease of access to up-to-date and reliable information, adapted to the different phases of the trip and to diverse visitors' needs and motivations (Briedenmann & Wickens, 2004; Pan & Ryan, 2009). Specific routes designed for visually impaired tourists, for journalists, or young visitors, for example, could be developed based on meaningful sensory-themed information.

Hence, the efforts to facilitate the emergence of memorable tourist experiences in rural areas may focus on bundles of textures, colors, shapes, sounds, tastes, and smells related to nature (e.g. local fauna and flora, and geography) and unique characteristics of place identity (e.g. local products, gastronomy, handicrafts, farm activities, local architecture), enabling an appealing aesthetic experience. Furthermore, the process of matching sensory-informed tourists' profiles to destinations encourages the integration of the local community and the optimal use of resources in the planning of the overall rural destination experience, benefiting all the stakeholders. This idea is in harmony with the win-win strategies related to community-based tourism that, if properly managed, can stimulate the conservation of endogenous resources and increase local benefits through participation in tourism activities while enhancing the global rural tourism experience (Saxena et al., 2007; Sebele, 2010). Against this background, empirical research using case studies is required in order to validate the complete framework and its effective impact in the sustainable development of rural destinations.

Since the intend of this paper was to present a framework to marketing integrated rural tourist experiences by using sensory-informed themes, rather than particular consumption interactions, the use of mixed methods proposed by previous research on rural tourist experiences seems to be adequate to this goal. Nevertheless, other tools used in consumer behavior research could be considered in a complementary fashion. In order to conduct tourism firm-specific market research to understand consumers' responses to particular sensory stimuli, neurophysiological tools, such as

eye tracking, skin conductance, electroencephalography (EEG), and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) can be implemented in a neuromarketingperspective(Plassmann et al., 2012).Also, experimental studies can contribute to reveal the influence of sensory stimuli (e.g. physical product, gastronomic experience, brand, or promotion) in tourist consumer behavior in particular conditions and to understand how tourists' individual specificities influence their responses (Krishna, 2010). These analyses could result in more effective sensory marketing strategies in rural destinations.

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LESBIANS AS TOURISTS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF TOURIST MOTIVATIONS IN MEXICO

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This paper is an exploratory research of the tourist motivations of lesbians in a context different from those previously studied. Evidence from Western countries suggests that sexuality plays a quite important role in tourism by homosexuals, at least for gay men. By recognising that males and females experience tourism differently, this study aims to contribute to an expanded and more specific understanding of lesbians as tourists in the context of Mexico. Based on qualitative interviews – unlike previous findings based on empirical evidence – this study suggests that sexuality is not as important for determining lesbians' tourism experiences as has been commonly argued. In this study, other aspects, particularly cultural experiences, seem to dominate in lesbians' tourism motivations. While this study does not, by any means, discard the importance of sexuality in lesbian tourism motivations, it does postulate that other factors are as important as sexuality in shaping the tourism experiences of lesbians, at least in a non-Western context.

Keywords: lesbians; tourist motivation; gay tourism; Mexico; qualitative research



INTRODUCTION

Within a number of studies on tourism and homosexuality, it has been suggested that homosexuals have travel motivations similar to those of mainstream tourists. Relaxation, rest and socialisation, to mention but a few, are holiday motivations that apply to both heterosexuals and homosexuals. However, according to existing evidence, sexuality plays a particularly important role in homosexuals' travel experiences, choices and identities (Pritchard, Morgan, Sedgley, Khan & Jenkins, 2000). Tourism provides homosexuals with the opportunity to get away from the social constraints of everyday life and, thus, to be open about their sexual orientation (Hughes, 1997).

However, the evidence on which these assertions have been made has come largely from studies in the context of quite specific Western countries and from the reported holiday experiences of white male homosexuals. Thus, what is known today regarding homosexuals' tourist experiences and motivations represents, at the most, the experiences of extremely specific groups of gay men. Therefore, the experiences of lesbians – and especially those from developing countries – have been significantly neglected. Bearing in mind that 'there is no such thing as a 'typical homosexual' (Hughes, 2002, p. 23), more studies on specific social and cultural contexts need to be done on issues of tourism and lesbians.

In this vein, almost a decade ago, Hughes (2007), an internationally quoted scholar, observed that there is extremely little published research on lesbians and tourism. In his paper entitled 'Lesbians as tourists: Poor relations of a poor relation', the author stated that the study of tourism and lesbians is significant because of wider implications for lesbians' holidays and holiday marketing.

Bearing in mind that sexual orientation and societal marginalisation can influence consumer behaviour, tourism has relevant implications for various aspects of lesbian life, some of which are positive and others arguably less so. The study of tourism and lesbians – particularly from the perspective of different socioeconomic and cultural contexts – can thus contribute to a further understanding of diversity in societies based on issues of sexual orientation, gender and homosexuality.

This paper, therefore, seeks to contribute to a further understanding of lesbians as tourists through a study of their travel motivations in a Mexican context. First, the paper provides a review of some of the main propositions about tourism and homosexuality, lesbians as tourists and lesbian travel motivations. Then, it briefly describes the research setting, Mexico, as a gay tourism destination and existing cultural attitudes towards homosexuality in this country. Next, details of the study's methodological procedure are given. Findings are then presented and discussed in the context of previous findings on lesbian tourism motivations in the West. Finally, conclusions are drawn.

LITERATURE REVIEW

TOURISM AND HOMOSEXUALITY

Gay men and lesbians have been commonly regarded as a profitable market group (Pritchard and Morgan, 1997; Russell, 2001; Stuber, 2002). Their perceived economic power, discretionary leisure time and the specific interests that represent a preference to be high-spenders have led to this perception. Although not all gay people are able to get involved in tourism (Casey, 2009), market reports, such as that of Community Marketing, have found that gay men and lesbians have the largest amount of disposable income of any niche market, making up five per cent or more of the USA consumer market (www.communitymarketinginc.com, 18/06/2015). The potential profitability of the homosexual community is further evidenced when companies such as American Airlines, American Express, Ford, Avis and Virgin have paid to gay and lesbian themes in their marketing (Hughes, 2006). The fact that tour operators, cruise companies, travel agents, accommodation providers, airlines and destinations have become interested in the gay and lesbian holiday market (Peñaloza, 1996) have also recognised the profitability of the homosexual community as a travel group. All these issues have led to a relatively recent interest by academicians.

The relationships between tourism and homosexuality have been discussed and researched in the English-speaking world since the late 1990s. This research has focused on the alleged economic power of gay men and primarily suggested that the gay tourism market is growing rapidly in the United States (Holcomb & Luongo, 1996) and

other parts of the world (Russell, 2001). The significance of holidays for gay men's construction of homosexual identity has also been a pioneering research interest in sexuality studies of tourism (Hughes, 1997). The sexual behaviour of gay men in tourist spaces (Forrest & Clift, 1998) and tourist destinations, as well as holiday motivations of gay men in England (Clift & Forrest, 1999), and the spatial distribution of gay tourism and recreation establishments around the world (Ivy, 2001) have also been incorporated into research agendas on tourism and homosexuality. Furthermore, the social processes that shape gay leisure spaces and the experiences of lesbians in the United Kingdom (Pritchard, Morgan & Sedgley, 2002), as well as the impact of tourism on emerging gay enclaves (Visser, 2003), have also been included in expanding discussions of tourism and sexuality. More recently, the requirements and current holiday profiles of older white British gay men (Hughes & Deutsch, 2010) and European destinations' competitiveness in the male gay tourist segment (Melián-González, Moreno-Gil & Araña, 2011) have also become the subjects of tourism research.

Interest in tourism and homosexuality has grown considerably, revealing issues that are frequently echoed in the literature. In these studies, it is claimed that homosexuality has an influence on holiday patterns in terms of the personal significance of tourists' sexual identity. As Hughes (1997) notes:

Because of social disapproval of homosexuality, many gay men are forced to find gay space... gay space is limited, and gays find it necessary to travel in order to enter that space... The holiday itself can provide for the gay man an opportunity to confirm his identity... Given that society has discouraged openness about being gay, the holiday provides the perfect chance to come out, if only temporarily. The gay identity can be adopted and confirmed 'in secret'. (p. 6)

In addition to the alleged significance that tourism has for the gay community, there appears to be wide agreement regarding the gay and lesbian community as a lucrative market. Based on market surveys, it has been claimed that the gay and lesbian community has more disposable income and a distinct propensity for travel (Holcomb & Luongo, 1996), and this community is expected to increase as a consequence of growing acceptance of sexual and gender minorities (Guaracino, 2007). According to a 2014 survey by Community Marketing, Inc. (CMI) (2014) – an organisation with

wide experience in gay and lesbian market research – 29% of gay and lesbian consumers are frequent leisure travellers, taking five or more trips with 10 or more hotel room nights per year. In terms of hotel branding, Marriot and Hilton hotels are found at the top of gay and lesbian-preferred brands, and, in hotel selection, location and price value are the two most important factors. In addition, CMI reports, homosexual tourists prefer to travel to destinations where they feel safe and do not have laws that discriminate against them. These findings suggest that the gay and lesbian community – or at least specific subgroups of the homosexual population – is indeed a lucrative niche market. What is important to note, though, is that the figures on which the alleged economic significance of the gay market depends largely represent privileged gay men and not the entire population (Puar, 2002).

In the same vein, the currently common assumptions derived from both academic and market research on tourism and homosexuality must be treated with particular caution. First, it must be borne in mind that the available findings derive largely from selected groups that are by no means representative of the entire homosexual population. It can be noted that these figures come from samples commonly made up of white male gays who are open about their sexual orientation or identity and who come from countries identified as developed. For example, the sample in Clift and Forrest's (1999) study on destinations and holiday motivations – one of the most frequently quoted studies on the topic – was composed of gay men residing in southern England. Another study by Hughes and Deutsch (2010) was based on 23 white British men who self-identified as gay. Similarly, in their study of resources required for a sun and beach destination, Melián-González, Moreno-Gil and Araña (2011) surveyed 346 gay tourists (mainly British and German) who stayed in gay-exclusive resorts in Gran Canaria, Spain. The most recent findings on the market by CMI (2014) were obtained from 3,503 self-identified gay and lesbian consumers in the United States who read lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) publications, visit LGBT websites and attend LGBT events. Other related studies have been carried out in the United States, Britain and other parts of Europe (see Table 1) and reveal, further, how figures and findings on tourism and homosexuality have been obtained, for the most part, from cases in quite specific cities in developed

countries and from informants holding quite particular characteristics.

Table 1 Empirical research on tourism and homosexuals: Profiles, motivations and experiences (selected list)

Study	Issue of study	City and country	Informants	Research method	Sample size	Sample procedure
Casey (2009)	The pursuit and/or experience of sex and the intersection of travel, sex and social class in reinforcing binaries of exclusion/inclusion within male gay travel	Melbourne and Sidney, Australia	Sexually active gay men	Semi-structured interviews	21	Snowball
Clift and Forrest (1999)	Tourist destinations and holiday motivations of gay men	Brighton (primarily), United Kingdom	British gay men	Survey	562	Bars/clubs in the main gay venues and issues of a local lesbian and gay magazine
CMI (2014)	LGBT tourism demographic profile	United States	Self-identified members of the	Survey	3,503	Gay and lesbian consumers

			LGBT commu nity in the United States			who read LGBT publications, visit LGBT websites and attend LGBT events
Herrera and Scott (2005)	The use and significance of leisure travel for gay men	'Soledad', United States	Gay men	In-depth interviews and participant observation	9	Snowball and purposive
Hughes (2002)	The choice and rejection of holiday destinations	Manchester, United Kingdom	Gay men	Structured interviews	40	Opportunistic and convenient
Hughes and Deutch (2010)	Requirements and current holiday profiles of older gay men	London and Manchester, United Kingdom	British men self-identified as gay	Semi-structured interviews	23	Purposive and snowball
Melián-González <i>et al.</i>	Destinations' competitiveness in the gay tourist segment	Gran Canaria, Spain	British and German gay tourists, primarily	Survey	346	Seven exclusive gay accommodation

(2011)			y			resorts
Poria and Taylor (2001)	Tourist experiences	Near London, United Kingdom and Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, Israel	Lesbian and gay men from United Kingdom and Israel	Semi-structured interviews	78 (39 lesbians and 39 gay men)	Snowball
Pritchard <i>et al.</i> (2000)	Sexuality and holiday choices	Wales and the Netherlands	Lesbian and gay residents	Focus groups and interviews	26 (12 lesbians and 14 males) and 2 specialist gay tour operators	Snowball
Pritchard <i>et al.</i> (2002)	The social processes that shape gay and lesbian leisure spaces and experiences of lesbians	Manchester, United Kingdom	White lesbians	Informal in-depth interviews	10	Snowball

Second, more specifically, most of what is known so far about tourism and homosexuality largely comes from self-identified male homosexuals. To some extent, they share leisure and tourism patterns that may be different from those experienced by other homosexual communities in the world.

As Hughes (2004, p. 70) stated, 'The surveys are inevitably biased towards those gays who are "out", who are willing to identify as gay and who read particular magazines, use particular websites or attend particular events.' Thus, studies have often portrayed only the voices of men, and the majority of what is known today about tourism and homosexuality has been drawn from the experiences of men. Therefore, existing knowledge on this topic is, at the most, time and place specific, and it does not represent the experiences and subjectivities of all homosexual communities, including those of lesbians in the context of developing countries.

Third, existing studies have also been for the most part undertaken in the West. As Table 1 reveals, studies have frequently been undertaken in North America and Europe (see also Ballegard & Chor, 2009) with a few recent exceptions in countries identified as developing (Mendoza, 2013). Given that socioeconomic and cultural conditions – including sex, age, gender identities, ethnicity, economic power and social status, among others – can shape the experiences of gay and lesbian communities, there is no reason to believe that the experiences of gay men in the West are the same as those experienced by gay men and lesbians in the Southern Hemisphere, or elsewhere.

TOURISM AND LESBIANS

There has been some recent interest in the tourism patterns of lesbians. However, despite Hughes's (2007) call for research almost a decade ago, there is extremely little published research on lesbians as compared to those on gay men. This situation is true for both developed and developing countries, though it is exacerbated in the context of the latter. Neglecting lesbians in tourism studies may have to do with their perceived reduced market power and their socialisation patterns. According to Hughes (2007):

Lesbians have not been considered economically powerful or visible and have not been targeted as a separate consumer group. . . . They are also considered to be more difficult to reach as they are less concentrated in cities, less likely to socialise in gay bars or events and are more oriented towards private social activity and entertainment. There has been a perception of lesbians (associated, in

part, with an anti-capitalist feminism) as being less interested in 'frivolous' leisure activity, fashion and beauty. (p. 17)

In addition, the exclusion of lesbians from tourism studies can be related to the exclusion of women in general, as a marginalised group (Swain, 1995). The absence of lesbians in tourism research may also reflect the male, patriarchal and heteronormative dominance that tourism research has long experienced (Pritchard *et al.*, 2002; Puar, 2002). Thus as Pritchard *et al.* (2002) point out, lesbians are, at the least, doubly marginalised in the tourism literature for being women and homosexual at the same time.

Bearing in mind that, as Hughes argued (2007), 'there is no more reason to believe that lesbians' holiday profiles are the same as those of gay men's than there is to believe that males and females generally have the same motivations and behaviours' (p. 19). The existing knowledge on gay men's holidays is of little help to reveal lesbians' tourism patterns. Men and women, as socially and culturally constructed beings, experience tourism differently, regardless of their sexual orientation. As Kinnaird, Kothari and Hall (1994, p. 7) claim, 'Women and men are involved differently within tourism processes, and, as a result, the relationships, consequences and the eventual configuration of the tourism experience for hosts and guests is gender specific.' Thus, while it is possible that homosexuality and social constraints influence holiday patterns and experiences of both gay men and lesbians, the holiday needs, motivations, experiences and behaviours of lesbians may be quite distinctive from those of gay men. As compared with men, lesbians experience tourism differently for at least two reasons: on the one hand, for being homosexuals and, on the other, for being women. Other important factors, such as socioeconomic conditions and cultural backgrounds, also play a role in differentiating the holiday experiences of lesbians – not only from gay men but also from a variety of lesbian groups.

LESBIANS AND TOURIST MOTIVATIONS

Tourism motivations can be defined as the biological and sociocultural forces that drive travel behaviour (Pearce, 2005, p. 55). Identifying tourist motivations is relevant for tourism market segmentation and for the study of tourists' expectations, satisfaction,

experiences and behaviour. The importance of tourist motivations has been echoed in academic research, as they have been one of the most consistent, important subject areas in tourism research (Xiao & Smith, 2006).

The number of studies looking at gay men and lesbians' motivations is small. Although these studies have focused directly on homosexuals' reasons for going on holiday, motivations can also be explored through the experiences of tourists. According to Clift and Forrest (1999):

An alternative approach to the study of tourist motivations involves asking about tourists' holiday experiences. It is reasonable to assume that tourists will generally plan holidays, which provides them with the experiences they are seeking, and so patterns of holiday activity may offer a good marker of principal motivations underlying holiday planning and destination choice. (p. 617)

Pioneering studies on gay male tourists' motivations revealed that what gay men look for in a holiday is to some extent similar to what mainstream tourists seek (Hughes, 2006; Pritchard *et al.*, 2000). In Waitt and Markwell's (2006) words, 'For many gay men, the travel motivations are similar to those of many young, single, heterosexual men' (p. 249). However, some studies have concluded that, for homosexuals, there is a particular need to be with other gay people and have access to gay spaces and gay-friendly places (Hughes, 2002). This has been empirically evidenced, although no differentiation between gay men and lesbians has been clearly made, despite the fact that tourist motivations are gendered (Kinnaird *et al.*, 1994). In their study of gay destinations and holiday motivations, Clift and Forrest (1999) found that comfort, good food, rest and relaxation, sunshine, good nightlife, landscape and culture are important elements in tourist motivation of gay men. Likewise, other factors such as socialisation with other gay men, gay spaces and opportunities to have sex have also appeared as relevant holiday motivations of gay men. The findings of recent surveys have been, in some ways, consistent.

The qualitative, exploratory study by Pritchard *et al.* (2000) on sexuality and holiday choices confirmed the idea that thereasons to travel of gay men and lesbians were similar to those of non-gays. By investigating the travel motivations of gay and lesbian tourists who had 'come out' and who had not, however, they concluded that

sexuality did influence choices of accommodation, booking methods (see also Poria & Taylor, 2001), destinations and packages for many of those interviewed. They also concluded that the need to feel safe, to feel comfortable with like-minded people and to escape from heterosexism emerged as key influences on their choice of holiday. Although their study did not clearly differentiate the experiences and motivations of gay men from those of lesbians, the authors found that lesbians are more likely to search for acceptance and do not associate their holidays with sex, or at least as much as gay men do.

According to Pritchard *et al.* (2000), the need to escape from the pressures of being gay was perceived as the most significant motivating factor for taking a holiday. In the authors' words, 'A key motivation is to be able to enter a world where they can behave in ways that would not be sanctioned or acceptable at home' (Pritchard *et al.*, 2000, p. 279).

Hughes (2002) extended the analyses and findings of Clift and Forrest (1999) and Pritchard *et al.* (2000) by further examining the reasons underlying destination choices— with special reference to risk and avoidance of destinations. Hughes concluded that the types of holidays that gay men go on are the same as those of the rest of society. Gay men choose holidays that are focused on sun, scenery, culture, heritage, sports and entertainment, to name a few. The author points out that motivations such as social interaction, regeneration, self-realisation, freedom, ego-enhancement, evaluation of self, prestige and escape apply in the same way to gay men as they do to others. In addition, Hughes (2002) reported that there was little support for the view that gay men travel in order to be more open about their sexuality or to have more sexual encounters but that sexuality has a significant influence on destination discard and choice. Although Hughes' (2002) research certainly extended and reinforced previous analyses, he recognized that, because his study sample was both opportunistic and convenient, it was unlikely to represent gay men as a population. In a similar vein, the nineteenth LGBT Tourism and Hospitality Survey undertaken by CMI (2014) found that relaxation, fun and culture are the top three motivations of the LGBT population surveyed in the United States. The study revealed, however, that a third of LGBTs have chosen a hotel based on their LGBT reputation. This suggests that for some, the gay-friendly character of a holiday destination is important as well.

Without supporting empirical evidence, Hughes (1997) suggested that one of the reasons why gay men take holidays is the process of forming and consolidating identities, that is, to be themselves. This reason can be explained by social oppression of homosexuality. Of all the variations of sexual behaviour, homosexuality has often been the target of social, religious, legal and gender oppression across different cultures and through various historical periods (Katz, 1992; Reding, 2000; Ruse, 1988; Weeks, 1989). Even though some writers have argued that, over recent decades, many homosexual people have experienced an end to homosexual oppression in some countries (Katz, 1992), negative social, legal and religious reactions toward homosexuals still exist around the world (Reding, 2000). In this vein, holidays play an important role in allowing homosexual people to indulge their sexuality away from everyday social constraints experienced at home.

Holidays have a particular significance for homosexuals: they offer the most significant opportunities for constructing, confirming and/or changing their sexual identity in an anonymous way (Cox, 2001; Hughes, 1997). This is because, most of the time, homosexuals live in areas dominated by heterosexism, which imposes social constraints on homosexuals for both gay men and lesbians.

Taking into account that the gay male community is not homogenous (Casey, 2009), there is reason to believe that the situation of lesbians is no different. Lesbians, as socioeconomic, cultural, gendered and political groups, have different characteristics from those of men and from those of other women. Thus, lesbians need to be studied in different socioeconomic and cultural contexts in order to gain a more holistic understanding of lesbians as tourists worldwide.

Within this framework, the purpose of this study was to explore the tourism motivations of lesbians living in different parts of Mexico. This paper sheds light on how the tourism motivations of lesbians have different socioeconomic and cultural characteristics from homosexuals already studied. In addition, it contributes to an analysis of the relationships between tourism and sexuality in the context of developing countries, which has been largely neglected in the study of tourism and homosexuality.

THE STUDY

SETTING

The study was undertaken in Mexico. Over the last decade, researchers have claimed that Mexico is growing in popularity as a gay tourist destination. Cantú(2002)reported, 'Mexico seems to represent a homosexual paradise free of pressures of a modern "gay life style", where sexuality exists in its "raw" form' (p. 148). This can be observed in the fact that Mexico appears in international gay guides. For example, *Spartacus International Gay Guide* (Bedford, 2005), one of the most widely used information sources for gay travellers around the world (Ivy, 2001) –although focused on men (Pritchard *et al.*, 2000) – provides homosexuals with information about bars, cafes, accommodation, dance clubs, saunas/baths, cruises and swimming spots around Mexico. This guide reports Acapulco, Guadalajara, Mexico City and Puerto Vallarta as important gay cities, though other cities and popular tourist resorts are described as well. According to the *Spartacus*guide(Bedford, 2005):

Mexico is a tourist paradise: wonderful beaches, impressive mountains, vast landscapes from the jungle in the south to the desert in the north, a millennial historical past and the melting of three different cultures into a very dynamic and coloured [sic] society. Big, exciting, modern cities, fascinating small colonial villages and rich archaeological areas make of this country a living museum. Last but not less, the authentic Mexican cuisine makes a visit to Mexico a must.(p. 682)

The existence of national travel agencies devoted to gay and lesbian populations is also an indicator of the popularity of Mexico as a tourism destination. *Conociendo México Gay (Getting to Know Gay Mexico)*, for example, is a travel agency dedicated to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transvestite, transgender, transsexual and intersexualcommunity. It is the first specialised gay agency for group travel in Mexico and offers a large variety of tours ranging from urban destinations to archaeological and gastronomic attractions – all this in a LGBT environment (Turismo Gay, 2012).

Nevertheless, homosexuality is still a target of social and religious disapproval in Mexico. The social and religious

environment in most of Mexico has historically been, and still remains, repressive and sometimes dangerous (Reding, 2000). In Mexican culture, society generally disapproves of homosexuality (Carrier, 1995). Throughout the country, Roman Catholic teachings that homosexuality is a sin have contributed to social intolerance. In order to live an undisturbed, openly homosexual lifestyle in most of Mexico, including large cities, homosexuals need to hide their sexual orientation. Otherwise, there is the risk of violence against them (Reding, 2000). For example, in a recent case, in December 2013, a lesbian couple were travelling on the Mexico City underground. While they were holding hands, a man said to them, 'Filth! If other people do not urinate or defecate on the street, why do you do this here?', referring to the couple's public demonstration of affection. The couple decided to ignore the man's insults and kissed each other. Then the man hit one of the women on the back. They responded to the attack, and he continued hitting them. They called the police, and the man was apprehended. The couple experienced, however, a lack of understanding in the authorities (Reyes, 2013).

On the other hand, homosexuals have made significant political and legal gains in Mexico, and this will eventually have an effect on homosexuals' holiday experiences. Mexico City, for example, has allowed same-sex couples to marry legally and adopt children since 2010 (Malkin, 2010), and the Mexican Supreme Court ruled in August 2010 that all the states of Mexico must recognise same-sex marriages registered in Mexico City (Agren, 2010). How these laws have been enforced in reality, though, is something that is outside the scope of this research but that deserves special attention.

METHODS

Researching issues related to homosexuality presents difficulties (Hughes, 2002; Pritchard *et al.*, 2000). A literature review suggests that one of the particular difficulties researchers have faced when investigating the relationships between the gay community and their travel experiences is the availability of informants. This may have much to do with the fact that the gay community is a hidden group (Renzetti & Lee, 1993) and its size is ill-defined. Hughes (2004) stated that 'the number of gays and lesbians is unknown; there is

considerable disagreement about definitions and, in addition, some proportion of that population (however defined) will not identify as such to others' (p. 66). Because of the normally small samples in studies, generalisations and assumptions about the homosexual community are therefore hard to make (Poria & Taylor, 2001). However, qualitative methods and snowball sampling procedures reveal a greater range of homosexuals' characteristics, language and tourism patterns than more quantitative surveys do (Hughes, 2004; Pritchard *et al.*, 2000).

According to published findings, qualitative methods are currently commonly used for data collection not only in tourism studies in general (Ballantyne, Packer & Axelsen, 2009; Phillimore & Goodson, 2004; Riley & Love, 2000) but also with regard to the holiday experiences of homosexuals. Several pieces of work support this observation. When conducting their exploratory investigation of the travel motivations of gay and lesbian tourists, for example, Pritchard *et al.* (2000) opted to use in-depth interviews and focus groups, as these would allow the researchers to understand and conceptualise the connection between homosexuality and holidays. Similarly, Poria and Taylor (2001) opted for a face-to-face interview method of data collection when exploring how the Internet provides the gay and lesbian population with sources that support anonymity. This qualitative technique was selected since the authors wanted to gather a rich, rather than representative, sample of perspectives. Hughes' (2002) study is a further instance of the use of qualitative approaches in the study of homosexuality in the context of holidays. This researcher opted to undertake a small number of structured interviews with gay men in order to determine what influences their choice and rejection of holiday destinations. The rationale for his qualitative approach, the author argued, lies in the ability to gain insight into behaviour in a way that is difficult through quantitative methods. In a similar vein, when examining the use and significance of leisure travel by gay men in a small city, Herrera and Scott (2005) opted to use in-depth interviews and participant observation since they believed that these approaches help explore informants' reality and allow them to speak in their own voice. More recently, Casey's (2009) research on gay men's motivations to undertake holidays and Hughes and Deutsch's (2010) study of holiday profiles of older gay

men reflect the value of qualitative methods – particularly in-depth interviews –in the study of homosexual tourism experiences.

Having established the validity of this methodology, this study also adopted a qualitative approach based on in-depth interviews. The study was undertaken in Central Mexico. Twenty-one Mexican women self-identified as lesbians or gays²residing in different parts of Mexico were interviewed.The criterion of self-identification was adopted bearing in mind that, as Hughes (2000) recognised, ‘Sexuality is a very fluid concept and being homosexual is ultimately a self-defined category’(p. 202). Initially twenty-eight women were approached for participation; however, seven could not participate due to time restrictions mainly. The informants were recruited largely via connections with the authors of this paper. The sample was,in some ways, opportunistic,utilising the researchers’ personal contacts and social groups – with some snowballing associated with these. Snowball sampling is useful when the population is so widely dispersed that other sampling techniques may not be efficient; it is used to identify potential participants when appropriate candidates are hard to locate and involves using referrals from initial participants (Altinay&Paraskevas, 2008). The final number of informants was based on the researchers’ judgement, reaching a theoretical saturation, that is, when no new categories emerged (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Although this procedure was opportunistic, a special effort was made to gather women from diverse socioeconomic and demographic backgrounds so that diverse voices could be heard. Guidelines for interviews were obtained from the literature review.The instrument included questions regarding destination choice, travel patterns (e.g. frequency), reasons for tripsand the interviewees’ perspective on the relationship between their sexual orientation and holidays. Examples of specific questions are as follows:

- How often do you travel?
- What type of destinations do you usually go to?
- Do you travel alone or with somebody?
- What type of activities do you commonly get involved in?

- What makes you travel when travelling for pleasure?
- What type of accommodation establishments do you usually stay in?
- How important is the gay character of a destination for you to visit it?
- How do you define yourself in terms of sexual orientation?

The research goal and interview procedure were introduced to each interviewee. With interviewees' prior consent, each interview was recorded and then transcribed verbatim for analysis and interpretation. Each researcher independently reviewed the transcriptions and then sought agreement on the tourist motivation categories that emerged.

FINDINGS

The women in this study reported, on average, taking three trips a year. While most of them reported travelling within Mexico, some of them have travelled abroad as well. Destinations in the United States, Canada and Europe were reported for international travel. Particularly on domestic trips, lesbians travel quite often with their family. Sometimes, they travel with their partner or friends or, on rare occasions, alone.

As stated by Pritchard *et al.* (2000), tourists travel for a multitude of reasons, and lesbians have much in common with mainstream tourists. This study reinforces this notion by revealing a large number of motivations for the lesbians studied. However, unlike other studies on homosexuals' motivations, experiencing new places and, especially, learning about other cultures in Mexico was the most reported motivation by the lesbians in this study. The cultural and, to a certain extent, natural richness of Mexico was a motivational factor for many of the informants. Culture as a tourist motivation for male homosexuals has also been reported in other research (Clift & Forrest, 1999), but, for the women of this study, culture is an extremely important factor in travelling. A single, 45-year-old informant said:

I go to places where the culture, music, traditions and food are appealing. I like to travel around Mexico because of the cultural

attractions. I like to meet different people, experience their lifestyles and Mexican traditions. This is the main reason why I travel.

An informant who normally travels twice a year added, 'I like to experience different places, and I like to learn. I love culture, and I am fascinated with learning about other ways of thinking and people's customs.' A woman who has travelled widely within Mexico and abroad reinforced this finding. 'What makes me travel? Getting to experience new places, meeting different people, enjoying architecture, typical food and items of the region is what motivates me to travel.' Whilst, in other studies, local culture has ranked eighth, in terms of what gay men look for in a holiday (Clift & Forrest, 1999), culture was mentioned as a top motivational factor for the lesbians in this study. This may be explained by gender dimensions, as it has been suggested that women place significantly more importance on holiday cultural experiences than men (McGehee, Loker-Murphy & Uysal, 1996). This suggests that lesbians' motivations are diverse, but, in the context of the Mexican women studied, culture (e.g. lifestyles, traditions, cuisine, behaviours, languages, architecture and museums) is an extremely important reason for lesbian travel.

Pritchard *et al.* (2000) found that, for the majority of their respondents, sexuality was an important determinant of their holidays. Seeking safety in gay spaces, a desire to be among like-minded people and the need to be oneself and escape from heterosexism were important motivations for gay and lesbian holidays. The findings of this study, however, suggest the opposite: the majority of the lesbians interviewed actually denied that their sexual orientation has an influence on their holiday patterns and experiences. Virtually all of them declared that their sexuality is an independent issue from their decisions to travel. A 37-year-old informant who has travelled widely abroad and within Mexico noted:

My trips are not associated with my being gay. I have visited many places just because I want to visit them. For my partner and me, travelling is important because we enjoy being together and discovering new places together. We decide on and make bookings together. We do everything together, but we do not search for gay places.

In a similar vein, a 28-year-old woman travelling at least twice a year said:

Once, I went to a gay place, but I did not like it. To me, it is not important to visit gay places. For my partner and me, other things such as museums, colonial cities, the people, the history and the like *are* important.

The above assertions were consistent with the activities and travel patterns that the majority of the informants engage in during their holidays. The descriptions of their holiday activities reinforce the idea that sexuality is not an important component of lesbian holidays. A housewife stated, 'When I travel on holiday, I usually get involved in hiking. I explore new places, try to get in contact with nature.' Likewise, an informant who works as a teacher reported, 'I often walk around. I talk to people, try to experience local culture and get involved in local people's customs and everyday life.' A woman who normally travels four times a year added, 'It is not relevant for me to go out to gay places. Sometimes, I just stay in my room resting, watching TV, reading or listening to music.'

Furthermore, almost none of the informants indicated an interest in meeting other lesbians or staying at gay or gay-friendly hotels. In fact, unlike findings that suggested that the gay and lesbian market is associated with specific brand hotels (CMI, 2014), extremely few informants in this study look for luxurious or expensive hotels. The great majority stated that they are not demanding in this regard: cleanliness, tranquillity, safety and a good location were the basic requirements for accommodations. A single 27-year-old said, 'I just need a clean and safe place, that's it!' A woman that commonly travels to visit her family members added, 'When travelling, I normally stay at my friends or my relatives' house. All I need is a bed, water and a toilet.' Furthermore, the notion of lesbian sexual orientation was not associated with food establishments in the interviews. None of the informants reported looking for gay or gay-friendly places to eat. In fact, most of them reported eating at local food markets (*mercados*) where traditional, authentic food can commonly be found in Mexico. Certainly, gay spaces were mentioned, but, as suggested by the extracts above, it was not reported as being relevant to their travel motivations and experiences. Instead, visiting gay spaces – mainly bars and nightclubs – was rather a matter of chance. A typical response was given by a woman who often travels with her family or partner. 'I am not the type of

person who is into gay bars and that stuff. If there is a chance to go, I go; if not, everything is okay.' Then, the gay space seems to be irrelevant for some lesbian travel.

Although this study's findings suggest that sexuality does not influence holidays – or, at least, not significantly and not for everyone – holidays do give lesbian couples the chance to spend more time together and strengthen their relationship, similar to heterosexuals and any other couples. An informant who has been living with her partner for 10 years said:

Travelling is important for us. We enjoy ourselves when travelling together. We get to know each other better. Holidays give my partner and me the chance to be together all the time, something that does not happen during the rest of the time, due to our work schedules.

An informant who sometimes travels with her family reported that 'during holidays, my partner and I escape from our everyday routine. We give ourselves time as a couple, and, when we travel together with our families, we can spend more time and share more with them.' So, lesbian travel, as any other form of leisure travel, provides individuals with the chance to enhance partner and family relationships. In this regard, the role of tourism is not differentiated on the basis of individuals' sexual orientation.

Furthermore, a frequently reported motivation and activity while travelling was to strengthen family bounds by travelling and spending time with family members and visiting relatives. This motivation, though, does not seem to have much to do with sexuality but perhaps more with cultural issues. It might be deeply associated with the meaning and importance that family has historically had for some Mexican people (Jones, 1948). In this vein, for the lesbians interviewed, holiday activities and travel patterns are intrinsically related to family ties: they travel with family members (commonly parents, brothers, sisters, nephews and nieces). This aspect shapes their holidays. According to a woman who travels four or five times a year, 'Where I go and what I do depends on who I am travelling with. If I go with my family, we go to family places.' A woman who loves travelling for pleasure said: 'I travel a lot with my family; my sister lives in Jalisco [a western state] and my cousins in Monterrey [a northeastern city], so my family and I visit them once or twice a year to spend time all together. We also go to other places in

southern and central Mexico to spend a week as a family. I love spending time with them.'

Finally, for others, the spiritual dimension of travelling is the main motivating factor. An interviewee who has travelled extensively around Europe said, 'I am a free spirit. Travelling feeds my soul. I cannot go for a long time without travelling. It makes me feel alive. It makes me feel very excited. It fills me up.' Getting away from routines, relaxing, socialising and having fun were also reported as reasons by the informants – motivations reported by gay men and mainstream tourists as well.

The empirical evidence and reflections above suggest that the differences between mainstream and lesbian tourism are not significantly determined by the sexual orientations component. Based on this exploratory study, there are similarities between lesbian tourism and perhaps many other forms of leisure travel in terms of the travel patterns, the motivations themselves, the leisure activities women get involved in and the significance that travel has for them. Unquestionably, for some lesbians tourism may be relevant for their own sexual or cultural identity, but something similar happens with other forms of heterosexual tourism, such as the case of heterosexual males who travel abroad to reinforce their masculinity (Garrick, 2005). Then, this study suggests that sexuality may be part of motivational factors in lesbian tourism, as it may be in other forms of leisure travel in the heterosexual world.

CONCLUSIONS

Much of the existing literature on homosexuality and tourism tends to be male dominated and comes from quite specific contexts, in particular, those of specific Western countries. The holiday motivations and experiences of lesbians in the context of developing countries have thus been largely neglected. The existing literature suggests that homosexuals' holiday motivations are similar to those of other tourists but that sexuality has a critical impact on their tourism choices and experiences (Pritchard *et al.*, 2000). Set in the context of a non-Western country, this study, however, suggests that, for some lesbians, sexuality does not play a relevant role in tourism experiences. While generally shared motivations such as rest and relaxation were reported by the women studied, cultural experiences

and strengthening family ties were often reported as travel motivations. Tourism may give lesbians an opportunity to spend time with their partners – as it does for heterosexual couples – and the use of gay spaces is more a matter of chance rather than planned behaviour.

This study thus suggests that special caution is needed when talking about possible lesbian holiday patterns, motivations and experiences. By incorporating the voices of lesbians from different contexts than those already studied, this study has shown that not all tourism motivations apply to lesbians. The type of travel in terms of purpose, people they travel with, their economic power and family relationships, among other aspects, shape their varying tourism motivations. In addition, scholars need to bear in mind that talking about lesbians as a homogenous group is risky, since the experiences of those yet unheard cannot be said, by any means, to be represented by the voices of lesbians studied here. If intra-gender differences often indicate the varying ways in which different women and men experience social practices (Kinnaird *et al.*, 1994, p. 28), researchers, therefore, should also consider intra-sexual and intra-cultural differences in order to gain a more integrated understanding of lesbians.

While this study widens the current understanding of lesbian tourists' motivations by presenting contexts never studied before, some possible limitations need to be considered. Particularly, it is highly likely that the fact that respondents were addressed based on the authors' personal contacts, their holiday motivations will be somehow similar; so a different sampling procedure may be useful to gain a larger variety of informants. Likewise, some issues still need further attention. The degree of the impact that culture has on lesbian tourists' experiences – as compared with that of sexuality and other issues, such as age and ethnicity – needs to be understood in order to gain a deeper understanding of lesbians as tourists.

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THE CLASSIFICATION OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS BASED ON CULTURAL ACTIVITIES- BASED SEGMENTATION: THE CASE OF PENANG, MALAYSIA

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This study evaluates the perceptions of cultural tourists regarding the importance and performance of Penang's attributes. Both activities-based analysis and importance-performance analysis were used. The former was applied to identify cultural tourists from all international tourists to Penang; whereas the latter evaluated their perceptions concerning Penang's attributes. The findings reveal that Penang's cultural tourists primarily perceive the image of Penang according to its World Heritage Site status.

Additionally, Penang's cultural and historical uniqueness were the second most important attributes, having satisfactory performance, ranking just after the island's image.

A discussion of the results and suggestions for further studies are presented.

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Keywords: cultural tourist, international tourist, Penang, activities-based segmentation, importance-performance analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Penang is one of Malaysia's leading cultural heritage destinations. Although the island had placed itself as a "sun, sea and sand" (3S) tourism destination (Cairns, 2002), the state government is also promoting cultural heritage as an alternative tourism theme (Hamzah, 2004). Nevertheless, the cultural heritage attributes of Penang have been neglected and overshadowed by the demand for 3S tourism. In recent years, Penang started to realise that it has lost the title 'Pearl of the Orient' which was assigned to this island in the 1960s. The island's charm is slowly diminishing and quickly losing out to emerging destinations such as Phuket, Bali and other Indo-China countries regarded as more exotic in the eyes of many Western tourists (Hooi, 2006). Following the economic recession of the late 1990s, Penang began to focus on cultural heritage tourism to sustain the developing tourism sector. The declaration of George Town as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) World Heritage Site in 2008 has paved the way for Penang to rejuvenate its ailing tourism industry. As a World Heritage Site, the uniqueness of George Town lies at the cross-roads of religious pluralism, historic townscape and living heritage. Consequently, 'novelty and knowledge seeking' and 'cultural and historical attractions' have been the most important push and pull motives for international tourists who are thinking about visiting Penang (Yousefi&Marzuki, 2012). The changes in visitor types to World Heritage Sites are also inevitable. As noted by Ho (2009):

...the heritage award has been linked to the much discussed 'culture-heritage tourism' sector, believed to carry great potential for driving the future growth of Penang tourism industry. This is in line with the growing numbers of global travellers seeking a different kind of holiday that is not packaged as a rushed shopping/sightseeing tour trip. Not surprisingly, many countries that heavily depend on tourism are increasingly gearing their tourism industry to cater for these 'culture-culture' travellers, who are deemed a more profitable and sustainable market (p.7).

In parallel with the rising interest in cultural heritage tourism and the global influx of alternative tourists, the number of tourist arrivals in Penang has steadily increased over the past decade. Penang State

Tourism Development & Culture (2011) reported that the total number of tourist arrivals to Penang in 2008, with the exception of those who visited by cruises, day trips and stopovers to friends and relatives, had shot up to 6.32 million tourists as compared to 5.19 million tourists in the previous year. Moreover, the total number of tourists in 2009 and 2010 was also close to 6 million, followed by 6.02 and 6.09 in 2011 and 2012, respectively. The increasing number of tourist arrivals has led to subsequent increases in related local industries; such as food and beverage, hotel, handicrafts, transportation, travel agencies and real estate businesses.

Since retaining existing cultural tourists in Penang is as important as attracting new ones, it is important to understand how these tourists perceive Penang in order to develop appropriately targeted marketing strategies. Tourists are more likely to hold destinations in high regards when their expectations have been met (Pritchard & Havitz, 2006). Therefore, the perceptions of cultural tourists with regards to the importance and performance of Penang's attributes are evaluated, which forms the gist of the paper. The activities-based segmentation method is used to identify those tourists who specifically rated cultural activities as essential to moderately important reasons for visiting Penang. After identifying those satisfying the first criterion, importance-performance analysis is used to identify both the importance and the performance of Penang attributes from the international tourist's perspective.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Cultural Tourist

Cultural enthusiasm and a passion to learn and experience new cultures are among the crucial factors that motivate individuals to travel to new places. Culture has been considered as one of the major destination attributes and motivational factors to affect the destination choice process (Kozak, 2002). For some tourists, culture is the main reason for a trip, and for others, it might be a part in a parcel of many intentions for a trip. Hence, the level of involvement and interest in cultural activities and products may differ from one to the other (Richards, 2007). Nevertheless, cultural tourism is thought to be one of the most globally significant and fastest growing components of tourism (Organisation for Economic Co-operation

and Development, 2009). Indeed, previous research observed that cultural tourists spend most of their time and money at a given destination (Silberberg, 1995). Due to this fact, many countries have placed considerable efforts into developing cultural tourism in order to cater to this segment of the market.

To identify cultural tourists, it is first necessary to define what cultural tourism is and to classify the activities related to it. The Dictionary of Travel, Tourism and Hospitality (Medlik, 2003) defined cultural tourism as a general term referring to leisure travel motivated by one or more aspects of the culture of a particular area. The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) (as cited in Csapo, 2012) provided a broad definition of cultural tourism:

...cultural tourism can be defined as that activity which enables people to experience the different ways of life of other people, thereby gaining at first hand an understanding of their customs, traditions, the physical environment, the intellectual ideas and those places of the architectural, historic, archaeological or other cultural significance which remain from earlier times. Cultural tourism differs from recreational tourism in that it seeks to gain an understanding or appreciation of the nature of the place being visited (p. 204).

Based on ICOMOS's definition, the main purpose of cultural tourism is to gain knowledge regarding new customs, traditions, etc. Richards (2001a) defined cultural tourism as "the movement of persons to cultural attractions away from their normal place of residence, with the intention to gather new information and experiences to satisfy their cultural needs" (p. 37). He emphasised the idea, 'intention to gather new information', to explain the cultural tourism phenomenon. However, other researchers defined cultural tourism based on the motives to visit places of historical, artistic and lifestyle interests (Alzua, O'leary & Morrison, 1998).

The distinction between an intended cultural tourist and those who inadvertently become cultural tourists is subtle. Nevertheless, exposure to the cultural aspects of a destination is a common motivation in any trip, and some tourists select specific destinations purely for their cultural attractions. These are the tourists that Richards (2001b) categorised to be with the intention to satisfy their cultural needs. He explained:

...cultural tourism therefore covers not just the consumption of the cultural products of the past, but also of contemporary culture or the way of life of a people or region. Cultural tourism therefore has seen as covering both ‘heritage tourism’ (related to artefacts of the past) and ‘arts tourism’ (related to contemporary cultural production) (p. 7).

Furthermore, the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) (as cited in Csapo, 2012) proposed two definitions of cultural tourism, referred to as the wide and narrow definitions. The wide definition:

...all movement of persons...because they satisfy the human need for diversity, tending to raise the cultural level of the individual and giving rise to new knowledge, experience and encounters (p. 205).

Whereas, the narrow definition:

...movements of persons for essentially cultural motivations such as study tours, performing arts and cultural tours, travel to festivals and other cultural events, visits to sites and monuments, travel to study nature, folklore or art, and pilgrimages (p. 205).

2.2 Classification of Cultural Tourists

Though cultural tourists constitute one segment of the tourism industry, this faction is comprised of different groups. A homogenous group of tourists might perceive various motivations, reactions and behaviours or seek to derive different benefits from consuming the same products and services (Söllner & Rese, 2001). The importance of categorising the market into different segments or groups is only meaningful if it helps to better match the products with the target market (Mitchell & Wilson, 1998). To identify the various groups of cultural tourists, some researchers have used demographic variables (Richards, 1996). Another approach included the segmentation method which categorised various factions in the market based on the benefits they seek in participating in an activity or purchasing a product (Frochot & Morrison, 2001). Others assume cultural tourism to be an undifferentiated segment of tourists who are highly motivated to seek out deep cultural experiences. However, Mckercher (2002) argued that “the importance (or centrality) of cultural tourism can be the main reason someone chooses a destination, but it also can play a lesser role” (p. 32). Therefore, cultural tourists can be categorised based on how they prioritise

culture and cultural activity in their decision-making process and their selection of activities on site (Silberberg, 1995; Mckercher, 2002). This notion can be empirically articulated to evaluate the different levels of tourist engagement in cultural activities (Mckercher&Cros, 2003). Activities-based segmentation differentiates tourists depending on the various types of activities that appeal to different types of cultural tourists. It defined groups of tourists by tracing their behaviour and cultural patterns (Mckercher, Ho, Cros& So-Ming, 2008). In this paper, cultural tourists were defined as those who rate cultural activities at the destination as being of essential to medium priority.

Importance-performance analysis (IPA) was also applied to understand tourists' perceptions toward Penang's attributes. Applying the IPA method to segmentation provides help in better understanding the market (Bruyere, Rodriguez & Vaske, 2002; Wade & Eagles, 2003). Martilla and James (1977) suggested using IPA to assess products and services based on two components: the importance of the products or services, and the performance of the products and services. IPA is an accepted measurement tool used to assess consumer satisfaction, and it emphasises the importance and performance of products and services (Bruyere et al., 2002). In this paper, IPA was used to evaluate the cultural tourists' perceptions with regards to Penang's attributes.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study utilised a questionnaire as a primary data collection instrument. The attributes of Penang used in the survey were discussed and finalised by a panel consisting of tourism stakeholders such as hotel managers, travel agents, airline officials, airport staff and tourist attraction representatives. The questionnaire contained 31 items and was arranged in four parts. The sections were related to travel planning followed by travel expenditure and shopping, travel preferences and opinions and demographic background. In section three, participants ranked 12 attributes of Penang based on their importance and performance. Participants were asked to rate the attributes based on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (extremely important). Similarly, destination performance was rated from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent).

The study sample included international tourists, aged 18 and above, who visited Penang in 2012. The survey was conducted either by face-to-face interviews with the respondents using assigned enumerators or by self-completion at selected tourist hotspots in Penang. Data collection sites included the departure hall at Penang International Airport, Swettenham Pier Cruise Terminal, Penang tourism information centres on Acheen Street and Beach Street, Chulia Street, Penang Hill, Ferringhi beaches and Homestay Jalan Baharu, BalikPulau. Enumerators asked screening questions at the beginning of the survey to verify whether the respondents were international tourists and not transient tourists. They approached respondents on a convenience basis and data collection was conducted between August and November 2012.

For the purpose of this study, respondents who rated cultural activities as their essential to medium priority were extracted from the main data set. 341 respondents were accessed. These respondents were chosen depending on activities-based segmentation in which tourists in the market were classified by the activities they had undertaken (Mckercher et al., 2008). Visiting museum/art galleries, attending traditional cultural performance, visiting heritage/historical attractions and experiencing local food were their essential to medium priority activities while visiting Penang. Data analysis occurred over two stages. In the first stage, frequency and cross-tabulation analysis were conducted to interpret the respondent's demographic and travelling characteristics. In the second stage, the importance-performance analysis IPA was performed to determine how the international cultural tourists rated the importance and performance of Penang's attributes. A reliability test was conducted for each of the 12 items of Penang's importance and performance, respectively, in order to test the stability of the variables. Variables with coefficients equal to or greater than 0.70 were accepted as being reliable indicators and measurement variables. The Cronbach's Alpha for the 12 items of destination importance was 0.874 and 0.879 for the 12 performance indicators, suggesting a strong homogeneity of the items.

The next step of the analysis was the importance-performance analysis, as described by Martilla and James (1977). IPA is a well-documented and reliable tool giving service providers and managers reliable information on the level of satisfaction and efficiency of

resource allocation (Wade & Eagles, 2003). IPA was employed to determine how the international cultural tourists rated the importance and performance of Penang's attributes. Survey participants were asked two questions regarding each of Penang's attributes: (1.) How important is this attribute? (2.) How well did this attribute perform? This was followed by the mean scores for both importance and performance variables which were calculated and illustrated in a two-dimensional grid where the importance values (Y-axis) was plotted against the performance values (X-axis). The data was depicted on a grid where each variable plotted was in line with its perceived importance and performance (Figure 1). Graphically illustrating the data in this manner required that each of the variables be assigned to one of four quadrants. Quadrant I was the most important categorisation as it represented the elements which failed to satisfy the customers' perceived expectations. The factors that fell into this quadrant indicated weaknesses which required immediate consideration. The attributes in Quadrant II indicated the industry's success in meeting the customer's standard for satisfaction. Factors indicating minor weaknesses were placed in Quadrant III. While improvements in these areas were desirable, they were not essential and, therefore, did not require immediate attention. Quadrant IV was reserved for attributes indicative of high performance (Wade & Eagles, 2003; Azzopardi & Nash, 2013). In addition to the IPA, a paired sample *t*-test was performed to determine whether any significant difference existed between the perceived importance and performance attributes of Penang from the cultural tourist's point of view.

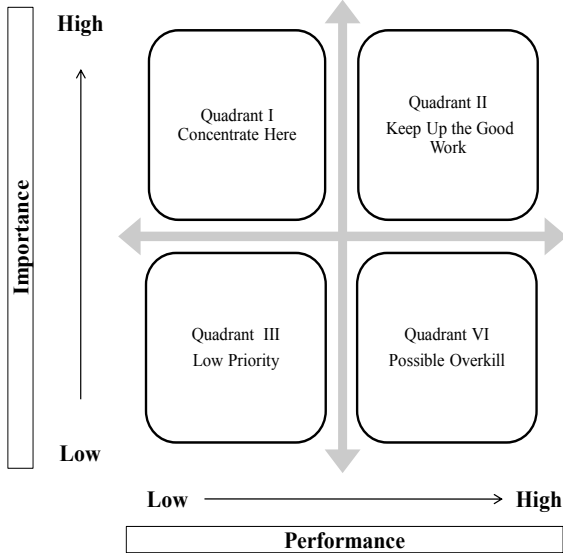


Figure 1.Importance-performance analysis grid

4. RESULTS

The process used for conducting the activities-based segmentation was outlined in Figure 2. First, essential cultural attractions and activities were identified based on the list of activities undertaken by tourists in Penang as follows: (1.) experiencing local food; (2.) visiting heritage and historical sites; (3.) attending traditional cultural performances; and (4.) visiting museums and art galleries. The second stage involved grouping tourists by the essentiality of the selected cultural activities. In the third stage, the demographic and travel pattern of this segment of the market was identified.

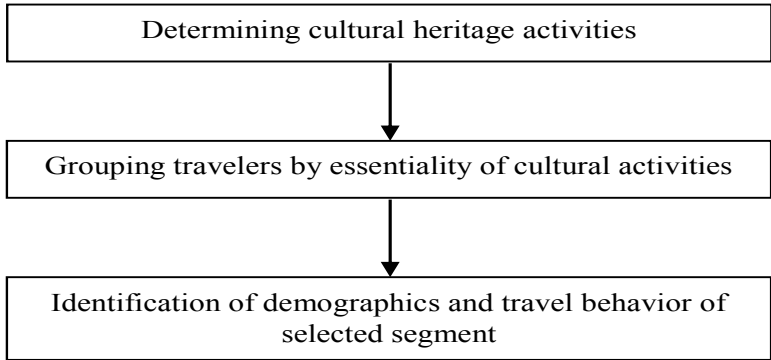


Figure 2. The process of activities-based segmentation

4.1 Demographic and Travelling Characteristics of Respondents

Based on the selected 341 respondents, travellers from Southeast Asian countries accounted for 21.8% of the sample, followed by 19.6% from Europe, 18.4% from Eastern Asia, 11.3% from Western Asia and 9.5% from the Americas. Therefore, respondents from Southeast Asian and European countries accounted for almost half of tourists who were primarily interested in cultural activities. The result of cross-tabulation between the respondents' region of residence and their gender revealed that the ratio of male to female respondents was almost equal, except for those from Western Asia, Southern Asia and Africa, in which male travellers were dominant (Table 1). The respondents ranged between 19 to 73 years old; however, the largest age group were youths. The age description for 'youths' (i.e., 18 to 35 years old) was based on studies by Sullivan (2004) and Carr (1999, 2001). The average age of respondents was 33 years old. Travellers at this age would have likely had a steady job and a disposable income. The majority of Western Asian respondents were married and preferred to travel in small groups of two to five people. By contrast, more than half of the single travellers from the Americas preferred to travel with two to five people. Other regions reported a balance of single and married travellers, while the average number of individuals travelling

together was three. Most of the respondents were educated and were involved in white-collar professions. Many of the respondents had undertaken tertiary education (46.5%) and 43.8% were higher degree holders. This finding was consistent with that of Ho (2009) and Yousefi and Marzuki (2012), in which Penang attracts more educated and novelty tourists who possess higher expectations of the cultural and historical attractions. The majority of the respondents were independent travellers; however, 64.9% of Western Asian respondents were travelling as part of a package tour. Half of the respondents did not have any specific duration for their travelling activities.

Table 1. Demographic and travel characteristics of survey respondents

Background	Region of Residence								
	S outh- east Asia (N=71)	W estern Asia (N=37)	E astern Asia (N=60)	O ceania (N=17)	E urope (N=64)	A mericas (N=31)	S outh ern Asia (N=24)	A frica (N=22)	
Gender									
Male	4	6	4	4	4	58	8	6	
Female	2.9%	3.9%	5.0%	7.1%	8.4%	.1%	3.3%	3.6%	
	5	3	5	5	5	41	1	3	
	7.1%	6.1%	5.0%	2.9%	1.6%	.9%	6.7%	6.4%	
Age									
18-35 years	7	6	7	2	7	74	7	7	
36-54 years	5.7%	2.2%	0.0%	3.5%	5.0%	.2%	0.8%	2.7%	
>55 year	2	3	2	5	2	19	2	2	
	2.9%	2.4%	8.3%	8.8%	0.3%	.4%	5.0%	7.3%	
	1	5	1	1	4	6	4	0	
	.4%	.4%	.7%	7.6%	.7%	5%	2%	.0%	
Marital Status									
Single	5	2	4	2	5	54	4	4	
Married	4.9%	4.3%	8.3%	9.4%	9.4%	.8%	3.5%	0.9%	
Divorcee/widowed	4	7	5	5	3	38	5	5	
	5.1%	0.3%	0.0%	2.9%	7.5%	.7%	6.5%	9.1%	
	0	5	1	1	3	6	0	0	
	.0%	.4%	.7%	7.6%	.1%	5%	0%	.0%	
Education									
Higher degree	4	5	3	2	4	25	6	6	
Tertiary education	2.3%	6.8%	7.3%	3.5%	5.3%	.8%	6.7%	3.6%	
Secondary education	4	4	5	4	4	71	2	3	
Primary education	5.1%	0.5%	9.3%	1.2%	2.2%	.0%	5.0%	6.4%	
No formal education	9	2	3	2	1	3	8	0	
	.9%	.7%	.4%	3.5%	2.5%	2%	3%	.0%	
	1	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	
	.4%	.0%	.0%	.9%	.0%	0%	0%	.0%	
	1	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	
	.4%	.0%	.0%	.9%	.0%	0%	0%	.0%	
Trip mode									
Independent traveller	7	3	7	7	8	83	1	8	
On package	3.2%	5.1%	1.7%	6.5%	5.9%	.9%	00.0%	1.8%	
	2	6	2	2	1	16	0	1	

tour	6.8%	4.9%	8.3%	3.5%	4.1%	.1%	0%	8.2%	
Travel companion									
Alone	9.7%	0.8%	3.3%	0	1	16	4	2	
2 person	2	4	4	5	5	25	2	3	
3-5 person	6.8%	0.5%	3.3%	8.8%	3.1%	8%	0.8%	1.8%	
6-10 person	4	2	3	3	2	38	3	3	
11-29 person	2.3%	9.7%	5.0%	5.3%	0.3%	.7%	3.3%	1.8%	
>30 Person	8	1	3	5	3	16	0	1	
	.5%	3.5%	.3%	.9%	.1%	.1%	0%	3.6%	
	1	5	5	0	4	3	0	0	
	.4%	.4%	.0%	.0%	.7%	2%	0%	.0%	
	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	.4%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	0%	0%	.0%	
Usual travel season									
December-	4.1%	.4%	1.7%	1.8%	.3%	6	6	2	
February	0	2	1	0	0	9	8	0	
March-May	.0%	.7%	.7%	.0%	.0%	7%	3%	.0%	
June-August	4	3	6	5	2	38	4	2	
September-	.2%	2.4%	.7%	.9%	3.4%	.7%	2%	2.7%	
November	9	1	2	3	2	9	1	1	
No specific season	.9%	3.5%	8.3%	5.3%	1.9%	7%	6.7%	3.6%	
	7	4	4	4	4	35	6	4	
	1.8%	5.9%	1.7%	7.1%	8.4%	.5%	6.7%	0.9%	

Most of the respondents had visited Penang for leisure or recreation (58.7%), followed by education and visiting friends or relatives (11.1%) (Table 2). Most had researched information prior to travel using the Internet (32.3%) or knew about Penang by way of word-of-mouth from friends and relatives (20.8%). Advertisements or write-ups in magazines, newspapers and guide books (16.3%) also played an important role in informing the traveller. Most of the respondents had planned their trip in advance. Half had planned their trip over a month before setting out on their travels. The average length of stay was rather short with 16.5% of respondents staying between 1 and 2 days at their destination, while 56.5% spent 3 to 7 days. Almost half of the respondents preferred to stay at more upmarket accommodations such as hotels or resorts, while 23.0% had opted for budget accommodation, such as motels, inns, chalets, guest houses and hostels. Only 3.0% of the sample used homestay accommodation. Homestays offer affordable accommodation while also providing travellers with an opportunity to interact more closely with locals, experiencing local culture, customs and lifestyles. Public transport (i.e., buses and taxis) constituted the major mode of transportation for travellers visiting Penang (60.8%). As previously mentioned, the four essential cultural activities undertaken by the respondents involved experiencing local food (15.3%), visiting

heritage and historical sites (11.2%), attending traditional cultural performances (7.0%) and visiting museums and art galleries (6%).

Table 2. Travelling pattern of survey respondents

Travelling Pattern			
Purpose of visit	%	Source of information	%
Leisure/Recreation/holidays	58.7	Internet	32.3
Education/study/teaching	11.1	Friends/relatives/word of mouth	20.8
Visit friends/relatives	11.1	Magazine/newspaper/guide book	16.3
Business/professional	5.0	Past experience	12.0
Honeymoon	4.4	Television/radio	5.9
Health treatment	2.6	Travel agency/tour company	5.1
Shopping	2.1	National government tourist office	2.6
Convention/conference/trade show	1.8	Airlines directly	2.3
Incentive travel	1.8	In-flight information systems	1.3
Religion/pilgrimages	0.6	Expo/exhibition/tourism fair	1.2
Government affairs/official mission	0.3	Others (University etc.)	0.3
Sporting tournament/event			
Length of stay	%	Accommodation	%
1- 2 days	16.5	Hotel/Resort	47.2
3 -7 days	56.5	Motel/inn/chalet/guest house/hostel	23.0
8 – 14 days	11.6	Friend or relative's house	12.5
15 – 30 days	8.1	Timeshare/apartment	6.2
31 – 60 days	1.1	Rest house/bungalow/villa	5.0
> 60 days	6.3	Homestay	3.0
Average	15	Cruise ship	2.0
Maximum	days	Campsite	1.0
	360		
	days		
Transportation	%	Lead time to decide trip	%
Public transport (bus, taxi etc.)	60.8	A week before the trip	14.3
Rented vehicle (car, motorcycle)	18.7	A month before the trip	24.8
Personal vehicle (friend's car etc.)	12.2	1 to 3 months	25.5
Company vehicle	3.5	More than 3 months	24.8
Trishaw	3.5	Not sure	10.5
Walking	1.2		

The tourism image of Penang as perceived by respondents was World Heritage Site (22.7%), local cuisine (20.3%), sandy beaches (18.8%) and multicultural society (17.6%) (Table 3). This finding affirmed that Penang has greatly benefited from George Town's World Heritage Site endorsement by UNESCO. As illustrated in Table 4, the majority of respondents were satisfied with their visit to Penang. The average satisfaction score was 7.5 (out of 10-points). Respondents who were satisfied with their travel experiences tended to revisit and recommend the destination to their friends and relatives. Only a small number of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with their trip to Penang.

Table 3. The image of Penang as perceived by respondents

Image of Penang	%
World heritage site	2
Local cuisine	2.7
Sandy beach	2
Multicultural society	0.3
Shopping paradise	1
International events	8.8
Health services	1
Folkdance/cultural performance	7.6
Others (education centre, national park and business)	8
	.7
	5
	.3
	3
	.5
	2
	.9
	0
	.2

Table 4. Tourists’ satisfaction, revisit intention and recommendation

Satisfaction score		Revisit intention		Recommendation	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
Not at all satisfied	2	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%
	3	0.0%	0.9%	0.6%	0.3%
	4	0.9%	0.6%	0.9%	0.6%
	5	8.6%	1.5%	9.9%	0.3%
Moderately satisfied	6	9.5%	1.8%	10.8%	0.6%
	7	16.0%	2.2%	17.9%	0.0%
	8	29.2%	3.4%	32.4%	0.3%
	9	16.9%	1.5%	18.5%	0.0%
Completely satisfied	10	6.5%	0.0%	6.5%	0.0%

4.2 Importance-Performance Analysis

The first stage in performing IPA involved calculating the mean scores for the attributes’ importance and performance. These mean values were presented in a two-dimensional grid with the importance

values (Y-axis) plotted against the performance values (X-axis). Table 5 indicated the mean scores for the 12 destination attributes of Penang as perceived by the respondents according to their importance and performance. The data plotted in the IPA grid was illustrated in Figure 3, where the X-axis depicted the performance scores and the Y-axis represented the importance scores relating to the same attributes. The mean importance for the plotted data was 3.92 and the mean performance rating was 3.80.

Table 5. Twelve features of the importance-performance analysis

o	Attribute	Mean Importance	Mean Performance	Diffe rence
	Image of destination	4.16	4.02	-0.14
	Variety of tourism attractions	4.12	3.95	-0.17
	Cultural and historical uniqueness	4.14	3.99	-0.15
	Value for money	3.87	3.85	-0.02
	Safety and security	4.14	3.96	-0.18
	Accessibility to the destination	3.96	3.87	-0.09
	Friendliness of the people	3.95	3.93	-0.02
	Availability of information	3.83	3.70	-0.13
	Ease of communication	3.56	3.70	0.14
	Cleanliness of destination			
0	Accommodation services	3.74	3.53	-0.21
1	Local transport services	3.85	3.70	-0.15
2		3.71	3.44	-0.27
	Total	47.03	45.64	-1.39
	Central line	3.92	3.80	

The result of the IPA grid analysis for the sample was shown in Figure 3. As presented in the following figure, ‘image of destination, variety of tourism attractions, cultural and historical uniqueness, safety and security, accessibility to the destination and friendliness of the people’, were grouped into the ‘Keep up the Good Work’ quadrant. ‘Value for money’ was assigned to the ‘Possible Overkill’ quadrant and ‘availability of information, ease of communication, accommodation services and local transport services’ fell into the Low Priority quadrant.

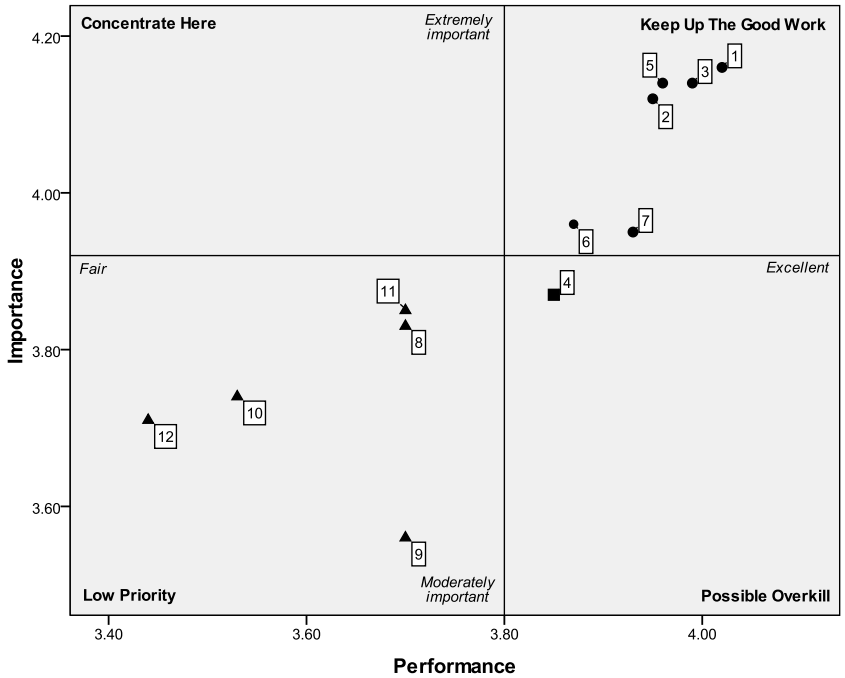


Figure 3. Importance-performance analysis grid of Penang's attributes as perceived by respondents

5. CONCLUSION

Activities-based segmentation and importance-performance analysis are both tools that help marketers categorise a market based on preferred activities and evaluations of destination attributes. Activities-based segmentation was based on the assumption that different types of tourists will have an affinity for different types of tourism experiences. By analysing the pattern and preference of tourists' activities, the subjects who took part in cultural activities were extracted. Furthermore, analysis of frequencies and IPA were applied to distinguish the unique features within this segment. According to the focus group of cultural tourists, none of the Penang attributes were highly important, with relatively poor performances.

This result indicated that all the attributes that were perceived as important also performed well. Not surprisingly, 'image of destination' scored as the most important attribute with relatively high performance ('Keep up the Good Work'). The image of Penang was largely based on 'World Heritage Site', 'local cuisine' and 'sandy beaches'. This result indicated that cultural travellers recognised Penang predominantly through its cultural attributes. In addition, 'safety and security', 'variety of tourism attractions', 'accessibility to the destination' and 'friendliness of the people' were important factors that satisfied cultural tourists the most. Five attributes fell into the 'Low Priority' quadrant: 'availability of information', 'ease of communication', 'cleanliness of destination', 'accommodation services' and 'local transport services'. Although, these five were perceived as low in importance, being the main products and services of the destination, their improvement should not be neglected. 'Value for money' was the only item that was perceived as 'Possible Overkill' which showed that efforts to keep Penang as an affordable place to visit was successful.

Using Penang as a case study, the international tourists who selected cultural activities as being essential to medium priority activities during their visit were extracted. Rather than simply engaging in cultural activities, this segment also perceived the image of Penang by its World heritage site and cultural and historical uniqueness; therefore, scoring these features as the most important. However, this group was not selected based on their visit intention, as suggested by some researchers (Silberberg, 1995), but was according to others who argued that cultural tourists should be recognised based on the activities that they partake in (Mckercher et al., 2008).

The results of this study can be used to develop a more accurate plan for cultural tourists, enabling tourism marketers to develop strategies to target tourists more effectively. Our profile of cultural tourists indicated that they tend to be relatively young adults (18–35 years old) who are independent travellers, travelling year round and not seasonally. Therefore, tourism marketers can rely on this segment more than seasonal travellers (e.g., during school holidays). Moreover, due to their interest in cultural heritage, they are potentially more sustainable tourists; as emphasised by previous studies (Silberberg, 1995). This insight may also assist heritage

stakeholders in designing new products and services focused on attracting this particular group of tourists. Furthermore, these findings enable destination marketers to identify and prioritise the importance and performance of Penang's tourism features. Further study within this segment can help to better comprehend the sub-segments within this market. In addition, comparing cultural tourist segments with other segments of Penang's international travellers would provide a clearer and more complete picture of the tourism market.

This study used activities-based segmentation to identify Penang's cultural tourists. Importance-performance analysis helped pinpoint what these tourists perceived as the most important attributes of Penang, as well as, the performance of these attributes. The results revealed that cultural tourists primarily perceived Penang based on its World Heritage Site status, with the cultural and heritage uniqueness of Penang being the second most important attribute. According to the cultural tourists questioned, none of the 12 attributes had low performance. Meanwhile, the uniqueness of Penang's cultural and heritage attributes scored as a very important item that also performed well. This indicated that, from a cultural tourist's point of view, cultural activities are not the only factors that brought them to Penang, their pre-formed image of the destination was also important. Overall, the results indicated that Penang can rely on its World Heritage Site status, as well as, featuring its other cultural products to cater to the whims of cultural tourists when designing future promotional plans for this target group. Analysing the perception of quality for each segment of the market will provide destinations with more insight in regards to future directions for moving forward. Future studies should focus on other segments of Penang's domestic and international tourists, while considering variables such as the motivations for their trip.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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VISITOR'S SATISFACTION MEASUREMENT IN ANIMAL PARKS: THE CASE OF PARC SAFARI IN QUÉBEC, CANADA.

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The measurement of visitor satisfaction of a zoological park, where wildlife is free and not in captivity, is an issue that receives growing interest in recent decades. The postmodern lifestyle we adopt causes this type of park to be considered as a last stand against the urbanization of the area. Through this study, we attempted to measure visitor satisfaction of a zoological park located in Quebec that provides a circuit where visitors can get direct contact with wildlife in its natural environment.

The results of the study demonstrated the importance of the proximity to the animals in the assessment of visitor satisfaction. However, the price remains the main explanatory component of satisfaction, followed by the overall appearance and park cleanliness.

Keywords: zoo, satisfaction measurement, quantitative analysis visitors.

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INTRODUCTION

Visitor satisfaction of a tourist attraction is an issue that has been widely studied by researchers, particularly those from the management sciences. Nevertheless, changing consumer behavior and the characteristics of the visited object requires a continuous updating of knowledge in order to clearly define the evolution of the concept of satisfaction on the one hand, and on a more operational level, to adapt the tourism product to the expectations of visitors on the other. As such, this study focuses on measuring Parc Safari's visitor satisfaction. Parc Safari is an important tourist attraction in Hemmingford, in the province of Québec in Canada. The park is in operation since 1972 and located 65 km south of Montreal, a few kilometers from the border with the United States.

Despite the large number of research conducted on the subject, this study presents some specific characteristics. First, it is, to our knowledge, the first to deal with the subject of animal parks in Quebec and, on the other hand, it is spread over several years which allow to observe the evolution of the main trends in the time.

Amusement parks, an evolving research topic

The popularity of amusement parks, especially zoos, has interested many authors over the last five decades. Indeed, in the 1960s, Conway (1969) analyzed the growing importance of the recreational function in the zoos at the time where they were mostly seen as a place for education and learning. Subsequently, other authors as Kasmar (1970) Kuehl (1976) and Jones et al (1976) studied the evolution of the attitude of zoo visitors in view of the growing interest of the recreational dimension of these new destinations. From then on, the question of satisfaction became one of the main concerns of researchers.

Lee (2015) identifies three subjects in the amusement parks literature, which have attracted the interest of the scientific community. The first issue is that of visitor's motivation, which was one of the most studied topics since it evolved from learning to

entertainment, followed by recreation (Morgan & Hodgkinson, 1999). In this sense, Falk et al (2007) concluded that motivations condition how visitors proceed in the parks and therefore, a focus on this issue in order to improve the visitor's experience is inevitable.

The second issue identified by Lee (2015) as important to researchers is that of the behavior of visitors. Indeed, several authors (Coe, 1985; Finlay et al 1988 and Davey, 2006) observed a change in the behavior of visitors in zoos, due mainly to changes in the relationship between humans and nature in general, and animals in particular. In a context of postmodernity, zoos, especially those where the wildlife is not in captivity, are considered a last stand against the urban sprawl.

Finally, Lee (2015) refers to visitors attitudes towards animals that were in turn influenced by the human presence (Davey, 2007). In a context where the primary purpose of amusement parks is geared more towards recreation, the impact of this change on animal welfare has become an interesting problem for researchers. Authors like Finlay et al (1988), conducting comparative field studies in Georgia, have established a relationship between the perception of the species by the visitor and the attitude of the latter once in contact with the wildlife.

Visitor satisfaction, a complex problem

Consumer satisfaction is at the heart of corporate strategies (Pizam and Ellis, 1999), making it one of the most discussed subjects in the literature (Yuksel and Yuksel, 2001). Despite the wealth of research on the subject, there is no consensus on the best way to measure it, or even define it. The main theories that have addressed this issues are the expectation gap theory (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Duke and Persia, 1996; Luk and Layton, 2002), the expectation disconfirmation theory (Oliver, 1980;1997; Pizam and Milman, 1993) and the performance only theory (Tse and Wilton, 1998; Pizam et al., 1978). This study will focus particularly on the latter. Indeed, the measurement of gaps between expectations and perceptions is not sufficient to understand the customer's satisfaction with the performance in a tourism context (Bowie and Chang, 2005). It is the performance of the product and its by-products that make up the overall tourism experience, which is at the heart of satisfaction.

This performance would be twofold: an emotional dimension and an instrumental dimension (Swan and Combs, 1976 in Pizam et al., 1978). According to these authors, the emotional dimension is central to the tourist experience e.i. comfort, reputation, sensory experience; and the instrumental dimension corresponds rather to physical and operational aspects such as price, availability and cleanliness. This approach is particularly interesting for us to address the issue of satisfaction as part of a theme park (Milman, 2010), the emotional dimension being at the very forefront of the experiential turn of the tourism Industry (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Milman, 2010).

The tourist experience is hybrid and complex (Neal and Gursoy, 2008), because it is composed of multiple sub-products and multiple vendors. In the case of theme parks, the different dimensions of the experience are found inside the premises (Milman, 2010; Bigné et al, 2005, Baron-Yelle and Clavé, 2014). These different dimensions, whether emotional or instrumental, combine in a confined space to create the feeling of satisfaction of the theme park experience (Milman, 2009). In this context, research on the theme parks and zoos have already identified a number of predictors of satisfaction.

Anderreck and Caldwell (1994), in an evaluation of the satisfaction of the North Carolina Zoological Park, identified the following as a predictors of visitor satisfaction: staff, amenities of the zoo, accessibility of exhibits, ability to view the animals, educational aspects of the visit, recreational features of the visit, environment of the zoo and the animals. The research concludes that visitor's satisfaction differed little in various identified segments (out of state vacationers and in state visitors).

Milman (2009) focuses on the importance given to different aspects of the theme parks of Central Florida by visitors. It identifies seven constructs that theme parks visitors use to evaluate their experience: (i) quality and variety of entertainment; (ii) courtesy, cleanliness, safety and security (fundamental operational issues); (iii) food variety and value for money; (iv) quality of theming and design; (v) availability and variety of family-oriented activities; (vi) quality and variety of rides and attractions; and (vii) pricing and value for money.

Finally, Geissler and Ruck (2011) use a ten years customer satisfaction trackingsurvey at a major US theme park to identify predictors of satisfaction of the customers with their experience in the park. Their finding stresses the importance of three main factors: overall experience park / value, park's food quality / value / variety, and park's cleanliness / atmosphere. Their research, whichusedan expectation gap model, identified significant predictors of met expectations that include satisfaction with total cost, variety of attractions available, and previous visit of the customer to the park.

Furthermore, Geisler and Ruck (2011)research focused on classical theme parks (Geisler and Ruck, 2011; Milman, 2009) or zoos (Anderek and Caldwell, 1994). The question of theme parks with wildlife freedom appears to be in need of assessment, including issues concerning the experience of contact with animals with special emotional charge.

Authors who have studied the question of satisfaction in zoos,identified several issues. As such, it is important to distinguish between zoos where animals are in captivity and thosewhere wildlife is free in its natural environment. According to Dengate (1993), the experience is quite different; therefore the context should be taken into account in the evaluation. For this author, zoos where animals are free in their natural environment are an ideal. Indeed, combining in the same space recreational, educational and conservation goalsallows visitors a memorable experience. Tribe (2001) goes in the same direction, and believes that the possibility of coming into contact with animals, and also with the staff, offers the opportunity for visitors to use the park in a different manner, and therefore enjoy the experience differently. Besides Luebke and Matiasek (2013) confirm this fact, finding intheir study that there is a strong correlation between seeing the animals and the level of satisfaction. These researchers also suggestthat zoo promoters promote visibility and contact with the animal as vital elements in their communication strategy.

We find these same conclusions in Hughes and Macbeth (2005) who studied Barna Mia, a site located in south-western Australia, in which people can observe wildlife in its natural habitat. These authors conclude that the contact of visitors with animals gives a feeling of unmatched satisfaction. In the same vein, Packer and Ballantyne(2002) estimate that the emotional charge felt while

visiting zoos where wildlife is in its natural environment is more important than that of places where animals are in captivity. Based on a study of four marine sites, of which two includes wildlife that is free to roam, the authors estimate that visitors arrive to similar levels of learning about the environment. However, in the experiment, the results are conflicting. Thus, visitors to parks where wildlife are free give importance to learning aspects of their visits. In contrast, visitors to parks where wildlife is in captivity are more interested in fun and social aspects of their visits. This difference reflects the perception that each category of visitors has towards wildlife. Visitors of zoos and aquariums consider these as a space for social interaction with family and friends, while they regard wildlife tours as an opportunity to learn about nature. According to the authors, this is due to close contact with the animals in the wildlife tour. Five months after their visit, visitors still remember those moments.

For other authors, contact with animals is not the only indicator in the assessment of visitor satisfaction in zoos where wildlife can be observed in its natural environment. For Roest et al (1997), the feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction results from the comparison between the costs and benefits of the act of purchase made by the visitor. As such, Churchill and Surprenant (1982) consider that it is the benefits gained through experience that will be decisive in the construction of satisfaction, while Ross and Iso-Ahola (1991) and Geva and Goldman (1991) believe that the cost is the determining factor in the definition of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the visitor. Other authors, such as Oliver (1981) and Tse and Wilton (1988), emphasize the regularity of the service throughout the visitor experience in the park. In contrast, Darby and Kani (1973) point out that the feeling of satisfaction should not be summed up as including only field experience. According to these authors, the construction of an opinion begins with the research phase (construction needs and expectations), continues with the field experience, and remains until after the end of the visit park. Other authors have studied elements that are often considered as accessories in the evaluation of customer satisfaction. These especially include the cleanliness of the toilets, the availability of parking spaces and the quality of food available on site. Even if they may seem secondary, these services can help alter the overall

satisfaction vis-à-vis the park in those cases where the benefit of the service is below the expectations of visitors (Jensen, 2007).

Methodology

Measurement of the the satisfaction variable

Especially in a zoo where wildlife lives in its natural environment, studies that have addressed the issue of satisfaction have identified several indicators to measure visitor satisfaction of the park. In this vein, based on the work of Roest et al (1997), Hughes (2005), Packer and Ballantyne (2012) and Lee (2015), a clustering of measurement indicators in three dimensions was performed. According to the results, the first dimension includes all the emotional indicators insofar they represent the visitor's experience in the park. As such, it is necessary to distinguish the indicators that fall within the contact with staff on the one hand, and those under the contact with the animals. Concerning this last point, visitors will assess the level of closeness with the animals, the ability to touch them, the possibility of viewing wildlife, the appearance of the animals and ultimately the quality of the natural environment in which animals evolve. In terms of the quality of contact with staff, visitors will assess the quality of care, the communication skills, the support and assistance provided by the staff, and the moments of interaction with the park's personnel.

The second dimension refers to the indicators of accessibility to the park. Indeed, the price and the distance before arriving at the zoo are the two main indicators to measure the visitor's satisfaction with the accessibility. The price variable is composed of park entry fees, expenses incurred in traveling to the park, and eventually all the money spent onsite. In terms of visit planning, visitors will analyze the convenience of the observation route, the quality of facilities, the quality of infrastructure and visitor services (including toilets, catering and parking) and finally the security for the visitors.

The last dimension in the measurement of satisfaction is the informational aspect. It refers to the communication efforts put forth by the park through displays, the staff, promotional materials, or any other communication medium intended to disseminate information among visitors. In particular, visitors will be sensitive to news that

expose the park's efforts for wildlife conservation, natural environment, animal welfare and the species specificity.

The analysis confirmed the emotional and instrumental dimensions of satisfaction found in other studies, although the latter is relabeled as accessibility dimension. Furthermore, a new aspect is added that takes into account the informational and educational aspects of animal parks, which according to the literature on animal parks are central to the experience.

Method

The study conducted with the Safari Park was designed to identify the satisfaction components of visitors to the park, with the aim to improve the visitor's experience. A web questionnaire consisting of 45 questions grouped into three themes was designed based on the literature. The first conventional theme was aimed at obtaining the profile the visitors in order to understand who is the typical park visitor. The second part of the questionnaire was intended to evaluate the visitor's satisfaction vis-à-vis their experience in the park, with particular relevance to the main attraction, Safari Adventure. The last topic that was submitted to the respondents was related to the identification of elements that could enhance the visitor's experience, by asking respondents to rate a list of projects under development in the Safari Park.

The questionnaire administration was done online to visitors who had agreed to participate and provided their email address. These individuals received three days after their visit a message containing a link to the questionnaire developed with the platform SurveyMonkey. The study began at the end of May 2014 and spanned until the second week of October. To improve the representativeness of the sample, the emails of individuals who visited the park early in the week, in the middle of the week or on the weekend were collected, since the traffic level is significantly different in various days of the week, with a peak on weekends, especially if the weather conditions are appropriate. In total, 4072 email addresses were collected, of which 3599 were valid. At the end of the survey 1203 completed questionnaires were received, which equals a response rate of 33%.

The sample consists of 67% women and 33% men. In most cases, the respondent's mother tongue is French (85%), followed by English and Arabic. Demographically, 70% of the respondents are in the age group between 25-44 and half of them(50%) have a university degree. As for the income level, 31% of the sample earn a household income of over \$100,000, followed at 20% by those recording a family income between \$60,000 and \$80,000. In terms of geographical origin, 68% of the visitors make a trip of less than 2 hours to get to the park, against 18% who require more than two hours. Only 9% of the respondents choose to take a tourist accommodation in the region. The following table summarizes the main characteristics of the sample.

Table 1: Respondent's demographic Characteristics

Demographic characteristics	Percentage
<u>Gender</u>	
Male	33 %
Female	67 %
<u>Mother tongue</u>	
French	85 %
English	3 %
Other	12 %
<u>Age group</u>	
18-24 years old	7 %
25-34 years old	34 %
35-44 years old	36 %
45-years old or more	23 %
<u>Last diploma obtained</u>	
Elementary school	1 %
Secondary school	12 %

Professional training	13 %
University Diploma	49 %
<u>Family income</u>	
Less than 20.000 \$	4 %
Between 20.001 \$ and 40.000 \$	10 %
Between 40.001 \$ and 60.000 \$	17%
Between 60.001 \$ and 80.000 \$	20 %
Over80.001 \$	49 %

As for the visit, 83% of the respondents came with their family, 73% represent parents with their children and 10% are grandparents with their grandchildren. Of these families, 87% visited the park with at least one child, 59% with at least two children, and 21% with at least three children. The main motivation of park visitors (38% of the respondents) is being close to the animals and being able to touch them. However, 31% chose the park to benefit in the same day from three activities offered by the park (animals, water games and rides).

3. Analysis of Results

To measure visitor satisfaction, respondents were requested to answer two questions. First, visitors were asked to rate their satisfaction with various attractions and services offered by the park using a measurement scale ranging from unacceptable to excellent. The reliability of the satisfaction scale was assessed using Cronbach Alpha considered the first tool to define the strength of the analysis (Hair et al, 2009). The value of this coefficient is .883, which is above the minimum threshold of 0.70 generally accepted in the scientific community (Université de Sherbrooke, 2015).

The next step was to conduct a principal component factor analysis using a Varimax orthogonal rotation on the variables measuring satisfaction. The review of the index Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) indicates a high level of significance (KMO = 0.852), the results show that 12 components can explain 60% of the variance, as seen in Table 2. These are: food, the various sites where

animals can be seen (with the exception of safari Adventure), cleanliness, the different shops in the Park, the various services offered, entertainment activities available, information presented to visitors at different times during the visit, aquatic areas, variable prices, signage in the park, the staff's provision of service to the visitors and contact with animals.

Table 2: Components to assess Parc Safari's visitor satisfaction

Components	Factor	Eigenvalue
	loading	
Component 1 : Food		
Food price	.858	
Value food	.847	7.893
Variety of menus	.810	
Resto de la Savane	.638	
Restaurant l'Explorateur	.522	
Component 2: Visibility of animals in captivity		
Farm five continents	.719	
Deer Trail	.711	
Tunnel lions	.686	3.511
Terrace Afrika	.656	
Olduvai Gateway	.654	
Plain cheetahs	.643	
Component 3: cleanliness		
Cleanliness of park	.813	2.379
General appearance	.729	

Mohamed Reda KHOMSI & Dominic Lapointe

Clean toilets	.681	
Component 4 : Shopping		
Shop toys	.834	2.263
Arts shop	.811	
Beach shop product	.771	
Component 5: Services offered by the Park		
Safari Expédition	.639	
Information booth	.553	1,791
ATM Availability	.510	
Smooking area	.506	
Educational presentations	.372	
Component 6 : Entertainment activities		
Mechanical rides	.719	
Skill games	.591	1.558
Nairobi Park	.590	
Show	.511	
Component 7 : Information for visitors		
Radio Safari	.751	1.279
Safari Mag	.661	
Information on animals	.644	
Component 8 : Water sector		
Acquaparc Safari	.802	
Tube downhill	.672	1.239
Creameries	.460	
Availability Pikes picnic areas	.445	

Component 9 : Price		
Value of the day	.770	1.166
Admission price	.768	
Component 10 : Signage		
Map reading ease	.762	1.093
Signage	.625	
Component 11 : Quality of the service personnel		
Quality of information provided by the staff	.723	1.076
Courtesy of staff	.630	
Component 12 : Contact with animals		
Box of foods for animal	.712	
Ticketing Wait Times	.419	1.007
Tours of animals	.402	
Safari Adventure	.375	

Once the main components were identified, the weight of each component in explaining overall satisfaction was assessed. Accordingly, linear regression analysis of the 12 components with respect to the main variable was performed. For this test, 12 new variables that reflect the average of the attributes that formed each component were created. According to the results (see Table 3), 4 components explain 42% ($R^2 = .422$) of the variation of the satisfaction model. The integration of the other components does not significantly alter the performance of the model and therefore we limited the analysis to these components and their attributes. The results as seen in Table 3 show that the price component is the most important coefficient ($Beta = .666$), followed by cleanliness, contact with animals and the visibility of animals in captivity.

Table 3: Result of regression analysis of overall satisfaction / components

Components	Non-standardized coefficients (B)	standardized coefficients (Beta)	Sig.
Price	.666	.442	.000
cleanliness	.389	.197	.000
Contact with animals	.205	.154	.000
Visibility of animals in captivity	.178	.138	.000

To complete the statistical analysis, a textual data analysis was carried out using Nvivo in order to review the 694 comments recorded. The analysis was used to identify the words that come up most often, and from there, the creation of themes or groups that were linked to the concept of overall satisfaction. As such, the research identified three themes: the price, contact with animals and services and attractions offered by the Park. When compared with those components that emerged from the quantitative analysis, it is interesting to note that price and contact with animals appear to be common to both analyses.

In terms of price, the statistical analysis indicates that this factor has two attributes, which are the entrance fee to the park and the value of a day at the park. The correlation between these two attributes is also significant with a value of .721, which indicates the importance of this factor in explaining the overall satisfaction of park visitors. Accordingly, the visitors believe that the price paid is too expensive compared to the overall experience. This perception is more pronounced if we take into account the fees paid for access to certain rides and water park activities. This viewpoint is more

prevalent among those customers who visited the park at the beginning or end of the season, when some areas of the park were closed. On this topic, the visitors suggest that prices are modulated based on the time of the visit and on the attractions that visitors wish to access. For example, they suggest that visitors who wish to make only the Safari Adventure circuit could pay a different price, comparatively to those who wish to travel only to the water park or to benefit fully from their day with a tour of all the attractions offered by the park. With respect to the time of the visit, respondents felt that the visitors who come to the park at the beginning or end of the season must receive a discount, as water park areas and rides are closed, and only animal areas are open to visitors.

The second common issue that arose from the statistical analysis and the examination of textual data is the contact with animals. In the regression analysis, this factor is positioned in third place, just behind the cleanliness factor, with a non-standardized coefficient (B) equal to .205. The main component of this factor (B = 0.522) includes the observation circuit of wildlife in freedom that offers the opportunity for visitors to get indirect contact with animals that circulate in their natural environment, while the visitor is in the vehicle. This attraction is of paramount importance to developers since it is the main attraction of the Parc Safari and has a direct impact on the level of visitor satisfaction. As such, the analysis of textual data indicates that the time spent inside the circuit is an important factor for the visitors. In fact, 73% of those that spent over two hours at the Safari Adventure, ascribe a satisfaction score between 6 and 8, while 60% of those who spent less than an hour and a half on the circuit show a satisfaction score between 8 and 10. This is explained by the fact that if visitors spend a significant time on the circuit they no longer have the time to visit other areas of the park due to lack of time or fatigue.

Finally, beyond the common elements of the statistical and textual analysis, the cleanliness component is positioned as the second largest after the price. The latter has three attributes, the park's cleanliness, the toilets and the overall appearance of the park. However, it is the latter attribute that is most important to the visitor in the assessment of overall satisfaction (B = .526) even though the issue did not come out significantly in the respondents' comments. As explained above, this may be due to the fact that visitors consider acceptable the

appearance and cleanliness of the park, which is within the minimum expected from the park, and therefore does not represent a dissatisfaction factor.

Conclusions

The analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data determines that the price remains the central element in the assessment of visitor satisfaction. This echoes the findings of Roest et al (1997), Ross and Iso-Ahola (1991) and Geva and Goldman (1991), which noted that the cost is a determining factor in the definition of visitor satisfaction of a zoo. As such, the dimension of accessibility identified in the literature as one of the three dimensions of visitor satisfaction, can be recognized as the main dimension in this research. In this regard, it is necessary to note that this price factor does not only refer to the admission fees to the park, but it also includes all costs to get to and all the money spent on, the zoo site. Moreover, in their comments, visitors propose that the charges for access to the park are adjusted by taking into account the choices of the activities that visitors wish to practice. If it is generally admitted that in the 21st century consumption has taken a turn away from goods and services towards experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), and that theme parks are a paramount example of this turn (Milman, 2010), the research's findings reified the importance of the instrumental dimension of the performance of a theme park, which in this study was labelled as the accessibility dimension of satisfaction. According to the research, no matter how good and satisfying is the experience obtained at the park, if the accessibility is not there, especially market accessibility via pricing, the customers may not be satisfied.

The question of the importance of price in the evaluation of the Parc Safari's visitors's satisfaction also follows the conclusions of Milman (2009). This author, who led a survey of Central Florida's residents, domestic and international tourists, concludes that price is a dimension more important to residents as compared to tourists. In our case, the same conclusion is reached, since 68% of the visitors make a trip of less than 2 hours to get to the park, compared to only 9% of the respondents who chose to take a tourist accommodation in the region. In this sense, the originality of this article lies in the redefinition of the attributes of satisfaction. Unlike many studies on the

same subject, this research has shown that the experiential dimension is not necessarily always the most important one. In our case, two functional attributes (price and cleanliness) are most significant for visitors, and especially the resident. For this reason, future studies should use the visitors' postcode in order to map the flow of people and to define a satisfaction attributes grid by segments of visitors.

In line with the literature, the starting assumption of this study was that the main motivation of park visitors is the will to make contact with the animals and to be able to touch them. This assumption was validated since, as we pointed out earlier, 38% of visitors choose the park for this reason. This reflects the importance of the emotional dimension that emerged in both the quantitative and qualitative analysis, since visitors consider this as an important dimension in assessing overall satisfaction. This is also the same point raised by several authors (Dengate, 1993; Tribe, 2001; Luebke and Matiasek, 2013; Hughes and Macbeth, 2005; Packer and Ballantyne, 2002), who felt that this emotional dimension is especially vital in the analysis of satisfaction in zoos where wildlife is free.

The findings confirm the importance of contact with the animals in the assessment of the overall visitor satisfaction and determines the weight that Safari Adventure holds, as the main attraction in the park to which developers should pay particular attention to. In the analysis of qualitative data, some areas for improvement that may enhance the customer experience and therefore satisfaction were identified. In this regard, the signaling within the circuit to encourage users to respect traffic rules was one of the proposals made by the respondents. In this spirit, some visitors even proposed that the park's staff be involved when some visitors slow traffic flow and impair the quality of the user's experience inside the circuit. The second element that recurs in visitor comments regarding the Safari Adventure is the lack of proximity to certain species. Indeed, some animals are less likely to approach the visitors, which accentuates the feeling of only very few animals being present in the circuit.

Also, contrary to what emerged in the literature review, visitors do not seem to pay attention to the informational dimension in the assessment of overall satisfaction with their experience at the park. Indeed, despite the actions of the Safari Park in recent years to

demonstrate its commitment to the protection of wildlife, this does not emerge as a significant factor of satisfaction, neither in the quantitative analysis nor in the qualitative one. In spite of this finding, it is not possible to conclude that park visitors are insensitive regarding this dimension and therefore further attention to this component should be given in the next survey. Furthermore, a line of research for the next study concerns what Jensen (2007) called secondary services. Indeed, in this research, the cleanliness of the toilets, the parking availability, the quality of food and the availability of picnic spaces only marginally influence the visitor's satisfaction. In this regard, authors such as Spreng and Mackoy (1996), Mittal, Kumar and Tsrios (1999) and Namkung and Jang (2010) estimate that one must distinguish between satisfaction and dissatisfaction that are completely opposed concepts. Indeed, the reaction of a satisfied or less satisfied customer will not be the same as that of a dissatisfied customer. In the latter case, a consumer will not repeat the purchase without talking about it. In contrast, the customer that is less satisfied with a product or service, but attached to a brand, will acknowledge it and talk about it. Accordingly, we believe that these secondary services raised by Jensen (2007) must be measured using the same grid as that used to assess visitor satisfaction in this research and therefore future studies should take this issue into consideration.

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AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF CONFERENCE ATTENDEES' POST-PARTICIPATION BEHAVIOUR

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With a specific focus on the conference segment of the MICE industry, this study extends the growing body of knowledge by testing a modified version of approach adapted from Severt et al. (2007) to a new classification of conference type (international and academic). A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from 497 international conference attendees. The results of the multiple regression analysis showed that performance and satisfaction, respectively, have a direct positive significant relationship on post-participation intentions of international conference attendees. The mediating effect of satisfaction is also supported. The results of this study can be considered as an important tool for conference organizers, universities and associations to attract future international academic attendees and improve the overall quality of their academic events.

Keywords: Performance Evaluation, Satisfaction, Post-Participation Intentions, International Attendees, Kuala Lumpur, Conference Industry

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INTRODUCTION

The Meetings, Incentives, Convention and Exhibition (MICE), also known as meeting industry, is the new catchphrase in international tourism. MICE tourism is a significant contributor to the overall economic growth produced by the tourism industry, and an essential part of the spread of knowledge and professional practices (UNWTO, 2014) that have also appeared as a major subsection of the tourism industry, both in terms of amount of travel and expenditure generated (Law, 1993; Oppermann, 1996; Nice, 2004). In recent years, “MICE has become a new emerging globalized industry with the characteristics of three high, three great, and three superior – high value created, high value added, and high potentiality; great value, great employment opportunity, and great inter-industry linkage; superior service, superior order, and superior environment” (Lin, 2005, p.1). According to Yoo and Chon (2008), the rapid growth of the meeting industry leads tourism authorities to struggle to attract a larger number of attendees to conventions and conferences in their destinations. Accordingly, Lee and Park (2002) asserted that in today’s world business, conventions and conferences have become crucially important. Consistently, Kim (1998) argued that conventions serve effectively the purpose of re-imagining a city for tourists in a positive, dynamic way. With the development of the convention industry, the increasing importance of service has been recognized by destinations more than ever (Lee & Park, 2002) because appropriate facilities and the quality of the services provided are critical in terms of the destination’s success in convention tourism (Crouch & Weber, 2002). Recent years have also seen an increase in the competition among convention destinations, as new facilities are added to the already saturated convention market (Malek Mohammadi & Mohamed, 2010). To face the conditions presented by such a competitive market, destinations and associations both need to maximize the numbers of convention attendees in general (Oppermann & Chon, 1997) and international attendees in particular.

Among the hospitality industry, conference tourism has reached the status of an important component that benefits to a variety of stakeholders (Severt et al., 2007). Additionally, conference tourism has been described as one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry (Fenich, 2001; Rogers, 1998) in the last 30 years. Nevertheless, the scientific literature has not thoroughly examined

meeting and convention industry, despite its global expansion and worldwide rise (Choi & Boger, 2000). This field has only recently been addressed as the main focus of research, and it still presents considerable gaps in its exploration. Some aspects of the conference tourism's field have been researched to a greater extent, while others still deserve more insights (Malek Mohammadi et al., 2011). It may be argued that this industry has not attracted the researchers' interest, as it actually deserves. In this regard UNWTO called for more research and data to be gathered for the development of the meetings industry since there is no reason to abandon efforts or discount the value that meetings, conventions and exhibitions generate (UNWTO, 2014).

The main purpose of this study is to determine the international conference attendees' post-participation behaviour through a comprehensive investigation. This research takes the perspective of the conference attendees and examines attendee's evaluation of conference performance, satisfaction and also their post-behavioural intentions in order to (1) fill the research gap in the understanding of the conference attendees' behaviour, and (2) to help conference organizers to identify the most effective marketing strategy to attract a larger number of international attendees to their destinations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To a large number of potential visitors, meetings offer the chance of becoming acquainted with a particular tourist area or region. If these visitors receive a satisfactory experience, they will not just benefit the destinations by reporting positive comments and publicizing it by word of mouth, but they may also like to return and visit the area on different occasions (Oppermann, 1996). Moreover, Edelstein and Bennini (1994) suggested that business travellers accompanied by their spouses may also enhance the benefits to the host locations. According to Opperman and Chon (1997), this factor should make host locations aware of the fact that by providing extensive leisure facilities, they may gain an additional stream of revenues. Consequently, conference buyers need to compete on the basis of key success criteria, and the fulfilment of the convention attendees' expectations (Go & Govers, 1999; Severt et al., 2007), while using more appropriate and sophisticated marketing strategies

in order to satisfy the attendees' expectations and desires (Lee & Lee, 2005).

Under the perspective of the tourists' consumption process, three stages can be determined in the tourists' behaviour: pre-, during- and post-visit. Tourist behaviour is composed of an aggregation of the concepts of pre-visit's decision-making, onsite experience, experience evaluations and post-visit's behavioural intentions and behaviours (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Ryan, 2002; Williams & Buswell, 2003). The choice of a destination to visit, subsequent evaluations and future behavioural intention are parts of the tourists' behaviour. Among 'subsequent evaluations', we can distinguish factors such as the travel experience or perceived trip quality during the stay, perceived value and overall satisfaction; on the other hand, future behavioural intentions include the intention to revisit and the willingness to recommend (Chen & Tsai, 2007). The marketing literature has already researched the concepts of service quality and customer satisfaction to a great extent, although post-purchase behaviours are somewhat less understood, especially within the context of the MICE industry.

Performance quality is conceptualized as the attributes of a service that are controlled by a tourism supplier (Baker & Crompton, 2000). For example, Akbaba (2006) argued that even if service quality is a major performance measurement for tourism products, it is simultaneously intangible; in other words, it cannot be seen or known before actual purchase (Ozer, 2008). In this regard, other studies (Crompton & Love, 1995; Huang et al., 2010; Johns et al., 2004) have also discovered that service performance is a more reliable and valid measure for both service quality and customer satisfaction on the operational level.

At the same time, in the field of tourism, satisfaction has been defined as the tourist's emotional state after experiencing the trip (Baker & Crompton, 2000). However, it would be appropriate to draw some differences between overall satisfaction and satisfaction with individual attributes, as particular tourism attributes may impact overall tourist satisfaction in different and notable ways (Huang et al., 2010). According to Oliver (1997), overall satisfaction does not only represent the sum of the individual assessment of each satisfaction attribute, but instead is a different, though related, construct from attribute satisfaction. Overall satisfaction may be

considered as a broader concept, implying holistic evaluation after purchase (Gnoth, 1994), instead of a sum of each attribute's individual measure (Bigne et al, 2001). This study employs this same definition of overall satisfaction.

Williams and Buswell (2003) argued that several studies conducted on consumer satisfaction and perceived performance have reported that there is a positive relationship between these components and behavioural intent measures such as recommendation and return intention. Several previous studies (Chi & Qu, 2008; Cole & Illum, 2006; Dabholkar et al., 2000) have also confirmed satisfaction as a mediating factor between some determinants and revisit intention.

In addition various scholars (Anderson & Sullivan, 1990; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Keaveney, 1995) have considered post-purchase behaviour as being significantly influenced by satisfaction. Previous research has determined that visitors' satisfaction and perceived quality are the most employed factors motivating the behaviour of tourists to visit a destination repeatedly (Hui et al, 2007; Pizam & Ellis, 1999).

When considering the context of conference attendees, in conformity with other phases of travel planning, the decision-making of an individual is lengthy and heavily influenced by the evaluation and satisfaction of the conference performance. In the conference context satisfied attendees will have intentions to participate in the same conference again or in conferences that take place in the same destinations, and will also recommend the conference to their colleagues and friends. This factor, as argued by Severt et al. (2007), becomes very significant in determining the degree of likelihood to participate in future conferences. Satisfaction also remains a crucial factor to conference attendees, because expectations and intentions for the purchasing decision of a next conference are affected by it. Consequently, satisfaction may also influence the revenue of the hosting hotels and convention centres, and even consolidate the stability of the destination and the convention centres (Oliver, 1996).

Nevertheless, by analysing previous literature, there is ample evidence that although many studies have focused on meeting planners' chosen destination satisfaction, a lack of research is still present in terms of conference attendees' performance evaluation, satisfaction and behavioural intention (Baloglu et al., 2003; Lee &

Back, 2005; Severt et al., 2007; Yoo& Weber, 2005). It is therefore important for researchers and practitioners to recognize that attendees assess the performance of a conference in multiple and sometimes complex ways, and consequently they may decide to visit again and/or recommend the conference to others. Additionally, the literature related to conference participation has scarcely measured what is a successful meeting in terms of service's quality, and instead only observed the meeting planner perspective, neglecting the attendees (Severt et al., 2007).

A study conducted by Hinkin and Tracy's (1998) has applied the SERVQUAL model in order to assess the service quality; however, customer satisfaction was not investigated in this study. In this regard, Danaher and Mattsson's (1994) study measured a conference's overall performance perceptions and the performance according to certain variables, before considering the overall customer satisfaction. Parasuraman et al. (1988) further attempted to assess conference customers' overall satisfaction and expanded the current body of knowledge in the field by examining customer satisfaction specifically.

Severt et al. (2007) have thus far conducted the most comprehensive research on the relationship between the evaluation of the conference performance, the satisfaction level and the behavioural intentions at the regional conference level. They assessed the importance performance analysis by employing a modified approach adapted from Ford et al. (1999), and then investigated the performance of only a limited number of items. Thus, Severt et al. (2007) have called for "testing their model across and within the various classifications of conference type (i.e., community, regional, national, international) in order to advance researchers and practitioner's level of understanding regarding the specifics of attendee satisfaction and behavioural intentions" (p.407). This study therefore, employed a modified version of their approach in order to evaluate the importance of service at an international academic conference, and differentiate its various aspects.

THEORETICAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

The Hypothetical model(Figure 1) explains the underlying process, which is adapted to guide this study. This research tests

whether there is a positive relationship among performance, overall satisfaction and post-behavioural intentions of international conference attendees.

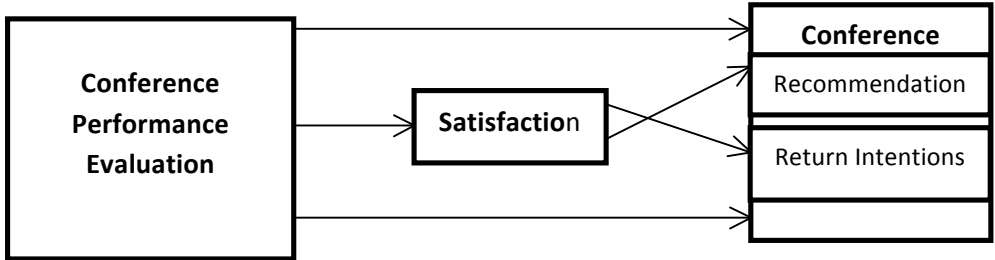


Figure 1. Theoretical model of the study

H₁: There is a significant relationship between conference performance and attendees' satisfaction.

H₂: There is a significant relationship between conference performance and attendees' recommendation.

H₃: There is a significant relationship between conference performance and attendees' return intentions.

H₄: There is a significant relationship between satisfaction of the conference and attendees' recommendation.

H₅: There is a significant relationship between satisfaction of the conference and attendees' return intentions.

H₆: Satisfaction has a mediating effect in the relationship between conference performance evaluation and recommendation.

METHODOLOGY

A self-administered questionnaire was used in this paper to test the theoretical model. The survey was categorized in four sections. The first section of the questionnaire focused on the general questions, mostly related to demographic information and information sources used by respondents. The second section looked into attendees' evaluation of the conference's performance. This section involved a list of 10 performance evaluation items adopted from Severt et al.'s (2007) study of performance of attendees to a

regional conference. However, some modifications were made to the items in order to suit the context of this study. Attendees' satisfaction was measured based on an adaptation of the universal scale of Oliver (1997) and included three items. The behavioural intentions construct was operationalized with five items pertaining to recommendation and return intentions. A seven-point scale was used to provide a normal spread of observations.

International participants attending 22 international academic conferences in Kuala Lumpur were used as the sampling frame. The reason for selecting 22 different conferences is that the majority of the researches that have been carried out concerning conference attendees focused only on specific cases of conference attendance, where all the attendees were like-minded; this does not allow for either generalization of the results or for a broader understanding of conference delegates (Mair, 2010). However, this study tries to fill a gap in the understanding of conference delegates in general, rather than delegates that are part of one specific conference population.

After the pilot study, the researcher found out that in order to obtain reliable results, more time is needed for attendees to settle back into their everyday life where they might apply their new knowledge; therefore it was necessary that the data collection takes place approximately one to three weeks after the conference. The survey instrument was therefore, administered to the target sample via online survey system. The online survey was much faster and more economical than the traditional mail survey (Wright, 2005). The survey was made available via a URL link for the duration of 6 months, beginning from September 2011 till February 2012. The online survey was mailed to 1,500 international participants and 515 questionnaires were collected. After removing those with missing core questions from the sample, 497 questionnaires were usable.

STUDY FINDINGS

The online survey showed a high response rate (of 3:1). The data from 497 respondents were analysed using SPSS. The profile of the sample is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the respondent

Variable		Frequency
Percentage %		
<u>Gender:</u>		
Male	263	
Female	234	
<u>Age:</u>		
Less than 20	18	3.6%
21-30	90	18.1%
31_40	12 9	26%
41_50	12 4	24.9%
Over 51	13 6	27.4%

<u>Profession:</u>		
Educator	28 2	56.7%
Student	15 4	30.8%
Industry Professional	61	12.3%
<u>Education:</u>		
Postgraduate	41 8	84.1%
Degree	78	15.9%
<u>Country of residency:</u>		
Africa	27	5.4%
America	74	14.9%
Asia	17 8	35.8%
Australia	15	3%

Europe	98	19.7%
Middle East	10	21.1%
	5	
<u>Conference experience:</u>		
1 time	70	14.1%
2-3 times	10	21.1%
	5	
4-5 times	16	34.0%
	9	
Over 6 times	15	30.8%
	3	
<u>Attendance payments:</u>		
By themselves	81	16.3%
By	24	48.3%
University/organization	0	
Partially both	17	35.4%
	6	

Total 100%	N= 497
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Trip characteristics of respondents (Table 2) revealed that while participation in the conference was the primary purpose of the majority of attendees (82.9%) for taking the trip to Malaysia, a great number of attendees (60%) consider their trip to be a combination of work and holiday and therefore most of them (51.9%) participated in the excursion offered by the organizers after the conference, even though the majority of the attendees (63.2%) had already been to Malaysia prior to the conference.

Table 2. Trip characteristics of the respondents

Variable Percentage %	Frequency
<u>Conference as the primary purpose of trip:</u>	
Yes	412
No	85
<u>Attending an international conference means:</u>	
Work	178
Holiday	19
Combination of work & holiday	300
<u>Conference excursion participation:</u>	
Yes	258
No	66
There was none	173

<u>First visit to Malaysia:</u>		
Yes	183	36.8%
No	314	63.2%
<u>Extending trip to stay more:</u>		
Yes	283	56.9%
No	214	43.1%
Total		N= 497
100%		

FINDINGS FROM THE FACTOR AND REGRESSION ANALYSES

The goodness of measures was determined through the applications of factor and reliability analysis. Factor analysis was carried out to reveal the underlying structure that forms the dimensions of performance attributes (P), satisfaction (S), recommendation (R), and return intention (RT). The Kaiser Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was higher than 0.6 in all analyses. The Bartlett's test of sphericity was also found to be significant. All of the anti-image values were greater than 0.50, indicating sufficient correlations among the items. The results found two performance evaluation dimensions namely: professional performance and cost and location performance.

According to the reliability analysis of all of the major variables in this study, the independent variables have a significant correlation with the dependent variable at a significance level of $p < .01$. This is considered as a good correlation for each dimension. This result also shows that all variables had Cronbach Alpha values higher than 0.70, confirming the reliability of the constructs.

Regression analysis was used to validate all the hypotheses in this study. The results of the regression analysis that was used to test the first five hypotheses show how the independent variables influence the level of respondents' overall satisfaction, and next their intention to recommend and re-attend the conference. Standardized estimates (beta coefficients) of each variable reflect the relative importance of the variables in the model.

As shown in table 3, the first regression model was run with the conference performance as the independent variable and satisfaction as the dependent one. The independent variable can explain 68% ($R^2 = 0.68$) of the variance of satisfaction. ($F = 518.195$, $p < 0.001$). Two dimensions, professional performance ($\beta = .372$, $p < 0.001$) and cost and location performance ($\beta = .571$, $p < 0.001$), were found to have a positive and significant effect on satisfaction.

Table 3. Regression analysis of conference performance evaluation on satisfaction

	Standardized Beta
Professional Evaluation Performance	.372***
Cost and Location Evaluation Performance	.571***
R^2	.679
F	518.195***

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

As seen in table 4, the second model was also significant ($F = 200.950$, $p < 0.001$). The independent variable (conference performance evaluation) can explain 45% ($R^2 = 0.453$) of the variance of the participant's recommendation. Thus, professional

performance ($\beta = .250$, $p < 0.001$) and cost and location performance ($\beta = .513$, $p < 0.001$) were found to have a positive and significant effect on participant's recommendation.

Table 4. Regression analysis of conference performance evaluation on recommendation

	Standardized Beta
Professional Performance	.250***
Cost and Location Performance	.513***
R ²	.453
F	200.950***

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

In the third regression model, the conference's performance evaluation variable can explain 26% ($R^2 = 0.258$) of the variance of the participants' return intention. The model was significant ($F = 83.344$, $p < 0.001$) and the R^2 was 0.25. Two dimensions of conference performance evaluation significantly affect the dependence variable.

Table 5. Regression analysis of conference performance evaluation on return intention

	Standardized Beta
Professional Performance	.163***
Cost and Location Performance	.406***
R ²	.258
F	83.344***

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

When satisfaction was regressed on recommendation, it was found that the model explains 68% ($R^2 = 0.684$) of the variance of the participant's recommendation. The result of the regression analysis determined that the model was also significant ($F = 1024.642$, $p < 0.001$) and R^2 was 0.68. The results clearly show that satisfaction ($\beta = .827$, $p < 0.001$) has significantly contributed to the participant's recommendation (See Table 6).

Table 6. Regression analysis of satisfaction on recommendation

	Standardized Beta
Satisfaction	.827***
R^2	.684
F	1024.642***

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

In addition, regression analysis revealed that satisfaction can explain 35.7% ($R^2 = 0.357$) of the variance of the participants' return intention. The model is significant ($F = 262.796$, $p < 0.001$) and R^2 is 0.357. Satisfaction ($\beta = .597$, $p < 0.001$) was found to have a positive and significant effect on the participant's return intention.

Table 7. Regression analysis of satisfaction on return intention

	Standardized Beta
Satisfaction	.597***
R^2	.357
F	262.796***

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Finally the last regression analysis was performed to explain the relationship between one independent variable (conference

performance evaluation), satisfaction (mediator) and two dependent variables (recommendation and return intentions). As shown in table 8, model one explained 67.9% of the variation in the satisfaction (adjusted $R^2= 0.678$; and $F = 518.195$ at $p<0.001$). Model two was significant at $p< 0.001$ and explained 45.3% of the variance of recommendation (adjusted $R^2= 0.451$; and $F = 200.950$). Model three also explained 68.4% of the variance of recommendation (adjusted $R^2= 0.683$; and $F = 1024.642$) and also significantly explained the predictor of recommendation ($p<0.001$). Model four significantly explained 69.3% of recommendation, with the inclusion of the predictor and the mediator (adjusted $^2= 0.691$; and $F = 361.869$; $p<0.001$). Multiple regressions were used to ascertain whether there are any mediator effects on the independent variables, and dependent variable. According to McKinnon et al. (1995), mediation is generally present when: a) the independent variable (IV) (in this case conference performance) significantly affects the mediator (satisfaction), b) the IV significantly affects the dependent variable (DV) (recommendation) in the absence of the mediator, c) the mediator has a significant unique effects on the DV, and d) the effect of the IV on the DV shrinks upon the addition of the mediator to the model.

Table 8. Mediating effect of satisfaction in regard to the conference performance and recommendation

	Stand ardized Beta	Stand ardized Beta	Stand ardized Beta	Stand ardized Beta	Re mark
	Mode 11	Mode 12	Mode 13	Mode 14	
Prof essional Perform ance	.372* **	.250* **		.009	Ful l mediat ion

Conference Cost and Location Performance	.571* **	.513* **		.091*	Partial mediation
Satisfaction			.827* **	.768* **	
Adjusted R ²	.678	.451	.683	.691	
F	518.1 95***	200.9 50***	1024. 642***	361.8 69***	

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001; Model 1= IV→MDV; Model 2= IV→ DV; Model 3=MDV→ DV; Model 4= IV+MDV→DV

Based on the regression results, the independent, mediating and dependent variables have met all of the conditions of mediation above. The result identified satisfaction as playing a full mediation role on the relationship between professional performances on recommendation. This can be seen from the insignificant relationship in model four. However, satisfaction played a partial mediation role on the relationship between conference cost and location performance on recommendation. Since the standardized beta of conference quality is insignificant but the beta value is lower than in the first and second models. Therefore, based on the results presented, all the hypothesis of this study are supported and accepted.

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Business meetings and conferences have become a feature of modern commercial life and one of the most valuable sectors of

business tourism that is increasingly used to promote tourism destinations. In order to draw attention of conference attendees, marketers and managers need to understand the various behaviours of conference attendees and their needs and wants in particular.

The current study was undertaken to empirically examine post-participation behaviour of international conference attendees. This study examined the relationships among performance evaluations, satisfaction and post-behavioural intentions of international conference attendees to determine important attributes of conference performance evaluated by international attendees. The results of the factor analysis found two performance evaluation dimensions, namely professional performance and cost and location performance. The results concerning professional performance in this study are very similar to those of Severt et al.'s (2007) that examine educational benefits as the most important conference performance evaluation criteria. Since previous studies on conference performance evaluation focused on regional conferences only, this study proposes a new performance dimension - cost and location performance dimension - which are considered very important when deciding to participate in conferences at the international level.

The respondents' evaluation of conference performance show that the conferences under study performed better in terms of location and cost, than in terms of professional and quality attributes. In regard to the satisfaction level, the results reveal that although attendees were generally satisfied, the conferences did not achieve an excellent level of satisfaction. In addition, while the willingness of attendees to recommend was high, their interest in returning back to the conference in the future is lower.

Furthermore, this study confirms the six hypotheses proposed above. The empirical data found the relationship among performance, satisfaction and post behavioural intentions is significant. The mediating effect of satisfaction is also supported. In parallel to Baker and Crompton's (2000) study, this research demonstrates that conference performance not only has an indirect effect on behavioural intentions through satisfaction, but also a direct impact on behavioural intentions. Improved performance quality increases attendees' interest to return to the conference and encourages their willingness to recommend it to others. The result of this study also demonstrates that satisfaction has

full mediation effect on the conference's professional performance, and participants' recommendation of the event. In this regard, the effect of other possible variables, such as travel funding and attendees past experiences that may affect recommendations and return intentions of conference attendees, should be explored in future research.

Another result of this study concerns the positive correlation between conference networking opportunities and the attendees' likelihood of attending the conference again in the future. Thus, the higher networking is as a motivator for attendance, the more likely the delegate is to attend the conference again in the future. The result of this study again confirms the previous work of Severt et al. (2007) with the difference that satisfaction has a partial mediation effect on conference cost and location performance, and participants' recommendation.

The current study confirms that customer recommendations and intentions to return are determined by attendees' satisfaction, with conference's performance as a vital antecedent. The outcome of this study offers insights for conference organizers in order to improve the performance of their conferences and attract customers. A great challenge for conference organizers is to identify attendees' satisfaction in order to encourage word-of-mouth. Therefore, the conference organizer should keep in touch with the attendees even after the conference to create positive post conference impressions. The suggestions provided by this study may strongly influence the conference organizers' future marketing plans and programs.

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WAITING TIMES AT THEME PARKS: HOW MANAGERS INTERPRET WAITING

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This paper explores how managers of theme parks interpret waiting times from a services marketing perspective. In-depth interviews are undertaken in order to uncover manager's perceptions of waiting.

'The inevitability of waiting times', 'the negative interpretation of waiting times' and 'neutral waiting times' are three themes that emerge from this qualitative study.

A deeper analysis of the waiting experience may contribute to enhanced strategies for managing waiting in theme parks, improved evaluations of the service and increased customer satisfaction. Finally, some practical tips for practitioners are proposed in the form of management takeaways.

Keywords: waiting; theme parks, consumer behaviour, qualitative research



INTRODUCTION

Waiting in services has been studied for more than thirty years (Maister, 1985; Pearce, 1989; Cameron, Baker and Peterson, 2013). During this time, researchers have endeavoured to better understand the process and effects of waiting and to design services that eliminate or reduce waiting times (Hornik, 1984; Taylor, 1994; Yan and Lotz, 2006). Various disciplines have attempted to explore and bring solutions to this issue. For instance, Operations Management studies have proposed solutions based on the use of different types of queues and how to organize these to improve operating capacity (Sheu and Babbar, 1996; Pullman and Thompson, 2002; Pullman and Rodgers, 2010). In Services Marketing, research has focused on understanding customer behaviour in waiting situations, including how consumers perceived waiting and how waiting affects customer satisfaction and service evaluation (Maister, 1985; Larson, 1987; Taylor, 1995; Davis and Heineke, 1998). Nevertheless, despite three decades of research on consumer waiting, customers continue to dedicate a considerable portion of daily life to waiting for services. According to Matter (2012), in the USA this amounts annually to about 37 billion hours spent waiting in line.

Tourism is especially prone to long, repeated waiting times (Moore, 2007). There is considerable research on waiting in a range of tourism contexts, such as waiting in restaurants (Davis and Heineke, 1998), in airports (De Lange, Samoilovich and Van der Rhee, 2013) and in various tourist and cultural attractions (Rowley 1999). Within tourism, theme parks have become synonymous with waiting (Gnoth, Bigné and Andreu, 2006) to the extent that research suggests that a typical visit to a theme park may involve more time spent waiting in line than time spent enjoying the park's attractions (Heger, Offermans and Frens, 2009). Yet research suggests that waiting causes considerable dissatisfaction among tourists (Dickson, Ford and Laval, 2005). In practice, queues are almost inevitable in theme parks because park attendance frequently surpasses the optimal capacity (Heo and Lee, 2009; Matthew et al., 2012). Indeed, a number of studies examine theme park guests activity patterns and

the time allocated by visitors to each activity (Birenboim et al., 2013). In addition, events such as the opening of new park attractions and rides unsurprisingly lead to queues (Cornelis, 2010). Meanwhile, management initiatives such as the recent appearance and growing popularity of wait-avoiding fast or express tickets and virtual queues have not always been successful (Matthew et al., 2012) and may result in even longer waits for consumers who do not purchase this option. In turn, this may lead to the perception that fast passes are inherently unfair to consumers (Biege, 2012).

However, there is also some contradicting evidence that tourists have come to expect and accept a certain amount of waiting time as part of the tourism experience and that waiting may not necessarily negatively affect tourist satisfaction (Sundström, Christine and Stavroula, 2011). Indeed, Heger, Offermans and Frens (2009) go as far as suggesting that by filling the waiting time in theme parks with fun activities to entertain park guests, making park guests wait may actually enhance the overall experience.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to consider the attitudes and perceptions of theme park managers of waiting in the theme park experience. We explore manager's perceptions because they have not been the focus of research on this issue, which normally focuses on the consumer (or 'theme park guest'). As a relevant stakeholder in the context of waiting, theme park management strives to balance park and attraction capacity with fluctuating demand in order to maintain guest satisfaction while simultaneously achieving operational efficiency (Pullman and Thompson, 2002). We propose that exploring theme park manager's perceptions of waiting will enable us to consider the contrasting evidence on this issue from the point of view of a stakeholder which has until now been largely overlooked in research.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we review the literature on waiting times in services with special emphasis on waiting times in the context of tourism and theme parks. We then we outline the methodology chosen for this study. We present and discuss the

results of the empirical study and finally we outline the conclusions and management takeaways.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK : WAITING IN SERVICES

Defining waiting in services

Prior literature defines waiting time as “the time from which a customer is ready to receive the service until the time the service commences” (Taylor, 1994:56). Indeed, consumers may wait before (*pre-process waiting*), during (*in process waiting*) or after (*post process waiting*) receiving the service (Dubé-Rioux, Schmitt and Leclerc, 1989). For instance, in the tourism and hospitality context of a restaurant dining experience, waiting times may be present before the service commences (before getting a table), just after the service has started (waiting once you have ordered your meal) or after the service has finished while the consumer is waiting to pay the bill and leave. In addition, as Taylor (1994) suggests, pre-process waits may be classified as pre-schedule waits: when customers arrive before the appointed time (when a tourist arrives early and waits for his flight), delays: when the service doesn't start at the time of the event (when a tourist waits beyond the scheduled time) and queue waits: when the system of first-come first-served is applied to manage waiting times (e.g., when visitors wait in regular lines to check in at an airport or a hotel).

The Negative Effects of Waiting

The negative effects of waiting on customers are widely accepted. It is generally accepted that waiting times are a serious problem for consumers (Bitner, Booms and Tetreault, 1990; Pruyn and Smidts, 1998; Lee and Lambert, 2000;) and companies (Schwartz, 1978; Taylor, 1995; Nie, 2000). Waiting can provoke unpleasant emotions such as nervousness, anxiety, stress or helplessness (Carmon, Shanthikumar and Carmon, 1995; Rafaeli, Barron and Haber, 2002). It may decrease customer satisfaction (Davis and Vollmann, 1990; Katz, Larson and Larson, 1991) and negatively influence overall evaluation of the service (Taylor, 1994; Hui and Tse, 1996; Pruyn and Smidts, 1998; Lee and Lambert, 2005) while reducing customer loyalty (Bielen and Demoulin, 2007). Waiting times may make customers abandon the service (Zhou and Soman, 2003; Nip, 2014) and decide not to return (Dickson, Ford and Laval, 2005; Lutz, 2008). Indeed, Friedman and Friedman (1997) suggest that waiting may be a reason for not choosing a specific service provider in the first place.

Service Solutions to Reduce Waiting Time

With this in mind, companies continually seek strategies to reduce these undesirable effects. This may involve reducing real waiting times (Davis and Heineke, 1994) or speeding up transactions (Katz et al., 1991). It may also include extending opening hours or implementing new technologies to more effectively manage waiting times and appointments (Davis and Vollmann, 1990; Yan and Lotz, 2006). Additionally, strategies may be oriented towards reducing perceived waiting time (the time the consumer 'feels' they have waited) (Hui and Tse, 1996; Davis and Heineke, 1998). For instance, when firms provide information about waiting time, the

overestimation of waiting times on the part of consumers tends to be less prevalent (Antonides, Verhoef and Van Aalst, 2002). Other strategies oriented towards reducing perceived waiting times consist of manipulating contextual factors such as music (Antonides, Verhoef and Van Aalst, 2002; Cameron, Baker and Peterson, 2013), social environment (Maister, 1985; Sommer, 1989) or activities to fill the wait (Maister, 1985; Taylor, 1994; Durrande Moreau, 1999) such as providing drinks for adults or entertainment for children while waiting (Kostecki, 1996). In the specific context of theme parks research suggests that some parks deliberately overestimate the waiting time in the information they provide to consumers knowing that guests like when the actual waiting time is less than the expected time (Geissler and Rucks, 2011).

The tourism industry has implemented several of the above strategies to reduce both real (Pullman and Thompson, 2002; Sheu, McHaney and Babbar, 2003; Rendeiro Martín-Cejas, 2006) and perceived waiting times (Pearce, 1989; Sulek and Hensley, 2004; Hwang, Yoon and Bendle, 2012). As waiting is a relevant and regular issue in tourist experiences, these contexts have been widely analysed by researchers. As mentioned earlier, there are a number of studies of waiting in a variety of specific tourist contexts; airports (Folkes, Koletsky and Graham, 1987; Minton, 2008; De Lange, Samoilovich and Van der Rhee, 2013), restaurants (Marquis, Dube and Chebat, 1994; Davis and Heineke, 1998; McGuire et al., 2010), theatres (Pearce, 1989; Becker, 1991), cinemas (Brady, 2002), ski resorts (Pullman and Thompson, 2002) and museums (Schmitt, Dubé and Leclerc, 1992; Riganti and Nijkamp, 2008).

Waiting in Theme Parks

Theme parks have also received considerable attention in academic research in recent years (Dawes and Rowley, 1996; Dickson, Ford and Laval, 2005; Cope III, Cope and Davis, 2008; Koo and Fishbach, 2010; Chuo and Heywood, 2014). Studies have been conducted at a number of theme parks situated around the

world, such as Taiwan (Chuo and Heywood, 2014), the Netherlands (Kemperman, 2000), Colombia (Álvarez and Mejía, 2012) and the United Kingdom (Matthew et al., 2012). Many of those studies use scenarios to reproduce waiting experiences at theme parks (Lutz, 2008; Gavián-Bouzas and García de Madariaga-Miranda, 2009; Matthew et al., 2012). However, little research has been conducted in theme parks, in their natural settings (Koo and Fishbach, 2010; Li, 2010) on actual waiting situations. There are few studies that adopt a qualitative approach, as the focus tends to be on carrying out quantitative studies based on consumer reactions to a range of hypothetical scenarios. The main focus of research on theme parks focuses on virtual queues and priority or express ticket systems (Tone and Kohara, 2007; Cope III, Cope and Davis, 2008; Lutz, 2008; Cope et al., 2011; Matthew et al., 2012) and the use of new technologies in managing and facilitating waiting times (Hwang, Yon and Bendle, 2012). Nevertheless, the optimal strategy for dealing with queues and waiting at theme parks remains a contested topic (Pearce, 1989; Dawes and Rowley, 1996; Dickson, Ford and Laval, 2005). In general, theme parks have struggled to find effective solutions to the persistent problem of waiting. For instance, Disney, probably the most well-known of the theme parks, is continuously working on improving their free virtual queue system (Dawes and Rowley, 1996; Elliott, 2002). Theme park managers are aware that waiting times and queues can overshadow the fantasy world of the parks who offer customers a break from the routines of everyday life by transporting consumers in time and space (Milman, 1991) and that making guests wait causes dissatisfaction (Brown, Kappes and Marks, 2013; Wu, Li and Li, 2014). If waiting times and queues are present, that entire experience may be interrupted and fragmented. Instead of having fun on the rides, tourists end up waiting in frustrating queues during a considerable part of their time (Heger, Offermans and Frens, 2009). Added to this, as attendance is increasing in some of the major theme parks around the world (Heo

and Lee, 2009; Milman, 2010), the problem of long queues for rides is ever-present and becoming more urgent (Martin, 2013; Nip, 2014).

With this in mind, we set out to gather the viewpoints of theme park managers on the issue of waiting. Our objective was to explore the perceptions and opinions about waiting from the viewpoint of managers with the purpose of extending our knowledge and understanding of the dynamics of waiting in a tourism environment from the point of view of a stakeholder that has largely been overlooked in studies on this issue.

METHODOLOGY

In order to explore in-depth manager's perceptions of waiting times in theme parks, a qualitative approach is adopted. As the literature suggests, qualitative methodologies provide flexibility and adaptability to the research project (Carson et al., 2001) and facilitate the exploration of individual's thoughts, emotions and feelings (De Ruyter and Scholl, 1998; Silverman, 1998). In addition, empirical studies in natural settings, as is the case in this study, enable us to examine real reactions and behaviours of participants in situ (Ryan and Valverde, 2006).

Hence in-depth interviews were judged as an appropriate data collection method. Specifically, semi-structured interviews, each of approximately 60 to 80 minutes, were conducted with ten managers of major theme parks in Spain between March and December of 2013. The ten cases were not extreme cases, but were chosen based on their current activities and their varied years of experience managing tourist and leisure services (from 1 year to 25 years in the sector) and their willingness to take part in the study. The specific managers were contacted by telephone. We explained the purpose and nature of our study and asked for an appointment to carry out the interview. The first three contacts were established through professional contacts at our university. These first participants assisted us in contacting five more managers through their own

professional networks. The final two contacts resulted from 'cold calling' a number of theme parks and requesting an interview. As waiting times at theme parks have not previously been analysed in detail from the point of view of managers, a data-driven approach was considered. This means the progress of the research project is guided by data and not by prior theories, experiences or intuition.

Nevertheless, it is important to point out that after many years of research on this topic, the researchers were equipped with a range of empirical and theoretical studies on the topic of waiting in services in general. Hence, a number of pre-prepared research questions were employed with the aim of giving some structure to the research process. Hence, the interviews were loosely framed around a number of questions areas: how managers manage waiting times at theme parks; how managers consider and perceive waiting time, including negative and positive interpretations. Participants, however, were free to raise and explore issues they considered salient to their experiences. This was an important characteristic of our study, given the long history of research on waiting. We suggest that if we are to advance in our knowledge and understanding of this persistent problem, a qualitative approach coupled with the participation of a mostly overlooked stakeholder may enable us to uncover new knowledge on this topic. Much of the time managers spoke of the specific context of waiting in queues for rides or attractions. However, they also spoke of waiting to purchase tickets to enter the park, as well as waiting in park restaurants, fast-food stalls, photographic services and so on.

All interviews were transcribed and then examined using computer assisted qualitative analysis software Nvivo. This software assists in making sense of the qualitative data (Ryan and Valverde, 2006). The procedures of open, axial and selective coding (Gibbs, 2002) were employed with the purpose of reaching a deeper understanding of the interview data. The number of interviews was decided upon according to the principal of saturation which states

that data collection should end when no new categories emerge from the data (Silverman, 1998).

As qualitative data and procedures cannot be validated through statistical techniques, systematic actions of verification of the research process were applied. These include: adequacy (considering different waiting situations at theme parks) (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Morse, 1994), maintaining an audit trail throughout the study (Morse, 1994), two separate coders (Morse, 1994), a high level of fitness of the method with theory on waiting and reality (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and a highly understandable language (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Ryan and Valverde, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section outlines and discusses the main results that emerged from the analysis of the interviews with the theme park managers.

The Inevitability of Waiting Times

Theme parks are generally situated in tourist destinations where seasonality is a significant factor, and where demand is concentrated during specific periods of the year. The presence of waiting times and queues as a typical scenario at theme parks' contexts was described across all cases. All participants reported that waiting was inevitable and unavoidable in theme parks. Although the managers involved all reported increases in park capacity in recent years, all managers described the inevitability of delays and the forming of queues on certain days, such as during the peak season or on a day of good weather just after a number of days of poor weather. During these specific periods, managers stated that the arrival of guests would predictably lead to the forming of uncomfortably long queues for certain attractions, despite the measures they undertook to avoid this.

“Attractions and rides don't have the capacity to avoid generating queues” (Josep)

In spite of all the provisions and the strategies implemented to cope with demand, the number of visitors will always exceed the service capacity on certain days and queues are impossible to avoid.

“For instance, there is a ride that can take up to 1,500 visitors per hour, with all trains running and all employees working. If more than 1,500 people turn up during one specific hour, you will have queues and there is nothing you can do about it” (Ricardo)

In an ideal distribution service context, waiting times would not exist and customers would receive their service when they order it without delays (Wang, 2011). However, the data suggest that this is not a realistic goal in the context of theme parks where reducing waiting time to zero is impossible for firms (Pearce, 1989; Heo and Lee, 2009; Matthew et al., 2012). There is an ‘under capacity by default’ (Heger, Offermans and Frens, 2009).

This is an important result because despite three decades of research on waiting, the literature continues to work towards the general aim of eliminating waiting. We suggest that a change of approach to waiting is required if we are to develop innovative solutions. The first step in this new approach would involve accepting the inevitability of some waiting.

Waiting and Consumer Satisfaction

Although managers know that waiting is a common occurrence that is generally interpreted as an inconvenience or annoyance by park guests, they also recognized that at certain times waiting becomes a serious problem. Although we do not claim a cause-effect relationship in light of the qualitative and exploratory nature of this study, the analysis of the qualitative data suggests that waiting may not generally play an important role in undermining customer satisfaction. Yet under certain conditions, when the park is very crowded, waiting may be more strongly linked to poor service evaluation and inevitably to reduced satisfaction.

“There is a curve that goes something like this. With up to about 1500 guests, satisfaction is not really affected. But above 1500,

satisfaction begins to fall. However, it is not a huge fall. Satisfaction only fell significantly on very specific days when attendance was well above our capacity limitation of 1500 per hour” (Armand)

Negative customer’s responses such as complaints only tend to appear when customers are forced to wait repeatedly and consequently, this may influence customer satisfaction. As one of the interviews explained, waiting times are not a minor issue.

“The problem of queues is probably the most important issue for customer satisfaction in theme parks” (José Luis)

“My experience in aquatic theme parks tells me that queues are negative. Queues affect my service quality index... queues at the attractions or at the entrance of the park are the main reasons for complaints” (Josep)

Because of the problems associated with waiting, managers in this study strive to solve the waiting problem. As one of the managers explained, a correct management of waiting times may influence positively customer satisfaction:

“When long lines and waits were managed properly, improving the quality of the service... the visitor left the park very satisfied” (Angels)

“You look for customer satisfaction, you want your client leave the park happy, so that they return on a future occasion and they speak well of you” (Pau)

Interviewees described several strategies that they apply at theme parks in order to manage waiting times. As one of the managers described, even Disney is concerned about queues and they implement different solutions to minimize waits:

“All theme parks have tried to minimize queues in one way or another. Disney is the benchmark of the theme parks and, as the benchmark, they have created the fast pass to avoid queues” (Maria).

However, reducing the real wait may be not an easy task. It may include extra human resources and extra training.

“The act of opening a new ticket office cannot be done instantly. You have to locate the person who will work there, the person has to

move to the ticket office, and the person has to be prepared to work there” (José Luis)

The managers explained that they also try to reduce perceived waiting times. They do so by providing information on how much time customers will have to wait, entertaining people while they are in the queue and making the queuing environment attractive. The following quote expands on the strategy to fill the wait with fun activities in order to reduce perceived waiting:

“We try to make queues less boring. In fact, there are pre-shows before the shows to make queues less boring” (Armand)

Waiting Times Expectations

In spite of the unavoidable negative aspects of waiting, some issues emerged from the interviews that may not be classified as negative. This was a surprising result given the overriding emphasis in the literature on the negative nature of waiting in services. For instance, managers explained that depending on whether customers are irregular or regular visitors to theme parks, they might perceive the inevitability of waiting times in different ways. Managers claimed that when customers are not familiar with the service (they are irregular visitors), waiting times are often viewed as a serious problem. Hence, waiting times act as an important barrier for irregular visitors. Indeed, they suggest that customers may decide not to visit the theme park in the first place due their expectations of long waiting times. Otherwise, they can choose not to buy the service again or decide to go to another service provider without queues.

In contrast, the managers interviewed suggest that when customers are familiar with theme parks, waiting times are generally viewed as something normal and not as a significant concern. These visitors enjoy the theme park’s experience and they accept that queues and waiting are part of the experience.

“When you do market research at theme parks, the most important hindrance for new visitors is queues. If you ask customers

why they don't visit the theme park, they will tell you that it is because of lines, because they don't want to queue. However, for people who have visited the theme park, the presence of queues doesn't tend to influence their decisions. People with prior experiences know when it's best to visit the park, when there are fewer queues, and in any case they are aware that they would find queues and they absolutely assume it. They don't give much importance to the issue of queues" (Maria).

These results support prior literature about prior experiences and customer's perceptions. As Eroglu, Machleit and Barr (2005) suggest, customers may end up habituated to some stimulus like crowds and not pay attention to them after receiving this stimulus for a long period of time. They may be tourists who are not really that bothered if they have to wait (Sundström, Lundberg, and Giannakis, 2011).

Willingness to Wait

A further situation in which waiting may not be associated with negative connotations is the fact that some customers are willing to wait for the service. According to our interviewees, some guests are not so bothered by delays if they eventually achieve their goals. Some guests are willing and prepared to wait to enjoy and ride attractions, regardless of the length of the queue. Some managers suggest that this may be due to the exceptional nature of the visit to the park and the fact that it generally takes place during holidays, when consumers are more relaxed. Because it's an event that often occurs once a year they are willing to join the queue and wait. It is important to note that we are not naively arguing that consumers like to wait or that when faced with the choice between a wait and a no wait situation, they will choose to wait. However, we are arguing that sometimes consumers will choose to accept to wait.

"Customers join queues because they want to enjoy the attractions. If you come to the theme park for a specific attraction

and there is a two-hour queue to ride it, you will join the queue, you won't go home. If you have travelled a long distance to visit the theme park and you want to ride a particular roller coaster, you will wait for it. The same happens if it is a new attraction or it is a show that occurs only once a year: there is a three-hour queue but people want to enjoy it" (Pedro).

Related with this, the literature explains that the willingness to wait increases when customers perceive a greater value of the service (Brady, 2002; Yan and Lotz, 2006; Gavián-Bouzas and García de Madariaga-Miranda, 2009). As Yan and Lotz (2006) suggest, the overall value of the service (as the utility and benefits that customers expect to receive from the service) may increase the zone of tolerance with waiting.

Filling the Wait

There are other positive aspects associated with waiting. The entertainment activities that theme parks provide while customers wait not only reduce the perceived waiting time, they also may become an important part of the service. In this way, visitors can actually enjoy the time they spend waiting for attractions.

"There were people who said they preferred the pre-show to the main show because actors in the pre-show asked them where they come from, they played games together and they had fun" (Angels).

Added to this, people can spend a relaxed time together while waiting. It may be a peaceful time where customers share their experiences and opinions about attractions. Rest and socialization may be positive outputs of waiting times. The next quotes expand on this:

"15 or 20 minutes waiting pass quickly and people have a good time; they share prior experiences, chat and rest. I think there is a waiting time which is not bad" (Sara).

Visitors may consider waiting as a positive part of the global service. People may start enjoying the attraction when they are

waiting in the queue (Niles, 2014). In this way, waiting times may be managed to be a fun and exciting part of the theme park experience (Dawes and Rowley, 1996; Heger, Offermans and Frens, 2009). As Maister (1985) suggests, people may enjoy the waiting time because they feel that they are not really waiting at all.

Queues Attract Guests to Specific Rides

Moreover, rather than acting as a hindrance, queues for specific rides may also attract other people and encourage visitors to join them. People become curious and want to know what is going on in that queue and why the ride seems so popular.

“I would say that queues attract people. We join a queue although we do not know exactly what will happen. We think: if there are many people here it is because this should be really cool, so we join the queue (Ricardo)

Thus, individuals may act according to what others do, imitating the behaviour of others.

“It is true that people sometimes act like sheep. If you see 4 or 5 people, then everybody goes there to see what is going on” (Juan Carlos)

In fact, in some situations people may prefer to trust and act according to the information given by other customers rather than according to the information given by the company. Customers may prefer the information provided by a physical queue of customers to the information provided by employees of the theme park.

“Sometimes people don’t believe the information that companies give them. Even if you are warning them that there are long waits for a ride, customers don’t believe you. Then, hiding the physical queue from the public may be not a good idea. I mean, sometimes it may be good for people to see the physical queue. It is not aesthetic, it is very ugly, but somehow it provides information to visitors” (José Luis)

Indeed, seeing a queue for an attraction may lead other visitors to perceive the attraction as more valuable. In contrast, the absence of a queue for an attraction may be perceived as something negative. Thus, people may act according what others do and join long queues. In fact, research suggests that sometimes people don't know why they are joining a queue but they join it because 'something is happening' (Mann, 1977).

"If there are no queues for an attraction, you will value less that attraction. A ride that has zero queues, where there is no one, this attraction gives the feeling that nobody really wants to ride on it. There should always be a minimum queue of at least three or five minutes. That always gives a bonus to that attraction. We were aware that a zero queue was not productive for the perception of the attraction." (Armand).

Indeed, making customers wait may cause services to be seen as more attractive and desirable (Kostecki, 1996; Gavilán-Bouzas and García de Madariaga-Miranda, 2009). As Bennett and Strydom (2001) explain, the presence of other customers may enhance and make the tourist experience more memorable.

Willingness to Pay to Avoid Waiting

Finally, waiting times may be related to economic benefits for companies. The interviewees explained that more waiting times are inevitably related with more sales of fast passes to avoid queues and consequently with more revenues for firms.

"Express passes provide a great amount of income. We can say that thanks to waiting times we can improve income. The sale of express products is directly proportional to waiting times. This is finally a great contradiction. It's a great source of revenues that today the theme park can't go without" (Ricardo)

Indeed, it might be suggested that some theme parks take advantage of this situation. The price of the fast pass continues to rise, as more people are willing to purchase the service.

“Due to the increased demand for this product, theme parks must raise the price, season after season. They have to do that for two reasons: on the one hand, if people increasingly value the service, it will cost more; and on the other hand, if companies don’t raise the price waiting times for priority lines will be longer than waiting times for regular lines” (Sara)

Previous studies support this strategy of charging consumers to avoid the wait (Friedman and Friedman, 1997; Heo and Lee, 2009; Matthew et al., 2012). The system of fast line passes increases company profits (Friedman and Friedman, 1997; Heo and Lee, 2009; Matthew et al., 2012) while improving waiting management and minimising congestion (Tone and Kohara, 2007).

CONCLUSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This study suggests a number of new and challenging issues on the stubbornly persistent problem of waiting in services, while focusing on this topic in the context of theme parks. The study takes an innovative approach to methodology in the sense that it adopts an exploratory nature to a problem that has been present for decades. We do so because we feel that academics and practitioner alike must seek new approaches to the old problem of waiting. Despite three decades of research on this topic, we continue to experience considerable waiting in our everyday lives as consumers. This is especially relevant in the context of theme parks which strive to balance park capacity, customer comfort and profitability.

This study suggests that some long-held beliefs about waiting should be questioned if we are to find new solutions. Firstly, we suggest that the inevitable nature of waiting means that searching

for the perfect solution to eliminate waiting may not prove fruitful. Secondly, we propose that consumers and tourists alike have become accustomed to and even expect a certain amount of waiting. Thirdly, we suggest that rather than striving to eliminate waiting, in certain contexts, especially in the tourism and hospitality sector, enabling consumers to pay to avoid waiting may prove increasingly profitable for companies. Nevertheless, research should further examine the issues surrounding equality, social justice and fairness in services that offer priority queues or express passes (Matthew et al., 2012).

In terms of managerial implications, the study outlines the following the practical considerations:

- Theme parks shouldn't necessarily focus their efforts on eliminating queues and waiting times. Instead efforts should be focused on reducing perceived waiting time.

- Waiting times should be considered as one part of the global customer experience and not as a residual and wasted time. Companies should manage waiting experience so that customers don't feel they are waiting by filling the waiting time with fun and entertaining activities.

- Less popular or less well-known attractions may benefit from the presence of a queue whether real or staged.

- Consequently, queues should not necessarily be disguised or made to appear shorter.

- Managers should clearly identify the customer segments that are willing to pay extra to avoid queues and provide the necessary services. Fast line passes should be available for those who are willing to pay.

In conclusion, despite three decades of research on waiting in services and the numerous advances that have been made in terms of understanding consumer waiting behaviour, many issues remain. As consumers we still experience waiting on a daily basis. Waiting in

line during leisure time or while on vacation can sometimes be a particularly unpleasant and frustrating experience. This paper examines the view of theme park managers on waiting and suggests a number of new insights on waiting in general as well as more specific proposals for waiting in the specific context of tourism.

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INCENTIVE PROGRAMS: CONSUMER-DRIVEN SOLUTIONS IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

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Incentive programs are a common tool used by businesses and other organizations to encourage specific behavior in customers and employees. This research note provides detailed information on how incentive programs may be an effective tool for encouraging sustainable travel-related purchases. A discussion outlining the existing research on green consumerism and consumer-driven solutions for encouraging sustainability is followed by industry and academic information on incentive programs. A focus group study then builds on this existing knowledge by looking at young professionals from Raleigh and Greenville, North Carolina to determine the effectiveness of incentive programs at encouraging green consumerism while traveling. Analysis of the resulting dialogue confirmed incentive programs may be an effective tool for encouraging sustainable travel-related purchases. Based on this result, recommendations provide design and logistical considerations that are important to take into account when trying to create an effective incentive program for sustainable tourism marketed to young professionals.

Key words: incentive, sustainable tourism, focus group, young professional, travel decisions



INTRODUCTION

The early 1990s marked the beginning of travel-related companies voluntarily implementing initiatives to showcase their commitment to sustainability (Ayuso, 2007) and to meet the growing demand for sustainable tourism products (Wehrli, Egli, Lutzenberger, Pfister, Schwarz, &Stettler, 2011; Weissenberg, Redington, and Kutyla, 2008). The most common initiatives are codes of conduct, best practices, ecolabels (or certifications), environmental management systems (EMSs), and environmental performance indicators (Ayuso, 2007). Because of the growing popularity of incentive programs (IPs), the purpose of this research was to explore the viability of using them on traveling young professionals.

Sustainability initiatives are not without their challenges. Businesses with ecolabels and certifications find it difficult to communicate their achievements in a way that provides a distinctmarketplace advantage. Certification systems often have fees associated with the auditing and recognition process, effectively creating cost barriers that exclude smaller, locally-owned businesses (Mycoo, 2006). EMSs are time intensive and costly, and self-imposed codes of conduct and environmental performance indicators do not guarantee increased sustainability. There is also conflicting research on whether or not sustainable practices enhance visitor experience (Susskind &Verma, 2011; Chun and Giebelhausen, 2012) or which sustainable practices consumers prefer (Millar, Baloglu, 2011).

Although Miller (2003) stated consumers can be a major force for progress toward sustainability, society does not currently have a consumer-driven solution for encouraging sustainable travel-related purchases. Instead, companies ineffectively invest in sustainability and travelers see consuming responsibly as time intensive, economically disadvantageous, and stressful (Valor, 2008). Incentive programs could be positioned to capitalize on the growing demand

for sustainable tourism as a less stressful, more economically advantageous alternative to existing sustainability initiatives.

IPs have five dimensions: 1) they encourage specific actions, 2) by a defined market, 3) to produce measurable outcomes, 4) through integrated strategies, 5) during a specific period of time ('Executive Summit,' 2010). According to the Incentive Performance Center, the objectives of IPs vary from increasing sales or customer numbers to acquiring market share and building customer loyalties ('Consumers: Incentive Overview,' 2012). Currently, 57% of America's largest companies use incentives ('Executive Summit,' 2010), and U.S. businesses spend \$30 billion dollars on consumer incentives annually. Because incentives are a large part of the current global economy, the recent recession has provided an opportunity for marketers to intensify their focus on IPs to help achieve organizational goals (Law, 2009).

Studying the effectiveness of IPs as a consumer-driven solution for sustainable tourism is important because: 1) existing supply-side initiatives haven't worked (Ayuso, 2007), 2) incentives are based on sound economical and psychological principles (Jolley, McHugh, & Reid, 2011), 3) there is a market demand for sustainable tourism products (Wehrli, Egli, Lutzenberger, Pfister, Schwarz, & Stettler, 2011), 4) IPs are on the rise as a means of engaging consumers ('Executive Summit,' 2010), and 5) current research on IPs in sustainable tourism is lacking (Chabowski, Mena, and Gozalez-Padron, 2011; Keh and Lee, 2006). Given the 5 known dimensions of IPs and the above potential implications of using IPs for consumer-driven solutions for sustainable tourism, the topic is worthy of investigation. The specific research questions for this study were:

- 1) Is an incentive program an effective tool for encouraging sustainable travel purchase decisions?
- 2) If so, what form should the incentive program take? If not, why are IPs ineffective?

3) What specific incentives are appealing to make sustainable travel-related purchases?

METHODS

Focus groups were chosen for this study because they have historical validity within marketing research (Calder, 1977). They provide rich, detailed information that allow the researcher to understand and analyze the reasons beneath the opinions expressed (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996). Lastly, a focus group is helpful for creating new ideas, which are crucial when studying fields where research is limited (Merton, 1987).

The samples for this study were two young professional groups (YPs) in North Carolina (NC): the Young Professionals Group sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce in Greenville, NC and the North Carolina Young Planners Group in Raleigh, NC. Participants were screened according to their age, profession, and previous travel experience. Altogether, there were nine YPs (eight males) ranging in age from 23 to 46. They worked in architecture, city planning/urban development, information technology, and sales.

Each focus group discussed the definition of sustainable tourism, obtained information on the participants' travel purchasing behavior, determined whether or not participants would use an incentive program for making sustainable travel-related purchases, and solicited feedback on three different incentive program models. To capture all responses, both focus groups were recorded using an audio-recorder, transcribed, and coded according to themes that emerged. Three phases of coding were used by the researchers for the analysis of the data. Initially, researcher 1 used open coding to categorize the data, followed by interconnecting the categories using axial coding. Then, researcher 2 carried out selective coding connecting the categories and providing a safeguard of validity. Feedback varied most on the interpretation of sustainable tourism and the type of incentive program that was most appealing.

FINDINGS

The YPs associated sustainable tourism with ideas of environmental longevity by reducing fossil fuels when traveling. They also equated it with completing a service project in a developing country. Although there is some recognition around the concept of sustainable tourism, it needs more clarification for YPs to identify with it. None of the participants used sustainability as a factor in their travel decisions; convenience, previous enjoyment levels, uniqueness, locality, authenticity, cost, safety, and overall quality were all more important. However, both focus groups considered sustainability a value-added component to their travel purchases.

Participants were, however, interested in a program that provided incentives for making sustainable travel-related purchases. Some saw IPs as a way to take out the hassle of researching sustainable businesses themselves, “You’re buying something of value as well as contributing to the environment and local economy”...“Now you’ve just given me two good things”...“Double bonus.” YPs would not participate if the program detracted from their overall experience.

The three incentive program examples mirrored existing consumer IPs. Program A was similar to a AAA membership. For \$25 per year a person receives a membership card that could be used for discounts at sustainable, travel-related businesses. Program B was similar to credit card points programs where consumers accrue points for their sustainable, travel-related purchases and redeem their points for prizes; it included a one-time fee of \$9.99. Program C encouraged travelers to go online to submit their information and unique receipt code for a chance to win prizes.

The YPs thought Program A was convenient, simple and liked the idea of an immediate benefit. Participants questioned the program’s quantity, type, and location of businesses involved. The ultimate criteria on whether to participate was if they received their

\$25 investment back. Three participants thought the \$25 was “relatively high” and some thought the price of the program suggested it might be a scam or assumed the discounts were unsubstantial. All stated they would be willing to pay more for a program if the discounts were worth it. Participants who did not like Program A felt restricted on where they could go when they traveled. Also, both groups stated a membership card was not attractive because they had too many unused membership cards. Six participants noted having a QR Code or an app would be more advanced, convenient, and environmentally sustainable.

The YPs found Program B had a low entry fee (\$9.99); two participants stated they would pay up to \$150 depending on how quickly that fee could be recovered through prizes offered. Participants liked this option because there were no annual fees, so you were not “under duress” to use benefits within one year. The YPs also liked the potential for this program to be competitive if participants knew how many points each other had through a social media platform. Most liked the idea of a direct benefit as opposed to accumulated points in exchange for a benefit. Participants expressed concern on the program’s flexibility and needed to know if points were based on the amount of money a person spends or the “level of sustainability” of the business. Another concern was if only locals used the program, then it would not increase the destination’s revenue. Lastly, tracking points was too much effort for the majority of participants.

Program C was the least favored amongst all YPs. The main concern was the possibility of getting nothing. The overall sentiment was, “Oh, I’ll never win.” Three participants noted this program offered the least amount of guarantee to help in tourism because the audience participating may not be tourists.

IMPLICATIONS

Although YPs are not looking for sustainable businesses when they travel, they are interested in becoming involved in the right incentive program because there is a “double bonus” in participation. By tapping into the internal motivation of the young professional market, companies can encourage young professionals to purchase products and services that are better for the environment and communities they visit. The long-term impact of having an effective IP is increased awareness, responsible travel, and pressure for companies to implement sustainability-focused options to access this market segment.

In order to encourage involvement and for IPs to be an effective tool for sustainable tourism, the program must be convenient, affordable, and have marketable benefits. Based on this study’s results, there is evidence supporting IPs as an effective tool for encouraging sustainable travel-related purchases. An optimal incentive program should be a hybrid of Program A and Program B and would:

- Cost a one-time fee between \$25 and \$150
- Offer accessibility via QR Code or phone application
- Include opportunity to collect immediate benefits and accumulate points for larger rewards
 - Be visible online to encourage competition
 - Base its points on the business’ level of sustainability and level of consumer spending
 - Distinguish between locals and tourists during program registration
 - Focus on significant involvement from one city or destination at a time to prevent multiple cities with only a few businesses participating
 - Align with statewide certification programs for green businesses. This would make it easier to choose what businesses would be involved in the IP, as well as eliminate skepticism amongst consumers regarding the organizations’ level of sustainability.

The data from the two focus groups should be considered a ‘stepping stone’ for future research but is not generalizable because of the small numbers of participants and its concentration specifically within NC. Also, gender bias may be evident in the results since eight of the nine participants were male. There are several future research ideas that can build upon this study. Testing other market segments such as Baby Boomers or Millennials would expand the notion of IPs’ effectiveness as a tool for sustainable tourism. Kotler (2011) called for a reinvention of marketing to create solutions that minimize the sacrifices consumers make (time, money, emotional well-being) to be sustainable. This qualitative research has provided insight into existing IPs, their effectiveness, and shown a market readiness for consumer IPs that encourage sustainable travel-related purchases.

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TOURISMOS

An International Multidisciplinary Journal of Tourism

AIMS & SCOPE

TOURISMOS is an international, multi-disciplinary, refereed (peerreviewed) journal aiming to promote and enhance research in all fields of tourism, including travel, hospitality and leisure. The journal is published by the University of the Aegean (in Greece), and is intended for readers in the scholarly community who deal with different tourism sectors, both at macro and at micro level, as well as professionals in the industry. TOURISMOS provides a platform for debate and dissemination of research findings, new research areas and techniques, conceptual developments, and articles with practical application to any tourism segment. Besides research papers, the journal welcomes book reviews, conference reports, case studies, research notes and commentaries.

TOURISMOS aims at:

- Disseminating and promoting research, good practice and innovation in all aspects of tourism to its prime audience including educators, researchers, post-graduate students, policy makers, and industry practitioners.
- Encouraging international scientific cooperation and understanding, and enhancing multi-disciplinary research across all tourism sectors.

The scope of the journal is international and all papers submitted are subject to strict blind peer review by its Editorial Board and by other anonymous international reviewers. The journal features conceptual and empirical papers, and editorial policy is to invite the submission of manuscripts from academics, researchers, post-graduate students, policymakers and industry practitioners. The Editorial Board will be looking particularly for articles about new trends and developments within different sectors of tourism, and the application of new ideas

and developments that are likely to affect tourism, travel, hospitality and leisure in the future. TOURISMOS also welcomes submission of manuscripts in areas that may not be directly tourism-related but cover a 236 topic that is of interest to researchers, educators, policy-makers and practitioners in various fields of tourism.

The material published in TOURISMOS covers all scientific, conceptual and applied disciplines related to tourism, travel, hospitality and leisure, including: economics, management, planning and development, marketing, human resources, sociology, psychology, geography, information and communication technologies, transportation, service quality, finance, food and beverage, and education. Manuscripts published in TOURISMOS should not have been published previously in any copyright form (print or electronic/online). The general criteria for the acceptance of articles are:

- Contribution to the promotion of scientific knowledge in the greater multi-disciplinary field of tourism.
- Adequate and relevant literature review.
- Scientifically valid and reliable methodology.
- Clarity of writing.
- Acceptable quality of English language.

TOURISMOS is published twice per year (in Spring and in Autumn). Each issue includes the following sections: editorial, research papers, research notes, case studies, book reviews, conference reports, industry viewpoints, and forthcoming events.

JOURNAL SECTIONS

Editorial

The Editorial addresses issues of contemporary interest and provides a detailed introduction and commentary to the articles in the current issue. The editorial may be written by the Editor, or by any other

member(s) of the Editorial Board. When appropriate, a “Guest Editorial” may be presented. However, TOURISMOS does not accept unsolicited editorials.

Research Papers

For the Research Papers section, TOURISMOS invites full-length manuscripts (not longer than 6000 words and not shorter than 4000 words) from a variety of disciplines; these papers may be either empirical or conceptual, and will be subject to strict blind peer review (by at least three anonymous referees). The decision for the final acceptance of the paper will be taken unanimously by the Editor and by the Associate Editors. The manuscripts submitted should provide original and/or innovative ideas or approaches or findings that eventually push the frontiers of knowledge. Purely descriptive accounts are not considered suitable for this section. Each paper should have the following structure: a) abstract, b) introduction (including an overall presentation of the issue to be examined and the aims and objectives of the paper), c) main body (including, where appropriate, the review of literature, the development of hypotheses and/or models, research methodology, presentation of findings, and analysis and discussion), d) conclusions (including also, where appropriate, recommendations, practical implications, limitations, and suggestions for further research), e) bibliography, f) acknowledgements, and g) appendices.

Case Studies

Case Studies should be not longer than 3500 words and not shorter than 2500; these articles should be focusing on the detailed and critical presentation/review of real-life cases from the greater tourism sector, and must include - where appropriate - relevant references and bibliography. Case Studies should aim at disseminating information and/or good practices, combined with critical analysis of real examples. Purely descriptive accounts may be considered suitable for this section, provided that are well-justified and of

interest to the readers of TOURISMOS. Each article should have the following structure: a) abstract, b) introduction (including an overall presentation of the case to be examined and the aims and objectives of the article), c) main body (including, where appropriate, the review of literature, the presentation of the case study, the critical review of the case and relevant discussion), d) conclusions (including also, where appropriate, recommendations, practical implications, and suggestions for further study), e) bibliography, f) acknowledgements, and g) appendices. All Case Studies are subject to blind peer review (by at least one anonymous referee). The decision for the final acceptance of the article will be taken unanimously by the Editor and by the Associate Editor.

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Research Notes should be not longer than 2000 words and not shorter than 1000; these papers may be either empirical or conceptual, and will be subject to blind peer review (by at least two anonymous referees). The decision for the final acceptance of the paper will be taken unanimously by the Editor and by the Associate Editors. The manuscripts submitted may present research-in-progress or my focus on the conceptual development of models and approaches that have not been proven yet through primary research. In all cases, the papers should provide original ideas, approaches or preliminary findings that are open to discussion. Purely descriptive accounts may be considered suitable for this section, provided that are well-justified and of interest to the readers of TOURISMOS. Each paper should have the following structure: a) abstract, b) introduction (including an overall presentation of the issue to be examined and the aims and objectives of the paper), c) main body (including, where appropriate, the review of literature, the development of hypotheses and/or models, research methodology, presentation of findings, and analysis and discussion), d) conclusions (including also, where appropriate, recommendations, practical

implications, limitations, and suggestions for further research), e) bibliography, f) acknowledgements, and g) appendices.

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Book Reviews should be not longer than 1500 words and not shorter than 1000; these articles aim at presenting and critically reviewing books from the greater field of tourism. Most reviews should focus on new publications, but older books are also welcome for presentation. Book Reviews are not subject to blind peer review; the decision for the final acceptance of the article will be taken unanimously by the Editor and by the Book Reviews Editor. Where appropriate, these articles may include references and bibliography. Books to be reviewed may be assigned to potential authors by the Book Reviews Editor, though *TOURISMOS* is also open to unsolicited suggestions for book reviews from interested parties.

Conference Reports

Conference Reports should be not longer than 2000 words and not shorter than 1000; these articles aim at presenting and critically reviewing conferences from the greater field of tourism. Most reports should focus on recent conferences (i.e., conferences that took place not before than three months from the date of manuscript submission), but older conferences are also welcome for presentation if appropriate. Conference Reports are not subject to blind peer review; the decision for the final acceptance of the article will be taken unanimously by the Editor and by the Conference Reports Editor. Where appropriate, these articles may include references and bibliography. Conference reports may be assigned to potential authors by the Conference Reports Editor, though *TOURISMOS* is also open to unsolicited suggestions for reports from interested parties.

Industry Viewpoints

Industry Viewpoints should be not longer than 1500 words and not shorter than 500; these articles may have a “commentary” form, and aim at presenting and discussing ideas, views and suggestions by practitioners (industry professionals, tourism planners, policy makers, other tourism stakeholders, etc.). Through these articles, TOURISMOS provides a platform for the exchange of ideas and for developing closer links between academics and practitioners. Most viewpoints should focus on contemporary issues, but other issues are also welcome for presentation if appropriate. Industry Viewpoints are not subject to blind peer review; the decision for the final acceptance of the article will be taken unanimously by the Editor and by the Associate Editors. These articles may be assigned to potential authors by the editor, though TOURISMOS is also open to unsolicited contributions from interested parties.

Forthcoming Events

Forthcoming Events should be not longer than 500 words; these articles may have the form of a “call of papers”, related to a forthcoming conference or a special issue of a journal. Alternatively, forthcoming events may have the form of a press release informing readers of TOURISMOS about an event (conference or other) related to the tourism, travel, hospitality or leisure sectors. These articles should not aim at promoting sales of any products or services. The decision for the final acceptance of the article will be taken by the Editor.

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NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Manuscript Submission Procedure

Manuscripts should be written as understandably and concisely as possible with clarity and meaningfulness. Submission of a manuscript to TOURISMOS represents a certification on the part of the author(s) that it is an original work and has not been copyrighted elsewhere; manuscripts that are eventually published may not be reproduced in any other publication (print or electronic), as their copyright has been transferred to TOURISMOS. Submissions are accepted only in electronic form; authors are requested to submit one copy of each manuscript by email attachment. All manuscripts should be emailed to the Editor-in-Chief (Prof. Paris Tsartas, at ptsar@aegean.gr) and to the Editors (Prof. Evangelos Christou, at e.christou@tour.teithe.gr and Prof. Andreas Papatheodorou, at a.papatheodorou@aegean.gr), and depending on the nature of the manuscript submissions should also be emailed as follows:

- Conference reports should be emailed directly to the Conference Reports Editor (Dr. Vasiliki Galani-Moutafi), at v.moutafi@sa.aegean.gr.
- Book reviews should be emailed directly to the Book Reviews Editor (Prof. Marianna Sigala), at marianna.sigala@unisa.edu.au.
- Full papers and all other types of manuscripts should be emailed directly to the Editors (Prof. Evangelos Christou and Prof. Andreas Papatheodorou), at

e.christou@tour.teithe.gr

and

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Feedback regarding the submission of a manuscript (including the reviewers' comments) will be provided to the author(s) within six weeks of the receipt of the manuscript. Submission of a manuscript will be held to imply that it contains original unpublished work not being considered for publication elsewhere at the same time. Each author of a manuscript accepted for publication will receive three complimentary copies of the issue, and will also have to sign a "transfer of copyright" form. If appropriate, author(s) can correct first proofs. Manuscripts submitted to TOURISMOS, accepted for publication or not, cannot be returned to the author(s).

Manuscript Length

Research Papers should be not longer than 6000 words and not shorter than 4000. Research Notes should be not longer than 2000 words and not shorter than 1000. Case Studies should be not longer than 3500 words and not shorter than 2500. Book Reviews should be not longer than 1500 words and not shorter than 1000. Conference Reports should be not longer than 2000 words and not shorter than 1000. Industry Viewpoints should be not longer than 1500 words and not shorter than 500. Forthcoming Events should be not longer than 500 words. Manuscripts that do not fully conform to the above word limits (according to the type of the article) will be automatically rejected and should not be entered into the reviewing process.

Manuscript Style & Preparation

- All submissions (research papers, research notes, case studies, book reviews, conference reports, industry viewpoints, and forthcoming events) must have a title of no more than 12 words.

- Manuscripts should be double-line spaced, and have at least 2,5 cm (one-inch) margin on all four sides. Pages should be numbered consecutively.
- The use of footnotes within the text is discouraged – use endnotes instead. Endnotes should be kept to a minimum, be used to provide additional comments and discussion, and should be numbered consecutively in the text and typed on a separate page at the end of the article.
- Quotations must be taken accurately from the original source. Alterations to the quotations must be noted. Quotation marks (“ ”) are to be used to denote direct quotes. Inverted commas (‘ ’) should denote a quote within a quotation. If the quotation is less than 3 lines, then it should be included in the main text enclosed in quotation marks. If the quotation is more than 3 lines, then it should be separated from the main text and indented.
- The name(s) of any sponsor(s) of the research contained in the manuscript, or any other acknowledgements, should appear at the very end of the manuscript.
- Tables, figures and illustrations are to be included in the text and to be numbered consecutively (in Arabic numbers). Each table, figure or illustration must have a title.
- The text should be organized under appropriate section headings, which, ideally, should not be more than 500-700 words apart. • The main body of the text should be written in Times New Roman letters, font size 12.
- Section headings should be written in Arial letters, font size 12, and should be marked as follows: primary headings should be centred and typed in bold capitals and underlined; secondary headings should be typed with italic bold capital letters; other headings should be typed in capital letters. Authors are urged to write as concisely as possible, but not at the expense of clarity.
- The preferred software for submission is Microsoft Word.

- Authors submitting papers for publication should specify which section of the journal they wish their paper to be considered for: research papers, research notes, case studies, book reviews, conference reports, industry viewpoints, and forthcoming events.
- Author(s) are responsible for preparing manuscripts which are clearly written in acceptable, scholarly English, and which contain no errors of spelling, grammar, or punctuation. Neither the Editorial Board nor the Publisher is responsible for correcting errors of spelling or grammar.
- Where acronyms are used, their full expression should be given initially.
- Authors are asked to ensure that there are no libellous implications in their work.

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For submission, manuscripts of research papers, research notes and case studies should be arranged in the following order of presentation:

- First page: title, subtitle (if required), author's name and surname, affiliation, full postal address, telephone and fax numbers, and e-mail address. Respective names, affiliations and addresses of co-author(s) should be clearly indicated. Also, include an abstract of not more than 150 words and up to 6 keywords that identify article content. Also include a short biography of the author (about 50 words); in the case of co-author(s), the same details should also be included. All correspondence will be sent to the first named author, unless otherwise indicated.
- Second page: title, an abstract of not more than 150 words and up to 6 keywords that identify article content. Do not include the author(s) details, affiliation(s), and biographies in this page.

- Subsequent pages: the paper should begin on the third page and should not subsequently reveal the title or authors. In these pages should be included the main body of text (including tables, figures and illustrations); list of references; appendixes; and endnotes (numbered consecutively).
- The author(s) should ensure that their names cannot be identified anywhere in the text.

Referencing Style

In the text, references should be cited with parentheses using the “author, date” style - for example for single citations (Ford, 2004), or for multiple citations (Isaac, 1998; Jackson, 2003). Page numbers for specific points or direct quotations must be given (i.e., Ford, 2004: 312-313). The Reference list, placed at the end of the manuscript, must be typed in alphabetical order of authors. The specific format is:

- For journal papers: Tribe, J. (2002). The philosophic practitioner. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol.29, No.2, pp.338-357.
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- For chapters in edited books: Sigala, M. and Christou, E. (2002). Use of Internet for enhancing tourism and hospitality education: lessons from Europe. In K.W. Wober, A.J. Frew and M. Hitz (Eds.) *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism*, Wien: Springer-Verlag.
- For papers presented in conferences: Ford, B. (2004). Adoption of innovations on hospitality. Paper presented at the 22nd EuroCHRIE Conference. Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey: 3-7 November 2004.

- For unpublished works: Gregoriades, M. (2004). The impact of trust in brand loyalty, Unpublished PhD Tourismos. Chios, Greece: University of the Aegean.
- For Internet sources (if you know the author): Johns, D. (2003) The power of branding in tourism. [Http://www.tourismabstracts.org/marketing/papers-authors/id3456](http://www.tourismabstracts.org/marketing/papers-authors/id3456). Accessed the 12th of January 2005, at 14:55. (note: always state clearly the full URL of your source).
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