

Advances in Tourism Marketing in a Global Market Towards a Better Understanding of Loyalty, Social Media, Island Tourism and Cultural Convergence

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Received: 29/09/2017

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Institution awarding the Ph. D. Degree: ULPGC

Date of defence: 21/09/2017

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Citation: Almeida-Santana, A. (2018) Advances in Tourism Marketing in a Global Market Towards a Better Understanding of Loyalty, Social Media, Island Tourism and Cultural Convergence. Doctoral Dissertation Summary. *European Journal of Tourism Research* 18, pp. 164-168

Goal and objectives of the dissertation

Goal

The present thesis is structured into four separate chapters, the objectives of each of them are indicated below:

- The first work of the present thesis “Island Tourism: Should They Compete or Co-operate? Designing an Effective Brand Architecture” arises from the concern about how island destinations can more effectively manage their brand architecture, with a wide variety of brands (island, archipelago, region, country, etc.). The aim of this paper is to provide destination management organizations of islands with information on which islands they should co-operate with, inside and outside their own archipelago, depending on the mainland markets.

- The second chapter “Understanding Tourism Loyalty: Horizontal vs. Destination Loyalty” analyses horizontal loyalty, and explains the factors that determine this behaviour. This paper also identifies the differences between the variables that explain horizontal loyalty and the loyalty to one-single-destination.

- Chapter 3 “New Trends in Information Search and Their Influence on Destination Loyalty: Digital Destinations and Relationship Marketing” further analyses the relationship between the tourist’s behaviour when searching for information and the development of their loyalty to the destinations. In doing so, a better understanding of how tourists vary their behaviour between the different sources and different destinations is obtained.

- The purpose of Chapter 4 “The Paradox of Tourist-Cultural Convergence-Divergence in Europe. Social Media and Motivations” is to investigate the following phenomena: “cultural-convergence” and “media-convergence”. Understanding the relationship between them will serve as a tool for destination marketing organisations in the development of their communication strategies, as they will be able to know what social media to use to best reach each culture and what content to communicate based on the consumers individual motivations. The final objective is that the different research problems covered contribute to increasing the competitiveness of tourist destinations in the new global competitive environment.

Methodology

Europe remains the world's largest outbound tourism region, generating more than half of global international arrivals per year (UNWTO, 2016). For this reason, the target population of this study was European tourists, aged 16 and over, from 17 of the main outbound European countries in terms of tourists: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

The work was done through Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI), to a representative sample of the 16 mentioned countries, from a database of panellists in each country. A random selection was made based on the variables of stratification of geographical area and province, on the one hand, and, on the other, of gender and age, in order to guarantee the representativeness of the sample with the population of each country. Once the questionnaire was translated and pre-tested in the language of the potential tourists, and the relevant corrections were made in those questions that raised difficulties of comprehension, the fieldwork was carried out. The defined sample was of 8,500 tourists (500 in each country) and the actual sample obtained of 6,964 tourists, between 400 and 459 tourists per country. The selected sample was sent a personalised email inviting them to participate in the study, with a link in the mail that led them to the online survey. In order to

ensure the expected number of surveys, during the three months of fieldwork in different countries, two reminders were held to encourage response.

After completing the fieldwork and having applied the corresponding quality controls, we performed different statistical analysis with the latest version of the SPSS programme.

In Chapter 1 we performed 73 different binomial Logit analysis. In this case a Logit model based on the theory of random utility has been chosen. The use of this model guarantees robustness in the estimated results and the fulfilment of the properties of the conventional utility functions established by the theory of the consumer.

In Chapter 2, two binomial logit models, with two different estimations have been estimated. Before estimating the models, a factor analysis was carried out to examine the dimensions of the cognitive and affective image and motivational factors with the objective of reducing its dimensions and to properly identify the determining factors.

In Chapter 3 we proceeded to conduct an analysis of the significant differences using a chi-square test among the different groups to analyse the first goal and a logit binomial analysis in order to look into the second goal. In this case, we chose the logit model based on the random use theory.

In Chapter 4, a correspondence analysis (CA) was performed to identify similarities and differences in tourist information search patterns (media convergence). The method used, given the nature of the variables (categorical variables) is the Homals or multiple correspondence analysis (MCA). Next, a cluster analysis was used to classify tourists according to the different dimensions found in the MCA. The Ward method was employed using the K-media analysis. In addition, multivariate statistics were used to examine the statistical differences between clusters.

Additionally, a factor analysis of the motivations was carried out using the principal component method with Varimax rotation in order to reduce their dimensions. Finally, once again, a cluster analysis was performed to group the individuals according to the factors found in the previous factor analysis. This analysis allowed the identification of motivational differences by culture.

Results

The first chapter highlights the importance of islands in the tourist market (32.1% of destinations chosen by European tourists to spend their holidays in the last three years were island destinations) and their complementarity (the visit to some islands influences the visit to others). Furthermore, the results confirmed that islands are the preferred destination of 16.4% of tourists, and considered an idyllic travel destination for 17.9% European tourists, which emphasises the islands' role as "dream destinations" for continental tourists.

In addition, this first chapter demonstrates that proper management of the brand architecture and cooperation between the islands could be a win-win strategy for those that form part of the relationship, but they have to understand in advance which islands they should co-operate with within the different markets. This study proposes, based on the study of the demand, the establishment of island networks but from a supply perspective in order to improve promotion.

The second chapter proceeded to identify different groups of tourists according to the type of loyalty they perform: loyalty to one-single-destination (DL) and to multiple destinations (HL). In addition, an attempt was made to determine whether or not the factors that influence a tourist to show horizontal loyalty are the same as those that make a tourist loyal to one-single-destination. The results allowed identifying the existence of variables that influence both types of loyalty, but also others that influence HL and not DL, and vice versa.

The results presented in chapter three demonstrate the extreme importance of social media in loyalty: behavioural and attitudinal,

and for both one-single-destination and horizontal loyalty. In addition, this chapter analysis the differences in the use of online and offline information sources to find out about the travel destination among the different groups of identified loyal tourists. The study allows us to confirm that the information sources used by the tourists to find out about the travel destinations influence the development of tourist loyalty towards destinations. However, the use of some sources or others determines the type of loyalty that develops.

The results found in essay four reveal the impossibility of treating Europe as a single market in terms of tourist communication due to "media-divergence". In the light of the results, Europe must be understood as a fragmented market in terms of how tourists use social media to find out about a travel destination. However, there is also a clustering of cultures (countries) in three segments, depending on the intensity of social media use, which does not respond to apparent cultural similarities. The grouping of these countries is precisely related to a process of media convergence, which is not homogeneous across all cultures, but is shared between the member countries of these three blocks, and with some specific sources widely present in a large number of markets (convergence), creating their own tribe and global culture on the Internet.

Furthermore, this study shows the existence of differences in the travel motivations tourists have according to their nationality, to the extent that the content to be communicated through social media should be different depending on the market at which it is targeting. Three blocks of countries are identified each of which require a different treatment.

Theoretical Conclusions

This first study represents an advance in the knowledge on "island tourism" and contributes to existing literature by helping develop a theory of co-opetition between islands through the proposal of a new way of analysing the same through the brand.

The second chapter proposes a change of vision in the design of destination loyalty strategies, where the emphasis is placed on the tourist community and how they engage with many destinations. Traditionally, literature analysis the destinations and their marketing strategies without taking into account the rest of tourist destinations, or the relationship of tourists with them. Thus, this study represents the first empirical application of the factors that determine HL, and the differences they have with DL. Future studies could make use of the methodology and the conclusions that are developed in the present research.

The results of chapter three contribute significantly to destination marketing literature, especially to literature on information sources, and with special emphasis on digital media, and its influence on the destination loyalty, given the lack of research in this context.

The fourth study contributes to existing literature on the debate on cultural convergence-divergence, where little attention has been paid to the paradoxical relation of convergence-divergence regarding “culture-content-media”. Thus, this last chapter contributes as much to literature on information sources, especially social media, as to literature on motivations, in both cases with respect to the national culture of the tourists.

Practical Application of the Dissertation

If we consider island tourism as a specific category of tourism, it is clear that island destinations are part of a large network connected through demand. Island managers should pay more attention to how tourists from the continent relate to these island destinations in order to achieve synergies in their marketing strategies.

The first chapter outlines the recommendation that the islands efficiently manage this co-competence to obtain competitive advantages. For example, islands can take into account their relationships with others to work on a coordinated presence at tourist fairs with islands that are part of the same network, and to decide how they should appear in tour operators' brochures, tourist guides or travel

guides, as well as other information sources consulted by tourists when deciding where to travel. In the same way, island destinations could carry out promotional strategies at the airports of other islands, including bilateral agreements, in order to attract tourists who, visit those destinations in the future, and to promote horizontal loyalty, in the awareness that many tourists have a tendency to search for something new.

With respect to the practical implications of the second chapter, understanding the differences in tourist loyalty implies designing marketing strategies aimed at each group, allowing the destinations to enhance their competitiveness. Thus, DMOs and company managers operating in the sector could maximise their available resources for tourism promotion and could also establish possible joint marketing strategies, using conventional media and new digital media.

The results found in chapter three provide a better understanding of how tourists vary their behaviour between the different sources and different destinations, and allow DMOs to develop better marketing strategies, both in conventional media and through social media.

The results found in chapter four can be used to design marketing strategies that attract tourists from the selected segments, according to the convergence-divergence identified. This could be achieved by emphasising presence in social media that are more intensely used by the selected segments; and generating “global” actions for the different specific channels, taking into account the differences in use according to the identified country blocks.

On the other hand, the results are of interest to destination marketing managers who benefit from a tool when designing the message to be communicated in each of the different blocks of countries, taking into account shared generic motivations. More specifically, by adapting the contents to each of the social media sites and to the communities identified by the country groupings.

Content of the Dissertation

Abstract of chapter one

The first study, as well as advancing the knowledge of island tourism, focuses on co-operation strategies through the management of brand architecture, and aims to provide island managers with answers regarding what destinations they should co-operate with, depending on the markets of origin and the relationship of these islands with the continental market. The study includes in its analysis some of the main tourist islands and archipelagos in the world (Cyprus, Malta, Balearic Islands, Canary Islands, Maldives, Caribbean, Azores, Madeira, Cape Verde, Greek islands).

Abstract of chapter two

The second chapter analyses horizontal loyalty (consumer's loyalty divided among several destinations), and explains the background factors that affect this behaviour (cognitive, affective and overall destination image; information sources; motivations; socio-demographic characteristics; previous behaviour; conative loyalty). The paper also identifies the differences between the explanatory factors of horizontal loyalty and one-single-destination loyalty. The study provides interesting recommendations for destinations with a view to better designing marketing activities and improving their co-opetition strategies and competitiveness.

Abstract of chapter three

The second study revealed that one of the most important aspects in determining both horizon-

tal loyalty and loyalty to one-single-destination is the use of social media on the Internet to find out about the travel destination. In this sense, chapter three further analyses the relationship between the tourist's behaviour when searching for information and the development of their loyalty to the destinations. Thus, this study proves a) the difference in behaviour when it comes to the use of several information sources, depending on tourists' profiles (nationality and socio-demographic characteristics); and b) although there are no significant differences regarding the use of the different social media in terms of destination-loyal and horizontal-loyal tourists, the impact of the different sources of information on loyalty (behavioural and attitudinal) is different.

Abstract of chapter four

Taking into account the differences found in this third chapter, regarding the use of social media depending on the different nationalities of tourists, the question arose as to whether DMOs in the design of their marketing strategies should appeal to the cultural convergence or divergence both in the media to be used and in the content to be communicated. Therefore, chapter four provides further knowledge on the paradoxical relationship of convergence-divergence between "culture-content-social media" through the analysis of nationalities, motivations, and information sources.