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A THEORETICAL BACKGROUND FOR PLACE BRANDING IN A TOURISM CONTEXT

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Abstract

This article aims to clarify the workings of place branding in a tourism context – destination branding. It has been recognized that the tourist buying decision has some unique aspects that differ from the more generic buyer behaviour. To have a clear idea about branding destinations one has to understand the specific characteristics of travel behaviour. Destination branding can be considered an exercise of identifying, organizing, and coordinating dimensions to deliver benefits relevant to the target markets. Destination brand dimensions are all of those attributes that are relevant and impact on the internal or external customers. A destination that has a clear position in terms of offer will potentially provide the means to satisfy in the most efficient way unsatisfied tourist's needs. It has been recognised that the tourists´ needs are the driving force that motivates travel behaviour. Nevertheless, it has to be acknowledged that the perceived destination's ability to satisfy a tourist's needs may change along with his or her motivations. It is then assumed that the evaluation of a destination brand will also be dependent on the motives to travel. This article adopts several complementary approaches to investigate the destination brand workings. Sociological, anthropological, economic, and marketing studies are included to set up a theoretical discourse for destination brands.

Keywords

Destination Branding, Tourism, Travel Behaviour, DMO, Place Branding.

Resumo

Este artigo tem como objetivo clarificar o funcionamento do place branding num contexto turístico - destination branding. Reconhece-se que a decisão de compra do turista tem alguns aspetos únicos que diferem do comportamento mais genérico do comprador. Para se ter uma ideia clara sobre o destination branding, é necessário compreender as caraterísticas específicas do comportamento de viagem. O branding de um destino pode ser considerado um exercício de identificação, organização e coordenação de dimensões para proporcionar benefícios relevantes para os mercados-alvo. As dimensões da marca do destino são todos os atributos que são relevantes e têm impacto nos clientes internos ou externos. Um destino que tem uma posição clara em termos de oferta fornecerá potencialmente os meios para satisfazer da forma mais eficiente as necessidades insatisfeitas dos turistas. Foi reconhecido que as necessidades dos turistas são a força motriz que motiva o comportamento de viagem. No entanto, há que reconhecer que a capacidade de um destino para satisfazer as necessidades de um turista pode mudar juntamente com as suas motivações. Assume-se então que a avaliação de uma marca de destino também dependerá dos motivos para viajar. Este artigo adota várias abordagens complementares para investigar o funcionamento do destination branding. São incluídos estudos sociológicos, antropológicos, económicos e de marketing para estabelecer um discurso teórico sobre as marcas de destino.

Palavras-chave

Destination Branding, Turismo, Comportamento do Turista, DMO, Place Branding.

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Introduction

Place branding is now part of the political agenda in most cities, regions and countries. It can be said that politicians in charge of a location are now sensitive to the issue of branding and are actively trying to apply the concept to their places (Dinnie, 2022; Kavaratzis & Florek, 2021). In fact, politicians are now expected to invest in and develop strategies to increase the attractiveness of their places (Dinnie, 2022; Govers, 2021; Hanna, Rowley & Keegan, 2020; Kavaratzis & Florek, 2021; Marauti & Florek, 2022). Furthermore, politicians in charge of countries, regions and cities tend to pay close attention to the tourism industry and are willing to invest in promoting their places (Braun, 2012; Dinnie, 2022; Pike et. al., 2019). Therefore, the relevance of having a place branding strategy is even more evident in the tourism industry since tourism is a highly competitive and global industry.

Over the years, tourism became an important industry for almost any country because it contributes to exports, generates taxes, and is relevant in the creation of new jobs. Before COVID-19, tourism used to be a reliable source of growth, creating millions of jobs and fuelling economies worldwide. Even now, UNWTO 2024 data reports a strong economic rebound in Tourism post-pandemic. The report shows near pre-pandemic tourism levels in 2023, with full recovery expected in 2024. According to the report, (1) international tourism receipts reached an estimated $1.4 trillion in 2023, nearing pre-pandemic levels (93% of 2019's $1.5 trillion); (2) total tourism exports, including passenger transport, reached $1.6 trillion in 2023, closing in on 2019's $1.7 trillion (almost 95%), and (3) tourism's direct contribution to global GDP (TDGDP) is estimated at $3.3 trillion in 2023, representing 3% of the global economy. This suggests a full recovery of TDGDP to pre-pandemic levels, fueled by both domestic and international travel.

Thus, in today's world of intense global competition, rising digitization, and unstable international dealings, brand credibility has become vital, especially for places (Alexander et al., 2020). Reitsamer and Brunner (2021) argue that place marketing managers should invest in building credible place brands since they affect visitors' intention to

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return to a tourist destination and increase positive word-of-mouth (WOM). In their 2021 study, Chan, et al., (2021) proposed a framework for branding a city within a tourism context that considers five key elements: pathways, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. The authors observed that this framework contributed to shaping a city's image, particularly for tourism purposes. In addition, developing a branding strategy that includes collaborations between businesses and governments enhance the place's image for tourists (Giannopoulos et al., 2021). Developing a brand strategy has become critical for creating a positive brand image and differentiating places from their competitors (Che-Ha et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2018; Milicevic et al., 2017; Sorsa & Frig, 2020).

To achieve the objective of creating a positive destination brand image, it is crucial to emphasize the involvement of various stakeholders and the importance of public diplomacy. Public diplomacy is crucial for destination branding and tourism, as it uses strategic communication to enhance a country's image and attract tourists, thereby boosting its soft power (Claro, Huguet & Serrano, 2023). Effective stakeholder collaboration is essential. For example, in the 1990s, conflicting messages from two UK government agencies—one promoting contemporary Britain and the other focusing on traditional aspects—risked confusing their audience and diluting the nation's brand (Nye, 2008).

Public diplomacy, destination branding, and tourism are deeply interconnected (Claro, Huguet & Serrano, 2023). By fostering positive narratives, public diplomacy can significantly enhance destination branding. Campaigns highlighting sustainability, cultural diversity, and hospitality make countries more appealing to tourists (Anholt, 2010). Japan's "Cool Japan" campaign, showcasing its culture, cuisine, and technology, is a successful example (Gartner, 2014). Similarly, Turkey's public diplomacy highlights its rich history and diverse landscapes to counter negative stereotypes and enhance its brand equity (Gartner, 2014). However, there are important considerations. Consistency is crucial; maintaining a positive image is essential as negative events or political instability can quickly damage a destination's brand (Avraham & Ketter, 2012). Additionally, cultural sensitivity is important. Public diplomacy efforts must be inclusive and culturally aware to avoid alienating potential tourists (Freire, Gertner & Gertner, 2022).

Nonetheless, it has been recognized that place branding is still not an established and totally understood concept (Kavaratzis & Florek, 2021; Mariutti & Florek, 2022; Ruiz-Real, et al., 2020). The lack of theoretical background that grounds the concept is often a cited reason for the current status (Hanna et al., 2020; Kavaratzis & Florek, 2021). It is recognized that there is still a paucity of research articles and cases that deal with the problem of Place Branding (Mariutti & Florek 2022).

This article has the objective of contributing theoretical bases of Place Branding in a tourism context. Throughout this article branding places for tourism will be given the name destination brands, as it is currently used by practitioners, such as, Baker (2012: 195):

Destination Brand: also referred to as "tourism brand," it is a brand founded on the location being an attractive place to visit.

Branding has mainly been researched in a product and service context. This implies that the findings and conclusions are strongly rooted in consumer behaviour studies. Nonetheless it can be argued that when researching the destination brand concept, a different approach should be taken. This conclusion is based on the assumption that travel behaviour has some particularities sometimes differing from the general consumer behaviour approach (Mansfeld, 1992; Mehmetoglu & Normann, 2013; Moutinho, 1987, Van Raaij & Francken, 1984).

Tourism, for example, has the objective of satisfying more emotional wants than utilitarian needs it is usually consumed for its emotional arousal (Beerli, & Martín, 2004; Caldwell & Freire, 2004; Hyde, 2000; Kim & Prideaux, 2005; Nikjoo & Ketabi, 2015). Furthermore, tourism has become a part of a lifestyle and is considered to be an important need (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Gnoth et al., 2000; Nikjoo & Ketabi, 2015). Moreover:

It is an investment with no tangible rate of return, and the purchase is often prepared and planned through savings made over a considerable period of time. That is, the vacation tourist will invest with no expectation of material and economic return on his or her purchase of an intangible satisfaction (Moutinho, 1987:3).

Decisions of when, where, and how, are normally taken by a group of people, with the family being the smallest group affecting tourist behaviour (Mansfeld, 1992). The final decision about consumption is not taken by one element but involves all elements of a group, which after a democratic and negotiated process they reach a final group decision (Van Raaij & Francken, 1984). It should be noted that even though these decisions take time and considerable cognitive effort, they are normally seen as pleasant activities (Munro & Richards, 2012). Another major aspect differentiating tourism and destination brands from other product or service brands is how receptive consumers are to receive information, publicity and other marketing material from various tourism organisations (Cocking, 2020; Howard-Brown, 1999). It has been recognized that prospective consumers want to, in fact, be in a dialogue with destinations (Munro & Richards, 2012).

Basically, when a consumer buys a tourism product, he or she will acquire a set of experiences that differ from a product. The overall experience incorporates (Moutinho, 1987):

- an anticipation phase (before the trip commences)

- the consumption phase (during the trip)

- the memory phase (after the trip has ended)

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Furthermore, a destination brand might have multiuse depending on the motivation of consumption (Kim & Prideaux, 2005) as opposed to product or service brands that are usually associated with a particular use (Engel et al., 1995). In fact, in a destination brand context, the same place might be consumed to satisfy different sets of needs, as opposed to products that normally are consumed to satisfy a particular bundle of needs. For example, an individual might decide to go to the Algarve, in Portugal, with some friends to play golf in June. But he or she might return to the Algarve in July, now accompanied with the family to enjoy sun and beach holidays. Hence it can be stated that in tourism, a consumer might have different natures and be categorised in different typologies depending on the motivation for travel.

Tourism, and consequently a destination brand, involves a highly complex offer, comprising not only tangible elements such as food, hotels, and general facilities but also intangible elements such as service delivery (Freire & Gertner, 2021; Hankinson, 2004a; Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007). Since tourism can be categorized as being mostly a service, the tourist is an active part of the production process, which means it has an active role in the overall experience (Lovelock et al., 2009; Zeithaml et al., 2009). Attitudes, moods and expectations are elements that will affect the overall experience; the overall tourist satisfaction will be dependent on their own perception (MacCannell, 1999; Kovacic et al., 2022). Additionally, as this service is consumed in a social environment, other people, such as local people (Freire, 2009) and other tourists will influence this overall experience (Freire, 2006; Holloway et al., 2011). Depending on the situation, other consumers will be relevant in proportion to a proper ambience (Kearns & Philo, 1993). It would be strange enjoying a meal in an empty restaurant or a drinking in an empty night-club. This means satisfaction with a tourism product, or a destination brand is often related to the presence of other people (Freire, 2006; Freire & Gertner, 2021).

Finally, the tourist's experience might be influenced by other external factors that are not controlled by the organisations that manage the destination brand, such as the climate or the service provided by other organizations (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007, Freire & Gertner, 2021).

All those particular characteristics inherent to the tourism product are indicative of the need to adapt the models of consumer behaviour and branding. Consumption of destination brands has different patterns from the consumption of manufactured products and/or services, which indicates that it is relevant to use the appropriate travel behaviour models to understand the working of a destination brand. It is relevant, therefore, not only to define tourism but also the underline motivation for tourism consumption.

Tourism Definition

Although tourism and marketing theories are foundational, insights from other academic fields are crucial for a comprehensive understanding of destination brands. Tourism, for instance, has been explored through various lenses such as anthropology (e.g., Graburn,

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1978; Leach, 1961), psychology (Iso-Ahola, 1982), and sociology (Urry, 1990), all contributing to a deeper grasp of the tourism phenomenon.

Graburn (1978) defines tourism as a unique form of play involving travel, offering an escape from daily routines (work and home), providing relaxation, and for some, a chance to temporarily disconnect from responsibilities like answering phones.

Leach (1961) described tourism as a ritual of passage. In modern society, those with sufficient income view life as alternating between work and holidays. People work for extended periods and occasionally take short breaks to travel. Leach argued that the perception of time occurs in cycles—from the mundane (work) to the extraordinary (leisure)—with annual vacations marking these transitions. A year without this cycle would feel incomplete. Leach also noted that time is perceived through recurring contrasts, with the year's progress marked by festivals. Each festival represents a temporary shift from the ordinary to the extraordinary and back again.

In this context, vacations in modern societies act as rituals of passage, with the contrast between work and vacation giving meaning to the passage of time. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines tourism as a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon involving the movement of people to places outside their usual environment for personal or professional reasons. However, this article adopts a narrower definition, excluding business travel, aligning with Swarbrooke and Horner (2007), who define tourism as short-term travel to places other than one's residence for pleasure.

These definitions imply that tourism involves movement, meaning staying home during holidays is not considered a proper vacation. Those who stay home may feel unproductive, while those who travel feel they are doing something worthwhile (Gnoth et al., 2000). These feelings are linked to travel motivations, which include both seeking and approaching behaviors (Gnoth, 1997).

Understanding tourists' motivations is essential, as they significantly influence tourism behavior (Hudson, 1999) and destination brand image (Baloglu & McClearly, 1999). A destination is only considered suitable if it meets the needs driven by consumers' motivations. Therefore, understanding these motivations is fundamental to building a successful destination brand (Andreu et al., 2006).

Travel Motivation

Motivation has been defined as 'a state of need, a condition that exerts a "push" on the individual toward certain types of action that are seen as likely to bring satisfaction.' (Moutinho, 1987:17) Moreover, using the conventional definition provided by psychologists, motive is 'an internal factor that arouses directs and integrates a person's behaviour.' (Murray 1964:71)

Deci (1975) argued that motives are cognitive representations of future psychological states. He argued that the internal factor that arouses could be linked to 'an awareness of potential satisfaction' in a future situation (Deci 1975:99). Basically 'motive is a driving force to reduce a state of tension, and it may stem from physiological or psychological needs.' (Moutinho, 1987:17) The motives which affect behaviour are influenced by the

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stimulus inputs. The stimulus inputs originate from the physical or social environment (Iso-Ahola, 1982). For instance, a sunny day (stimulus input from the physical environment) can provoke a memory of a good time in Ibiza. In the individual this stimulus creates an awareness of a potential activity that can satisfy certain needs and thereby triggers a sequence of motivated behaviour.

The need for tourism might arise from a mental state signalling physical and/or psychological exhaustion. Social needs such as recognition or inclusion might also be a stimulus that provokes action (Gnoth et al., 2000). These psychological needs can also be triggered by the simple curiosity of certain experiences (Krippendorf, 1987). Moreover, it can be argued that marketing activities, originating from different organisations, might also start a chain of events that will influence and trigger the need for holidays.

Tourist motivation has been researched and analysed through the concepts of push and pull factors (Crompton, 1979, Dann, 1977, 1981; Mansfeld, 1992; Nikjoo & Ketabi, 2015; Phau et al., 2013). The push factors are those socio-psychological motives that predispose individuals to travel. The push factors have normally been linked to the inter-personal consumer. On the other hand, the pull factors are those that attract individuals to a specific destination. The physical environment, the setting, the potential activities the people might engage in, and their conceptions or their perceptions of the place – the representational meaning of the destination - are dimensions that might contribute the destination's attraction (Pearce et al., 1996).

Crompton (1979), based on Dann's (1977) research, identified nine motives to travel, seven of them were classified as push and two as pull. The push factors were identified as: escape from a perceived mundane environment; exploration and evaluation of self; relaxation; prestige; regression; enhancement of kinship relations and facilitation of social interaction. The pull motives were novelty and education. This classification is similar with Mannell and Iso-Ahola's (1982) framework of motivations to travel. They argue that people are motivated to travel in order to escape from their environment and to obtain personal or interpersonal rewards. The personal rewards can be seen as self-determination, sense of competence, challenge, learning, exploration, and relaxation. The interpersonal rewards arise from social interaction. This indicates that there will be certain dimensions, within a destination brand, which will motivate consumption. An important aspect of a destination brand manager is the development of an understanding of what those dimensions are and how they satisfy the consumer's needs.

Nevertheless, when Krippendorf (1987) analysed the different tourism motivation theories he concluded that they were built following the paradigm that all individual's decisions were self-oriented. He disagreed with the perspective, depending on the individual's family lifecycle, and believed that decisions about whether to take holidays and where and when, were also influenced by the family. This point is supported by Moutinho (1987), who also argued that motivations cannot only be seen as being self-oriented. This leads to another point where the application of general branding theories developed for products and services have to be reviewed and adapted to the destination brand concept.

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Tourism Consumption a Group Decision

Family lifecycle is a concept, which classifies family units into different groups according to a set of variables, such as marital status, existence of children, age of the children, and work status. Wells and Gubar (1966) developed one of the first models that illustrates, describes and classifies the family lifecycle.

(1) bachelor stage;

(2) newly married couple with young children or no children;

(3) full nest I (youngest child under 6), full nest II (youngest child 6 or over), full nest III (older married couples with dependent children);

(4) empty nest I (no children at home, head in labour force), empty nest II (head retired);

(5) solitary survivor (in labour force or retired).

These different sets of family lifecycles have an impact on group needs, which will influence destination brand's role. In a family context, decisions about tourism products and consumption are normally made by all individual units that compose the family household. Family, for this article, represents a group of people, which means that the mechanics that work within this group can be generalised to other situations as long as the individual is travelling with a companion.

Buying a tourism product follows a complex process composed of several stages, where different kinds of decisions must be made. The nature of holiday decisions in a family context can be classified as syncratic, partially syncratic and autonomic context (Moutinho, 1987). Syncratic decisions can be described as the ones that are taken not individually, but jointly. Partially syncratic decisions are the ones that are taken partly independently and partly jointly. Finally, autonomic decisions are the ones that are taken independently or autonomously. This last type of decision is normally linked to the initial stage of the travel behaviour sequence, i.e., collecting information. The syncratic and partially syncratic stages are tied to decisions such as where, when and how to travel. This means that it is not only an individual inner motive that influences and triggers the need to travel, but the family exerts a potential role on each individual's travel behaviour (Moutinho, 1987).
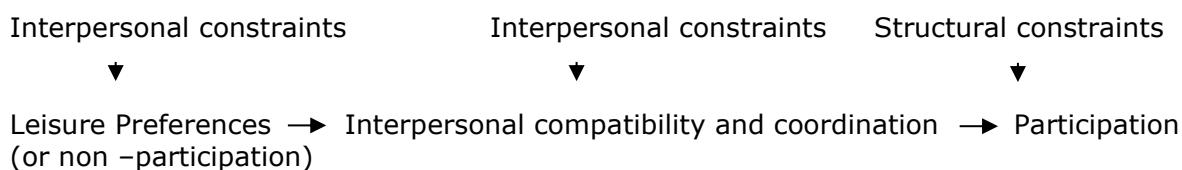
The family's lifecycle can be a powerful indicator of the individual's travel behaviour. Essentially, travel behaviour will be influenced by the individual's position in the family and the characteristics of the family – the family lifecycle. For example, it is expected that the presence of children in the household will be a main factor influencing travel behaviour. The family might not only influence the final decision of where to travel, but it also might have an impact in all the different stages of travel behaviour – recognition of a need, information gathering, evaluation of alternatives, choice and post-purchase evaluation. In this context family lifecycle will be a powerful tool to segment the market (Smith, 1997). Nevertheless, it has to be acknowledged that inner motivations do have an important role in the tourist decisions. Even though decisions might be taken in a

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syncratic context, self-motivations will have a role and an impact on the negotiation process. This is based on the concept that decisions about travel arrangements may follow different strategies: negotiation, bargaining, and compromising; persuasion by one member; coalition formation of one parent with children; politicking; or amicable discussion (Van Raaij & Francken, 1984).

However, it has been recognised that family and inner motivations are not the only relevant variables influencing travel behaviour. Other variables are also relevant and impact decisions about travelling. The influence of these variables can be seen under a constraint perspective. Crawford, Jackson and Godbey (1991) argue that consuming a tourism product is the outcome of a successfully negotiated hierarchical series of constraints. Two sets of constraints affect participation on travel (see figure 1).

Figure 1 - *Constraints to Travel*

Interpersonal constraints   Interpersonal constraints   Structural constraints
          ▼   ▼   ▼
Leisure Preferences ⟶ Interpersonal compatibility and coordination ⟶ Participation
(or non –participation)

Note: figure adapted from "A Hierarchical Model of Leisure Constraints" by D. Crawford, E. Jackson and G. Godbey, 1991, *Leisure Sciences,* Vol.13, No. 4, pp. 309-320.

Interpersonal constraints constitute the first set. Interpersonal constraints involve psychological states, which interact directly within the leisure preference rather than between preferences. Those psychological states, for example, can include stress, depression, anxiety or confidence, and might be used to evaluate the appropriateness of the leisure activities. For example, an individual that is learning how to play golf might not be confident about going to a place, which is associated with highly skilled players, such as the Old Course at St. Andrews. This individual might be anxious about being perceived as a bad player and might prefer to go to a destination where there is no such association.

On a second level, interpersonal constraints will occur as a result of the group's conflicting preferences. For example, a husband who desires to go to Scotland to play golf might be prevented from doing that because his wife and children do not like that activity. Since travel decisions are syncratic it is probable that the husband will have to give up his golf holiday plans and decide on another destination with an emphasis on other activities that better suit the group's needs. Individual self-interest and motivations interact with all the major and relevant players in the decision process. Not only is there an interaction between the different actors, but also an evaluation in terms of structural constraints.

Finally, the last constraint is a structural one. At this level economic barriers, availability of time, access and opportunity, can be seen as examples of factors that might restrict individual participation in a particular activity. In this sense, aspects like income,

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occupation, age, education, savings and possessions can be seen as potential structural constraints. An individual might want to go to the Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) Carnival, but might be constrained by lack of financial resources or perhaps language would be a major barrier. In this sense, family, age, income, education, occupation, savings and possessions are also factors that influence tourist decisions and, therefore, influence destination brand evaluation.

The Vacation Sequence Model

Tourist travel decisions are influenced by a set of variables and follow a sequence of stages. Van Raaij and Francken (1984) designed one of the most relevant models (figure 2) that attempts to describe the tourist decision process.

Figure 2 - *Factors Determining the Vacation Sequence (source: Van Raaij and Francken, 1984)*
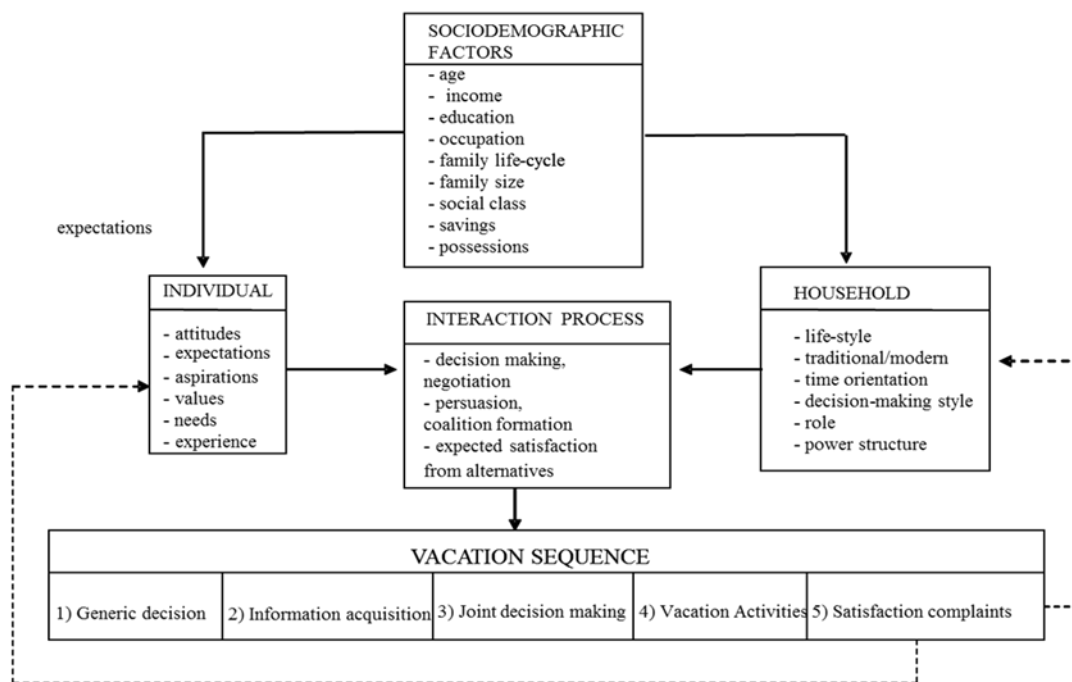
Note. figure adapted from "Vacation Decision, Activities, and Satisfaction" by W. Van Raaij and D. Francken, 1984, *Annals of Tourism Research,* Vol. 11, No.1, pp. 101-112.

Van Raaij and Franken based their model on the push and pull factors theory. The tourist is motivated by push factors (e.g., need to relax from daily life, need to break from routine) to go on a holiday. The realisation of the need for holidays will start a chain of actions, which involves funnelling through different stages until he or she makes a final decision. In the end the individual will negotiate and choose a destination that will satisfy his or her needs. Nevertheless, as it can be seen from the model, there are several different factors that impact an individual's decision. As already referred to, both individual and family elements will influence decisions. Moreover socio-demographic

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factors, such as age, income, occupation, savings and possessions will also impact the travel decision. Those factors can also be regarded as constraint factors.

Generic Decision

The first decision is concerned with whether to go on holidays or stay at home. The decision about going on holidays might be a routine one. As explained above, taking holidays can be seen as a ritualistic process; a particular period of the year might represent a signal to go on holidays (Leach, 1961). In this sense the motivation to take holidays might be strongly linked to seasonable factors, such as the children's holidays. The major factors in this stage will be structural ones. This phase is characterised as evolving as a joint decision between husband and wife (and sometimes the children). The decision may involve social comparison with others outside of the family. As already stated, people who do not travel are pitied and perceived as having some kind of personal disadvantage. In this context, participating in a specific type of holiday is seen as a necessary activity to maintain a certain status. It cannot be forgotten that both preparation for and the experience from holidays are relevant conversational topics with friends and acquaintances (Thomas, 1964). Hence, it is reasonable to assume that the place a person decides to travel has a social importance rather than just a functional aspect of the destination. In this case it is acknowledged that, like brands, destinations will have a representational dimension and are used as a self-expressive tool (Caldwell & Freire, 2004).

Information Acquisition

The process of information gathering can be divided into two distinct phases. First, the individual collects information about a different set of destinations to ascertain which target destinations are within the constraint limits (for example, in terms of time and disposable income). Then, after a first pre-selection, consumers will assemble information to evaluate a set of alternatives on a place-utility rather than on a constraint basis. It is recognised the information used to evaluate different options emanates from two types of sources, formal (the commercial environment) and informal (the social environment) (Munro & Richards, 2011). The formal information can be characterised as originating from traditional offline sources such as travel agents, travel-guides, books, TV, specialised magazines (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). **The press, particularly travel sections of newspapers, plays a significant role in shaping destination image (Pasquinelli & Trunfio, 2020),** where Freire and Curvelo (2021) advocate for targeted press releases of travel stories tailored to specific journalists' interests**.** In addition, **Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) and PR agencies must consider a broader information landscape.** Travel blogs, websites, and social media platforms all contribute to a destination's image (Cocking, 2020; Oliveira and Panyik, 2015; Pirolli, 2019;). The informal or organic information source can be characterised as recommendations and impressions from friends, family, acquaintances or other customers, who have some kind of knowledge or experience with the chosen destination. This last source of informal information increased dramatically with the Web 2.0 or social

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media, which is credited as contributing to an "unprecedented customer empowerment" (Constantinides & Fountain; 2008:231). Social media transformed how DMOs manage their brands. The informal source of information is now at the centre of the DMOs' activities (Florek, 2011; Oliveira and Panyik, 2015; Pasquinelli & Trunfio, 2020).

In fact, it can be argued that social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, X, and TikTok have revolutionized destination branding. These platforms allow destinations to showcase their unique attractions and experiences through visually appealing content, reaching a global audience instantly. User-generated content (UGC) plays a significant role, as travelers share their experiences, effectively becoming brand ambassadors. This organic content often resonates more with potential visitors than traditional advertising (Tran & Rudolf, 2022). Social media also enables real-time engagement with travelers. Destinations can interact with users by responding to comments, sharing user posts, and creating interactive campaigns. This engagement helps build a community around the destination, fostering loyalty and encouraging repeat visits (Reissenweber & Kristiansen, 2019). In addition, online review platforms like TripAdvisor, Google Reviews, and Yelp have become critical in shaping travelers' perceptions and decisions. Positive reviews can significantly enhance a destination's image, while negative reviews can deter potential visitors. These reviews provide authentic feedback from fellow travelers, which many people trust more than promotional content (Qi, M., Abdullah, Z., & Rahman, S. N., 2024). Thus, digital marketing strategies, including search engine optimization (SEO), content marketing, and influencer partnerships, have become integral to destination branding. SEO ensures that a destination appears prominently in search results, making it more accessible to potential visitors. Content marketing, through blogs, videos, and social media posts, provides valuable information and inspiration to travelers (Wan &, Li, 2024), In sum, the digital age has also brought advanced analytics tools that provide insights into traveler behavior and preferences. Destinations can analyze data from social media interactions, website visits, and online bookings to understand what attracts visitors and tailor their marketing strategies accordingly. This data-driven approach allows for more targeted and effective branding efforts (Tran & Rudolf, 2022).

Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that the tourist might have some kind of experience with the chosen destination. In this case it is expected that information will come from internal sources rather than external ones (Moutinho, 1987). The internal sources are stored in the memory and are used whenever they are necessary. As previously stated above, decisions on travelling are mostly syncratic, typically involving the husband, wife and children. However, the search information phase tends to be autonomous, i.e., both parties seek information autonomously. The information gathered might then be used in different ways (Moutinho, 1987):

- It may be used to create desire and needs in people by creating expectations;

- It may be used to persuade a partner to take a particular holiday;

- It may be used as background information in order to help to evaluate each alternative;

- It may be used to justify and legitimise the vacation decisions.

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Therefore, in a destination brand management context it is important to know which dimensions consumers will use to evaluate different alternatives. The information transmitted to the target market should take into consideration the relevance of each dimension.

Joint Decision Making - Risk Assessment and Types of Risks

After collecting travel information, the individuals will assess which destinations are viable. They will discard the alternatives that have a low utility score and do not fit in the current constraints and will eliminate others that present a higher perceived risk (Montgomery, 1983). Perceived risk can have different natures. According to Cox (1967) perceived risk is a function of uncertainty and possible consequences of consumption. This may include: (1) uncertainty inherent in the product; (2) uncertainty in place and mode of purchase; (3) degree of financial and psycho-social consequences; and (4) the subjective uncertainty experienced by the tourist.

The degree of risk varies with the cost of holidays and the expectations one has in terms of satisfying needs (Moutinho, 1987). Roselius (1971) within the product holidays context, defined risk in terms of different losses- physical loss, loss of time, ego loss, or financial loss. Moutinho (1987:26) developed Roselius categorisation and divided types of risks in five groups:

(1) Functional risk - the risk that the product will not perform as expected

(2) Physical risk - the risk that the tourist product will be harmed

(3) Financial risk - the risk that the product will not be worth its cost, either in time or money

(4) Social risk - the risk that a poor product choice may result in embarrassment before others

(5) Psychological risk - the risk that a poor product choice will harm the consumer's ego

There is a general agreement that travel information is used to minimise risk (Mansfeld, 1992). Likewise, there is also a general agreement that the main role of a brand is to minimise risks (Keller, 2023). In this sense, destinations that are perceived as having lower risks are more likely not to be discarded and to be considered as valid alternatives. Therefore, and drawing a parallelism with product brands, destination brands will be used to infer risk associated with consumption. In the tourism industry context, consumers will choose a destination that with a minimum risk satisfies needs. For example, if the main drive to travel is related to the enjoyment of beach activities, then the destination brand in the consideration set will be the ones associated with sun and beach. Those destinations will typically have a small risk associated with, for example, weather conditions, which implies that consumers will use the climate as a dimension to evaluate the destination. To know how to manage perceptions of risk, it will be relevant to understand what those dimensions are and how they work, their dynamics, interactions and impact on image.

Vacation Activities

Tourist destinations thrive on offering a variety of activities, or "things-to-do," that cater to visitors' desires for new experiences (Kim, 2014). Research underscores this importance, with studies exploring the role and nature of these activities (Gertner & Freire, 2019; Kim & Richarson, 2003). As discussed before, travel motivation is another cornerstone of travel and tourism research. Researchers aim to understand the "why" behind travel, identifying tourists' desires and needs (Hsu & Li, 2017; Wong et al., 2018). Studies like Van Raaij & Francken's (2011) exemplify this focus, highlighting the strong link between entertainment needs and travel decisions (Va Vuuren & Slabbertt, 2011; Getz & Mc Connell, 2011; Gowreesunkar, 2014). Travel motivation is normally linked and classified according to either avoidance (escape) or approach behaviour (seeking). These two types of behaviour can be described as escaping from routine situations or searching for something new (Gnoth, 1997). It means that individuals perceive tourism as a product that can satisfy their needs by either breaking with the routine environment (leaving the everyday environment behind) and/or by providing new experiences (desire to obtain psychological rewards) (Iso-Ahola, 1982). Although behaviour can be broken in two parts, it cannot be said that one is independent from the other. Both have an important and relevant influence on the individual (Gnoth, 1997).

In general individuals perceive potential satisfaction from a tourism activity if the experience satisfies both sets of needs. Hence, it can be argued that for a destination brand to be considered a viable option for holidays, it must be able to provide attributes that will guarantee satisfaction on both sets of needs (Phau & Quintal, 2013). Although both sets may have different weights, they will always be present. An individual might have an element more of avoidance than approach, but it does not mean that the approach element is not there (Gnoth, et al., 2000).

For example, going to a hotel in the tourist's own city is unlikely to be considered as a valid alternative for vacationing. Usually this is not considered as a true holiday alternative because there is a set of needs that are not satisfied. Although going on holidays and staying in a hotel in his or her own city would allow him or her to avoid routine, since he or she does not have to work. The element of seeking is not present, which means that this holiday alternative would not satisfy his or her needs (Hoogendoorn & Hammett, 2020)

Activities are therefore the answer to achieve those two sets of behaviour. They can either provide new thrills satisfying the need that is triggered by the seek motivation or they can satisfy the need of breaking the routine by giving consumers different activities to do. Meyer (1984) in a review of research on vacation activities concluded that there are essentially seven types of vacations on the basis of their activities:

- Adventure: innovative, discovery type, low emphasis on comfort

- Experience: romantic ambience, new experience, but no adventure

- Conformity: activity as usual, not too different from home

- Education: interest in culture, architecture, history, language of region

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- Health: rest and comfort away from hectic daily life

- Social contact: group activities, contacts with other people

- Status: prestige, social contacts with persons of same or higher social classes

It is then expected consumers use the availability of certain activities to evaluate and differentiate destination brands. In that case activities are a relevant destination brand dimension.

Satisfaction Complaints

Satisfaction or dissatisfaction includes feelings, positive or negative, that must be considered in relation to the individual's cognitive dissonance mechanism. These feelings emerge from the perception that the vacation does or does not meet the individual's expectations. The individual's evaluation of the vacation will contrast their reality and their perceptions. Were the holidays better or worse than he or she expected? These feelings then result in the individual's perception of a fair vs. unfair purchase. The final level of satisfaction with the consumption will be measured by subtracting expectations from the benefits acquired while on holidays.

Figure 3 - *Satisfaction with holidays*

Pre-purchase ⟶ Purchase ⟶ Post-Purchase

Expectations ⟶ Benefits ⟶ Satisfaction (Expectations –Benefits)
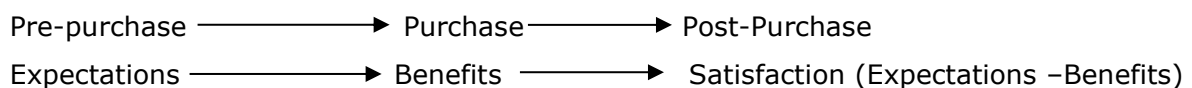
Note. Figure adapted from "Consumer behaviour in tourism" by L. Moutinho, 1987, *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 21, No. 10, pp. 5-44

The 'Vacation Sequence' model (Van Raaij & Francken, 1984) introduced several stages that are involved in the holiday decision process: from the first moment when the individual decides to go on holidays to the final stage characterised as a reflection about the satisfaction and the rewards achieved by the holiday. However, this model does not clarify the destination selection process.

Conversely, models such as the one from Crompton (1992) attempt to clarify and explain in detail the mechanisms behind destination brand choice. That model is based on the notion of the choice sets introduced by Nicosia (1966), Howard and Sheth (1969), Narayana and Markin (1975), Spiggle and Sewall (1987) for fast moving consumer goods, and Woodside and Lysonki (1989) and Um and Crompton (1990) for tourism destinations.

Destination Brand Selection Process – the Dimensions Discourse

The choice-set models, such as the one from Woodside and Lysonki (1989) or Crompton (1992) imply that this type of purchase involves a certain degree of risk. There is high involvement, and it is not a routine task. It is reasonable to assume that decisions about summer holidays, for example are considered high involvement because of the risks associated with its' consumption and its' potential losses. Hence it can be argued that a tourist when selecting a destination brand will normally go through different stages and will evaluate different "parts" of a destination (Claxton, 1989; Mansfeld, 1992; Moutinho, 1987; Timmermans, 1992). A "part" of a destination can be defined as its' inherent attributes, built in the consumer's mind. In this article a "part" or the inherent attributes of a destination brand is a dimension. Each dimension will be composed by variables and will have a certain utility value that can be either positive or negative (Claxton, 1989). The set of dimensions of each destination will be grouped and constructed in the tourist's mind. It will be the evaluation of those different dimensions that will allow tourists to rate and differentiate destination brands.

Mansfeld (1992) argued that the choice between each alternative could be based on a set of decision rules – non-compensatory and compensatory. Non-compensatory rules are based on the idea that in a situation where a decision has to be made and there is no trade-off between alternatives, the tourist does not make a balanced evaluation of alternatives based on each attribute. Nevertheless, Mansfeld recognised that most decisions about destination choices are based on compensatory rules. Compensatory rules are based on the idea that the tourist can compensate dimensions; there will be trade-offs between different alternatives. It means that a low score on one or more dimensions can be compensated by positive high score in other dimensions, which means that there are trade-offs, and the evaluation of each alternative is based on the overall result of the dimensions level (Claxton, 1989). Hence the destination selected is the one that gets a higher evaluation in the overall dimensions. It is therefore important to realise and understand how consumers make their decisions and select and group destinations in different sets.

Woodside and Lysonki model considers that destinations might be divided and grouped in distinct sets.

- Consideration set – are the ones that an individual considers as viable alternatives to travel.

- Inert set – brands that an individual does not have either a positive or negative evaluation. The individual is aware of the brand, but it does not have any information in order to evaluate it.

- Unavailable Aware set – are those destinations that an individual is not aware off.

- Inept set – are those brands that a consumer rejects from his or her purchase intention. This can be the result of unpleasant experience or negative information from friends or other sources.

However, Crompton (1992) argues that the sets should not only be divided into four as proposed by Woodside and Lysonki (1989). He assumed that the selection of a destination follows a funnelling process consisting of three central core stages, which are influenced by distinct forces – both internal and external. The three stages were defined as: development of an initial set of alternatives, distinguishing which are viable destination alternatives, and selecting which are not considered viable from a small late consideration set (figure 4)

Figure 4 - *Choice Set Model*
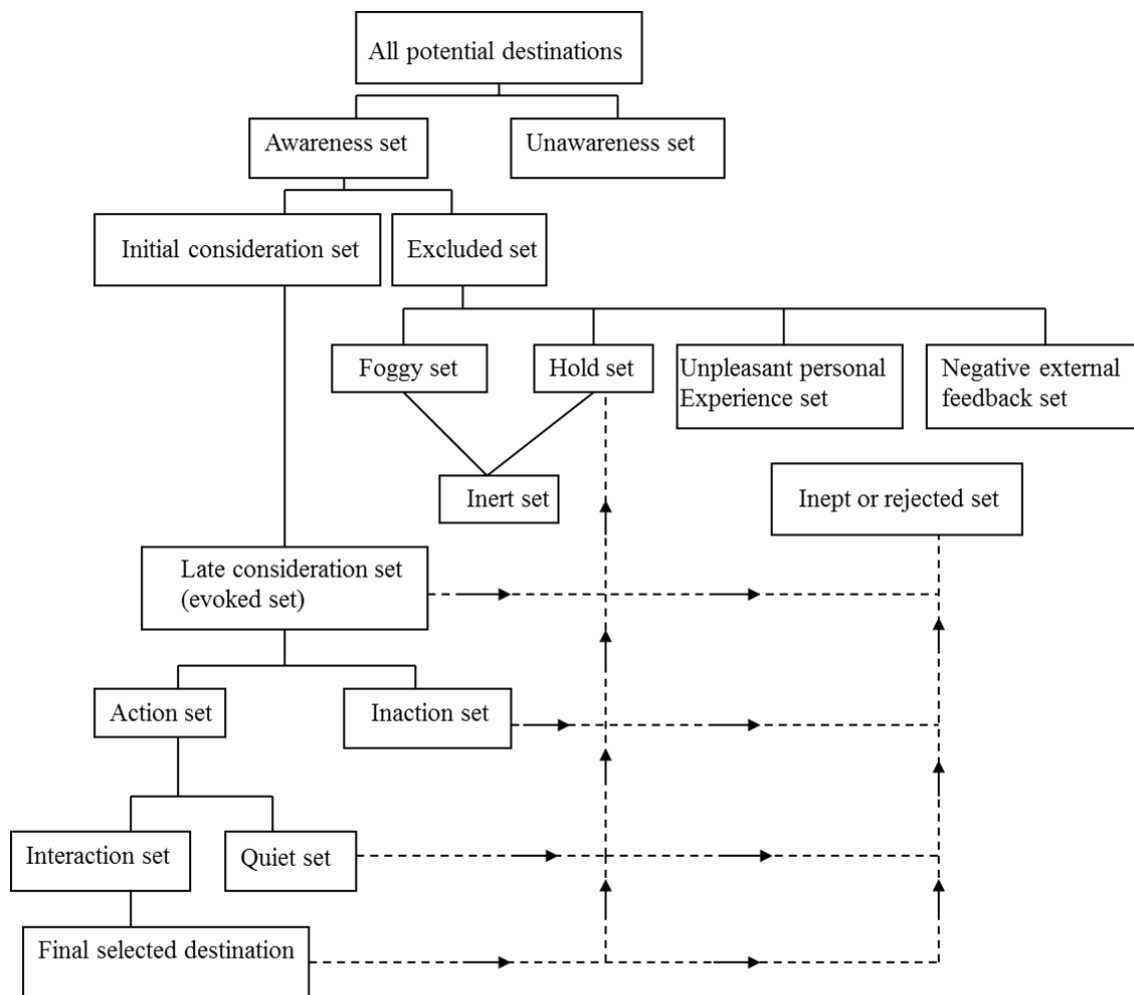
Note. Figure adapted from "Structure of Vacation Destination Choice Sets" by J. Crompton, 1992, *Annals of Tourism Research,* Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 420–434.

The set structure is influenced and determined by motivations and needs that arise internally from the individual – the internal forces (Crompton, 1992). Nevertheless,

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experience or knowledge acquired through friends, advertisement and other sources of information will also influence the construction of the choice sets.

The first stage of the model suggests that destinations should be categorised as belonging to awareness or unawareness sets. The awareness set is composed by all destinations that an individual knows about. The unawareness set is composed by those that an individual never heard about and for this reason they are excluded from the possibility of being selected as a holiday destination. The destinations that an individual is aware of but within a given time period and for different reasons are not considered as viable options, constitute the excluded set. After this first stage, initial decisions are made in terms of limiting choices; the individual restricts his or her options forming a new set. This set is called 'late consideration set' or 'evoked set' and is defined as the one that is composed of destinations that a tourist is considering as a potentially viable alternative for consumption. The main difference between the initial and the late consideration set is that a period of time elapses between them allowing the individual to reduce the list of alternatives. The excluded set can then be sub-divided into different sets. Those different sets, which were developed and purposed initially by Brisoux and Laroch (1980) and then by Church, Laroche and Rosenblatt (1985), are a refinement of Narayana and Markin, (1975) work as:

- Inert set

- Foggy set: destinations that cause individual indifference. Although aware of the place, they do not have enough information to form a positive or negative image;

- Hold set: destinations that an individual might consider positively, negatively or remain neutral feeling, but because they are viewed in a certain context they are not perceived as viable alternatives. They have a positive attitude towards the destination but it can be perceived as not optimum for satisfying specific needs or situational constraints make it impossible to choose (e.g. price is too high, or it is perceived as too far);

- Inept or rejected set

- Unpleasant Personal Experience set: destinations where the traveller had a negative experience that affected his or her holidays will be removed from a potential future visit;

- Negative External Feedback set: those are the destinations from which the tourist was advised to avoid.

In the third stage the individual will select a destination from the late consideration set. Even at this stage it is possible to distinguish two different sets – the action set and inaction set. Furthermore, the destinations can also fall into the interaction or quiet sets. Destinations that fall into the inaction set are those where no further information is sought.

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The action set is composed of all destinations of which the individual took active steps to acquire more information. This action involves investment in time and cognitive effort and the bigger these commitments, the higher the probability of choosing a destination from this group. The interaction set is composed of those destinations which the potential tourist allows certain contacts, and which expose personal selling. The probability of these destinations to be chosen is high since, at this stage, communication barriers are lifted, and the destination marketer can communicate directly with the individual using more persuasive tools. The quiet set is composed of destinations where more information was sought, but subsequently there was no personal interaction with a brand's representative. The quiet and inaction sets are very similar: they both are regarded positively but neither is chosen. Of course, if certain conditions change, and the choice sets are reviewed, the destinations at the interaction and quiet set might be transferred to the interaction set and be then chosen for consumption.

The choice-set model incorporates two sets of variables that are considered relevant for the destination selection process - the marketing variables and personal variables. These models are relevant because it gives support to the destination brand concept in the sense that recognises that there are both manageable and non-manageable variables or dimensions that influence consumers' decisions.

Conclusion

From the models presented, it can be concluded that marketing activities developed by Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) significantly influence tourists' consumption decisions. First, destination brand managers must ensure and maintain a certain level of awareness; consumers need to know and remember that the place exists. Secondly, constructing positive feelings towards the brand is crucial for the destination to be chosen as a holiday spot. Positive associations develop when the destination is perceived as a viable option to satisfy certain needs.

A destination is defined by a line of interdependent dimensions that need to be managed and coordinated due to their impact on the overall image. Destination branding is relevant as it optimizes and coordinates the supply function with the demand from inhabitants, companies, and tourists. Thus, the destination brand manager plays a key role in developing strategies that align with consumers' needs.

Additionally, the destination must develop tools to minimize the risk of negative consumer experiences. This is vital because consumers use past experiences to evaluate future alternatives and rely on opinions from friends, relatives, and social media. Negative experiences can impact not only the tourist directly but also potential consumers through word-of-mouth. Avoiding negative experiences means meeting consumers' overall expectations and satisfying their needs. To ensure positive experiences, destination brand managers must understand which dimensions to manage and how.

It is important to note that dimension evaluation is dynamic and depends on individual situations. Individuals are influenced by various needs, such as travel companions and other constraints. A positive dimension in one situation can become negative in another.

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For example, a destination with vibrant nightlife might appeal to someone traveling with friends but may not be relevant or even negative for someone seeking a romantic getaway. In destination brand management, this implies that a particular dimension can have a dual nature, impacting the brand image positively or negatively based on the consumer's travel motivation. Therefore, identifying individual travel motivations is crucial for DMOs to understand the relevance of each dimension that composes a destination brand.

DMO managers can effectively manage their offerings if the destination's value proposition is clear to all stakeholders. Destination brands, like other brands, should have a well-defined value proposition composed of functional, emotional, and self-expressive benefits. These benefits should consider tourist motivations at a given time. Consumers will choose a destination that best satisfies their needs and those of their companions. Hence, the brand manager must develop a positioning statement with a clear marketing strategy, including market segmentation and a communication plan for both internal and external audiences.

Recommendations for Destination Marketers and Policymakers:

1.   Enhance Digital Presence: Utilize AI and big data to personalize marketing efforts and predict tourist behavior. Implement advanced analytics to understand trends and preferences.

2.   Focus on Sustainability: Promote eco-friendly practices and sustainable tourism to attract environmentally conscious travelers. Highlight green initiatives and sustainable accommodations.

3.   Crisis Management Plans: Develop robust strategies to handle negative experiences and crises. Ensure quick and effective communication to manage public perception.

4.   Leverage Social Media: Encourage user-generated content and leverage influencers to create authentic and engaging content. Monitor social media for feedback and trends.

5.   Collaborate with Local Stakeholders: Work closely with local businesses, residents, and government bodies to create a cohesive and attractive destination brand.

6.   Develop a sound model of governance that involves the central government.

Future Trends in Destination Branding:

1.   Sustainability: Increasing focus on sustainable tourism practices will shape destination branding. Destinations that prioritize environmental conservation will gain a competitive edge.

2.   Technology Integration: The use of AI, big data, and virtual reality will revolutionize how destinations market themselves and interact with potential tourists.

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3.   Personalization: Tailored experiences based on individual preferences and behaviors will become more prevalent, enhancing tourist satisfaction and loyalty.

Practical Implications for Place Branding Managers:

1.   Dynamic Strategy Development: Continuously adapt marketing strategies based on real-time data and changing consumer preferences.

2.   Holistic Experience Management: Ensure that all aspects of the tourist experience, from pre-arrival to post-departure, are managed to meet and exceed expectations.

3.   Stakeholder Engagement: Foster strong relationships with all stakeholders to ensure a unified and compelling brand message.

In conclusion, destination branding involves identifying, organizing, and coordinating dimensions or marketing variables to deliver benefits relevant to the target audience. By implementing these recommendations and staying attuned to future trends, destination marketers can effectively enhance their brand's appeal and ensure long-term success.

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