Editorial

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Dynamics of brand image and loyalty in tourism marketing

There exist strong relationships among tourism marketing-mix consisting of channel, customer driven price, brand promotion, perceived quality and brand image leading to brand loyalty. Brand image constitutes tangible and intangible elements. The former elements are associated with colour, size, calligraphy, punch line and reputation of the company, while intangibility of brands is manifested in reference to quality, referrals and brand relevance (Kim and Hyun, 2011). Successful leisure and tourism brands manifest adherence, popularity, ability to maintain price and opens multiple routes to market. The tourism brands are built over the experiential marketing outcomes. Consumers experience a tourism brand through variety of positive emotions emerging as aura and arousal that guide the perceived values to get satisfaction. Hence, it is evident that positive emotions play significant role in architecting tourism brands (Kwortnik and Ross, 2007). In this issue of the journal, Stratigea and Hatzichristos discuss the experiential marketing in the context of tourist marketing and its power to promote peripheral regions as tourist destinations. Tha authors explain WEB-GIS and virtual reality applications as tools enabling an immersive tourist marketing paradigm, based on their potential to provide experiential information on local tourist assets.

Many studies contributed over the past on destination image in tourism. Image appears as a component of destination brand associations that helps in developing cognitive, affective and consumer behaviour. Sustainable tourism destination images are built through co-creation and stakeholder viewpoints from having modelled the branding process and mapping the destination-branding activities in the local context (Saraniemi, 2011). In the second paper of this issue, Bordelon and Dimanche explore what images of

New Orleans visitors expect to see and how visitors use the media to form perceptions about New Orleans. Specific to this study, content analysis provides a technique to determine the dominant themes and images of New Orleans that are projected to tourists through selected unofficial visual media from motion pictures. Though this paper is based on a destination case study, it provides a strong and empirically grounded framework for identifying, in-depth, several key destination branding processes and activities in great detail.

The relationship between quality performance and business performance also drive the brand image and loyalty. The performance of tourism firms should strive on improving service quality and related measures of quality performance by developing trust and commitment, adapting to each other's needs and improving communication and co-operation. Eusébio and Carneiro analyses in the third paper of this issue, the impact of tourism on several dimensions of tourists' quality of life in reference to physical health, psychological features, social relationships and environment. The authors argue that travel motivations, the travel group, type of destinations and activities influence the factors on tourism impacts on quality of life. Quality improvement in tourism services is used as a collective expression for quality assurance, quality management and quality control and service operations refer to private as well as to public service operations and to services in manufacturing companies. Concepts and models in leisure and tourism organisational theories, marketing, and related fields have been contributed to a great extent based on empirical research (Edvardsson, 1998). Adding value to the existing literature, in the fourth paper of this issue, Lo et al. argue that tourists' satisfaction and service quality has each been the subject of extensive, but separate, research although a great deal of interest on tourists' satisfaction has been conducted in tourism setting. The authors present research to assess the service quality gap by measuring tourists' perceived and actual service performance and to identify the service quality dimensions on tourists' satisfaction in the context of rural destinations.

Value of relationship with the customer reveals significant quality and behavioural outcomes in the sales activities. Value displays a stronger impact on satisfaction than on commitment and trust, and also directly impacts a customer's intention to expand business with the firm. Perceived strength of the relationship with the customers may be measured by salespeople in reference to technical ability, experience, pricing requirements, speed of response, frequency of customer contact, degree of cooperation, trust, length of relationship, friendship and management distance barriers. The effect of services performance on relationship quality, in situations characterised by high relative dependence of the buyers on the dealers, is governed by the efficiency in delivery of services which develop high customer satisfaction. The benefits of customer relationships have been recently addressed and include increasing efficiency and effectiveness in maintaining current customers rather than prospecting new customers, and improved competitive advantage (Rajagopal, 2011). In reference to the recent global competition, the tourism sector has witnessed a transition from traditional brick and mortar channels to virtual channels of distribution through the websites that provide travel information have an increasing impact on the travel related decision-making. The acceptance of these websites is increasing because of the content relevancy, easy accessibility, ease of operations, flexibility and variety of travel packages they offer (Khare et al., 2011). In the last paper of this issue, Gera and Singhvi discuss that examines the consumer consequences these users' perceived service quality of online travel companies and its relationship with their level of satisfaction, value perceptions and behavioural intention.

Empirical findings indicated that online travel companies users viewed two dimensions of e-service quality factors as important in reference to customer service quality and website quality and they were generally satisfied with travel websites.

We hope that the anthology of five research papers included in this issue would contribute to the existing literature on leisure and tourism marketing, and scope for future research on the subject. This managerial implications suggested in the above studies would drive thoughtful insights in improving the performance of customer centric measures in leisure and tourism firms around the global destinations. The papers published in this issue demonstrate that leisure and tourism research has diversified scholarship.

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