Country Image, Tourist Satisfaction, and Future Visit and Product Purchase Intentions: An Integrative Model

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Introduction

Country image is a matter of strong and current interest, especially in an era when not only attracting tourists but promoting product exports, ,and satisfying developmental objectives are all subject to intense and growing domestic and international competition. Researchers have "risen to the occasion" and made significant contributions to more broadly understand the role of country image across sectors.

This study aims to advance existing knowledge by developing and testing a model that integrates tourism, product and general country images of country, in order to identify the antecedents and effects of tourist satisfaction in both the tourism and non-tourism product domains.

The study explores four key relationships: 1) The influence of a country's overall image on destination and product beliefs, and thence on post-visit intentions toward tourism and products; 2) the effect of product familiarity and beliefs on destination beliefs; 3) the influence of country, destination, and product beliefs on tourist satisfaction; and 4) the relationship between tourist satisfaction and post-visit intentions in both the tourism and non-tourism product spheres.

Literature Review

Though each of the Tourism Destination Image (TDI) and Product Country Image (PCI) research streams is voluminous, few studies have linked the two (Elliot et al. 2011). Common to both, studies show that country image is a powerful stereotype that influences behavior, whether consumers generally or tourists specifically (Anholt 2002; Papadopoulos and Heslop 2003).

When TDI and PCI are modeled simultaneously, as in the integrated place image model by Elliot, Papadopoulos and Kim (2011), results suggest a strong cross-over effect between product

beliefs and destination receptivity. A later application of this model (Elliot et al. 2013) found the contrary cross-over effect, from destination beliefs to product receptivity but not from product beliefs to destination receptivity. The combination of results suggests that these relationships may be driven by the relative strength or weakness of a country's TDI and PCI. Cross-over influences are evident when images, whether those of products or tourism, are strong. Similarly, beliefs about a country's national products have been found to influence perceptions of the country as a tourism destination (Lee and Lockshin 2012).

PCI studies have found that product familiarity plays a significant role in behavior (Han, 1989), and that the greater the familiarity, the more positively evaluated are the products (Orbaiz and Papadopoulos 2003). In TDI, destination familiarity has also been shown to influence traveler perceptions (Beerli and Martin 2004). The few studies that have considered the cross-over influence of product or destination familiarity on either destination or product beliefs or receptivity (Elliot et al. 2011; Lee and Lockshin, 2012) suggest familiarity indeed has an effect, though whether direct or indirect, uni- or bi- directional, remain matters of debate.

Building from these relationships, as identified in past research, Figure 1 depicts the study model, which links beliefs and behavior in line with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985). The underlying hypothesis comprises three components: (a) perceptions of a country's general image, beliefs about it as a tourism destination, and beliefs about its products held before the tourist experience, all exercise a positive influence on perceived tourist satisfaction with the country; (b) perception of tourism satisfaction will be, in turn, a significant predictor of post-visit intentions toward the country in both tourism and product purchases; and (c) higher familiarity and positive product beliefs have a positive influence on tourists' beliefs for the country as a tourism destination. In sum, the model delineates country-level image from beliefs at the

destination and product sub-level, with satisfaction as a potential moderator of their influence on post-visit intentions.

Drawing from the literature on services marketing, which states that satisfaction with the service encounter is significantly affected by the prior image the user has of the company (Andreassen and Lindestad 1998) research provides reliable empirical evidence about the sequence destination image → tourist satisfaction.

Insert Figure 1 near here

The study also hypothesizes a causal link between satisfaction and two components encountered in PCI: 1) *General County Image* (GCI) - all the beliefs, perceptions and information related to the cognitive and affective attributes of a country (Roth and Diamantopoulos 2009); and 2) *product beliefs* - consumers' evaluations of a country's products (Papadopoulos and Heslop 2003). The proposed hypotheses are derived from findings that suggest close interrelations between beliefs about a country's products and perceptions of it as a travel destination (Elliot et al. 2011; Lee and Lockshin 2012):

H1a: *Positive perception of the general image of a country increases tourism satisfaction.*

H1b: *Positive beliefs related to a country as a tourism destination increase tourism satisfaction.*

H1c: *Positive beliefs related to a country's products increase tourism satisfaction.*

PCI and TDI research supports a hierarchical relationship between GCI and the image relating to a country's product and tourism offerings. Past studies have identified a direct causal relationship between *country image* and *product beliefs* (Papadopoulos, Marshall and Heslop 1988; Li et al.

1997; Insh and McBride 2004). The relationship between *GCI, destination beliefs,* and *product beliefs* has also been analyzed simultaneously (Elliot, Papadopoulos and Kim, 2011). Results show that a country's affective image significantly influences the receptivity of its products and tourism, while its cognitive image is positively related to beliefs about it as a producer and tourism destination. Thus:

H2a: *Positive perception of the general image of a country positively affects beliefs about the country as a tourism destination*

H2b: *Positive perception of the general image of a country positively affects beliefs about the country's products.*

H2c: *Positive beliefs of a country's national products positively affect tourist's beliefs of the country as a tourism destination.*

Familiarity with a place has been found to positively influence its image as a destination (Pearce 1982) and producer (Orbaiz and Papadopoulos 2003), and to be related to both cognitive and affective components in both TDI (Baloglu 2001; Beerli and Martin 2004) and PCI (Steenkamp et al. 2003). However, most studies focus on the effect of destination familiarity on product evaluation, while research investigating this relationship in the opposite direction is still scant (Gnoth 2002). Elliot, Papadopoulos and Kim (2011) found positive relationships between familiarity and both product and destination beliefs, while Lee and Lockshin (2012) show that destination familiarity may moderate the relationship between product and destination beliefs.

Here, it is hypothesized that tourists' familiarity with the sojourn country's products is able to affect touristic beliefs. This assumption is based on the logical extension of the research above,

as well as the intuitive notion that the path familiarity → beliefs is more likely to be found in the product-to-destination than the destination-to-product direction. Thus:

H3a: *Familiarity with a country's products positively affects beliefs about those products.*

H3b: *Familiarity with a country's products positively affects beliefs about it as a tourism destination.*

Research shows that satisfaction with a destination can influence a tourist's future attitudes, in terms of loyalty, word of mouth, and destination image perception (Hosany and Prayag 2013). However the relationship between tourist satisfaction and attitudes towards the products of the sojourn country has not received the same attention. Papadopoulos and Heslop (1986) found that people who had traveled to a country evaluated its products differently from those who had not. Thus:

H4a: *Tourism satisfaction has a positive influence on post-visit intentions towards the country as a destination.*

H4b: *Tourism satisfaction has a positive influence on post-visit intentions towards the country's products.*

Research suggests that TDI plays a primary role in determining behavior in terms of destination loyalty (Mansfeld 1992; Chen and Tsai 2007) and word of mouth (Bignè et al. 2001; Hosany and Prayag 2013). Similarly, studies in PCI suggest relationships between a positive image of a country's products and behavioral responses in terms of attitude and purchase preferences (Roth and Romeo 1992). This study proposes that positive beliefs related to the image of a country as a

tourist destination and a place of origin of national production has a positive effect on post-visit intentions. Thus:

H5a: *Positive beliefs about a country as a tourism destination have a positive influence on post-visit intentions towards the country as a destination.*

H5b: *Positive beliefs about a country's products have a positive influence on post-visit intentions towards the country's products.*

Methodology

The measurement items (listed in Table 1) for *GCI, product beliefs, destination beliefs,* and *familiarity* were based on Elliot et al. (2011), who in turn drew from well-established scales. A structured survey was conducted in English on a systematic random sample of international tourists, intercepted over a five-week period at the end of their visit to Italy at two major airports. After data pretests and cleanup, 498 questionnaires were available for analysis. The sample was equally divided by gender and consisted of tourists mainly from the UK (24.5%), Germany (16.9%), France (11.5%), and Spain (9.7%), while the prevailing non-European countries were the U.S. (5.4%), Japan (3.2%), and China (3.0%).

Results

Confirmatory factor analysis provides support for all 28 study measures, and indicates satisfactory model fit: RMSEA= 0.08, CFI=0.96, NFI=0.95 and NNFI=0.96 (Table 1). All loadings of items on their constructs were above or close to 0.60. Scale reliability and validity was assessed through Cronbach's alpha and tests provided by Fornell and Larker (1981). Scales exceed the minimum standard of 0.70 for Cronbach's alpha and in all cases the average variance

extracted is above the criterion of 0.50 with one exception at 0.49. The highest squared

correlations between constructs are lower than the average variances, supporting discriminant

validity.

Insert Table 1 near here

The hypothesized relationships were tested through a structural equation model, using *maximum*

likelihood estimation (Lisrel v. 8.7). Results provide reliable support for the proposed model

(Table 2). Although the χ^2 value is significant (χ^2=1,177.37, d.f. 262; p<0,001), all performance

indices exceed the thresholds commonly regarded as indicative of a satisfactory fit of the model

to sample data (RMSEA=0.07; CFI=0.97; NFI= 0.96; NNFI=0.97).

The parameter estimates for the antecedent constructs of tourist satisfaction suggest that beliefs

about a country as a tourism destination are a significant influence on *tourism satisfaction* –

while no significant links emerge between *GCI* or *product beliefs* and *tourist satisfaction*.

Consequently, hypothesis H1b is supported while H1a and H1c are rejected. However, the

general image of a country and the specific components of product beliefs are an integral part of

international tourists' beliefs about the country as a tourism destination – both exert an *indirect*

influence on tourists' level of satisfaction with their travel experience. Moreover, the general

image of a country is a significant antecedent of *product beliefs*. This supports hypotheses H2a,

H2b and H2c.

The hypotheses tests related to the influence of *product familiarity* on *product beliefs* and

destination beliefs provide interesting findings: International tourists who are more familiar with

a country's products hold more positive beliefs not only towards the products made in the

sojourn country but also towards the country as a tourism destination. Results confirm H3a and H3b. With reference to the influence of *tourist satisfaction* on *post-visit intentions*, consistent with hypotheses H4a and H4b, the parameter estimates show that the perceived outcome of the visit experience has a significant influence not only on loyalty and positive word of mouth to Italy as a destination, but also on the formation of positive intentions towards the country's products. Satisfied international tourists are more inclined to increase consumption of Italian products when back in their own country and to suggest their use to family and friends.

In addition to influencing tourist satisfaction, beliefs about the *destination image* and *product image* also have a *direct* influence on post-visit consumption intentions, regardless of the evaluation of the travel experience. This finding leads to accepting H5a and H5b, and is consistent with previous research in TDI (Bignè et al. 2001) concerning the relationship between destination image and post-visit intentions, as well as with research in PCI that has analyzed the link between product image and product receptivity (Knight and Calantone 2000).

Insert Table 2 near here

Conclusion and Discussion

The findings indicate that tourism satisfaction is indeed influenced by country image, but, perhaps not surprisingly, following a pattern that was not fully consistent with the hypothesized relationships: Satisfaction is influenced *directly* only by travelers' *destination* beliefs, whereas the influence of *GCI* and *product* beliefs is *indirect*, in both instances through their impact on destination beliefs. The finding that product beliefs affect destination beliefs is in line with other studies (Elliot et al. 2011; Lee and Lockshin 2012); it reinforces the importance of consumers'

views and suggests that travelers compartmentalize their beliefs, forming their perceptions of trip satisfaction directly from the destination image of a country, and indirectly through the influence on that image of the country's general and producer-based images.

Destination beliefs are also influenced directly by product beliefs and product familiarity, which buttresses the argument that views of a country's products can and do serve to color its perceived image not only as producer but also in terms of other capabilities, in this instance the ability to offer an appealing tourism product. Therefore, this study shows for the first time that the image people hold about, and the familiarity they have with, a country's products provide a "summary" to form perception of the country as a tourism destination. This result extends to the tourism realm findings from PCI research, which states that consumers possessing high knowledge about a country's products may use product beliefs to summarize information about the country image and to develop consumption attitudes (Han, 1989; Knight and Calantone, 2000).

The implications for practice are significant, suggesting that a country's exports can play a role in marketing it as a tourism destination. A well-received country-of-origin label on a product has the potential to stimulate consumers to travel to the product's country-of-origin.

Perhaps of most interest, the results indicate that a satisfactory tourism experience is able not only to positively affect loyalty and word of mouth towards a destination, but can also significantly influence post-visit intentions towards national products. Of substantive importance to international and domestic marketers, it can now be argued that satisfied international tourists are both enhanced consumers and "welcome ambassadors", not only for the visited country's tourism industry but also for that country's products once back in their own place of origin.

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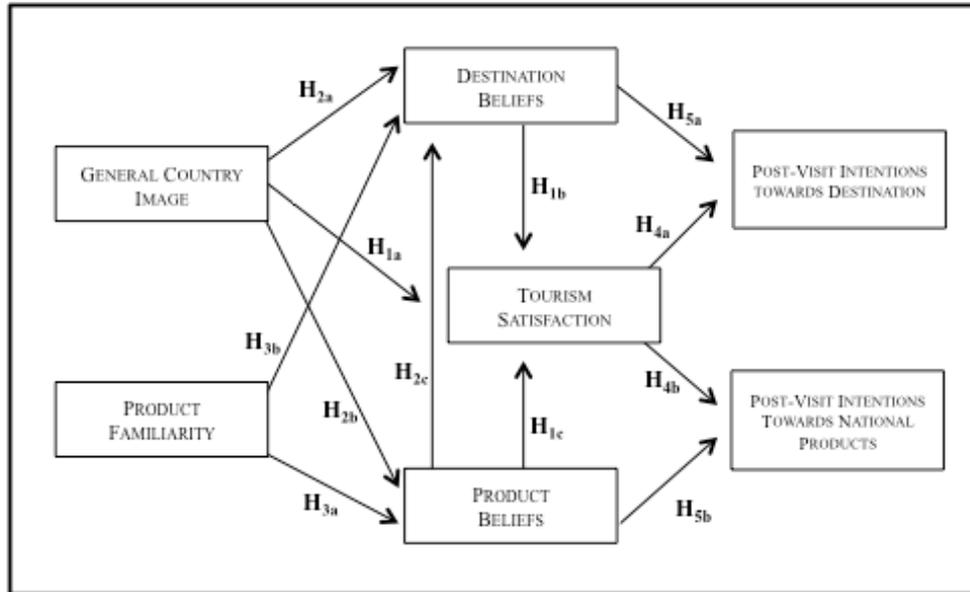
Figure 1. Integrative Model

Table 1. Model Constructs and Reliability Measures

Measures (7-point scales)	Mean (Stand. Dev.)	Λ Score (stand. solution)	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE	Highest squared correlation
GCI			0.87	0.59	0.28
quality of life	5.08 (1.24)	0.74			
technology	4.61 (1.18)	0.67			
education	4.85 (1.19)	0.73			
wealth	4.91 (1.29)	0.72			
Friendly	5.57 (1.17)	0.59			
Trustworthy	5.11 (1.33)	0.66			
Pleasant	5.93 (1.12)	0.60			
Safe	4.70 (1.41)	0.61			
PRODUCT BELIEFS			0.81	0.55	0.28
quality	5.22 (123)	0.78			
workmanship	5.37 (1.21)	0.73			
value	5.19 (1.21)	0.77			
Innovative	4.83 (1.26)	0.58			
DESTINATION BELIEFS			0.78	0.49	0.26
sceneries	6.04 (1.18)	0.78			
attractions	5.62 (1.20)	0.76			
Lots to do	5.86 (1.15)	0.58			
Good overall	5.61 (1.09)	0.70			
PRODUCT FAMILIARITY			0.90	0.76	0.11
know Italian products	4.04 (1.58)	0.86			
buy Italian products	3.96 (1.59)	0.90			
Italian products reflect lifestyle	3.78 (1.77)	0.86			
TOURISM SATISFACTION			0.91	0.70	0.26
very satisfied	5.51 (1.28)	0.88			
exceeded expectations	5.12 (1.33)	0.83			
wise choice	5.33 (1.25)	0.78			

worth it	5.50 (1.36)	0.83			
INTENTIONS - DESTINATION			0.95	0.74	0.29
visit Italy again	5.81 (1.28)	0.82			
recommend to friends	5.80 (1.22)	0.89			
INTENTIONS - ITALIAN PRODUCTS			0.91	0.78	0.25
buy Italian products	4.64 (1.55)	0.92			
welcome Italian imports	4.91 (1.48)	0.90			
recommend Italian products	5.11 (1.53)	0.82			

χ^2 = 1,694.29 (d.f. 329; p<0,001)

RMSEA = 0.08 CFI=0.96; NFI= 0.95; NNFI=0.96

Table 2. Model Results

	HYPOTHESES	STANDARD COEFFICIENTS (T-VALUES)	SUPPORT
H1$_a$	GCI → TOURISM SATISFACTION	0.19 (n.s.)	NO
H1$_b$	DESTINATION BELIEFS → TOURISM SATISFACTION	0.86 (8.77)	YES
H1$_c$	PRODUCT BELIEFS → TOURISM SATISFACTION	-0.02 (n.s.)	NO
H2$_a$	GCI → DESTINATION BELIEFS	0.45 (2.74)	YES
H2$_b$	GCI → PRODUCT BELIEFS	0.86 (14.56)	YES
H2$_c$	PRODUCT BELIEFS → DESTINATION BELIEFS	0.34 (1.96)	YES
H3$_a$	PRODUCT FAMILIARITY → PRODUCT BELIEFS	0.18 (5.32)	YES
H3$_b$	PRODUCT FAMILIARITY → DESTINATION BELIEFS	0.10 (2.02)	YES
H4$_a$	TOURISM SATISFACTION → POST VISIT INTENTIONS - DESTINATION	0.63 (9.07)	YES
H4$_b$	TOURISM SATISFACTION → POST VISIT INTENTIONS - PRODUCTS	0.19 (3.47)	YES
H5$_a$	DESTINATION BELIEFS → POST VISIT INTENTIONS - DESTINATION	0.16 (2.13)	YES
H5$_b$	PRODUCT BELIEFS → POST VISIT INTENTIONS - PRODUCTS	0,68 (9.96)	YES

Fit Statistics:

χ^2 = 1,177.37 (d.f. 262; p<0,001)

RMSEA = 0.07 CFI=0.97; NFI= 0.96; NNFI=0.97