

THE IMPACTS OF TOURISM EXPERIENCES IN THE DESTINATION IMAGE.THE CASE OF THE ALGARVE

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ABSTRACT

To succeed nowadays, tourism destinations must differentiate and create a competitive positioning, and this can only be done by addressing and adapting to the needs of their visitors. A value-attainment construct based on tourism experiences is proposed for the product development and promotion strategy of the destination Algarve.

KEYWORDS

Destination Image, Experiences, Positioning, Satisfaction.

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to compare the destination image of the Algarve before and after the tourists' holidays, in order to evaluate the impacts of their different holiday experiences on the destination image. Although several studies have found that travelers' images were modified after visiting a particular destination (Chen et al., 2007; Chon, 1992), these studies have been unable to capture the holistic component of the tourism experiences (Echtner et al., 2003) and its impacts on the tourist's perceived destination image (Bigné et al., 2005; Szymanski et al., 2001).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The increasing number of new international tourism destinations over the past decade and the intense competition between them (Echtner et al., 2003), have made destination image a key underlying factor affecting tourists' destination site selection (Hunt, 1975; Pearce, 1982), since it exerts a decisive influence on their choice (Baloglu et al., 1999; Hunt, 1975; O'Leary et al., 2003; Pearce; 1982). In addition, tourists' behaviour can be divided into pre-visit decision-making, on-site experience, impressions of their experience, and post-visit intentions (Fakeye et al., 1991), making it harder to assess it.

Moreover at a time of difficulty to find differentiation between tourism competitors (Hudson et al., 2009), marketing managers and decision-makers must be able to position their destinations effectively prior to the holidaymakers' visit (Calantone et al., 1989), because margins are falling and customers increasingly buy solely on the basis of price, experiences can thus be seen as a fourth offering, as distinct from services as services are from goods (Pine et al., 1998:1). However, the value created by the consumption of experiences depends not only upon the objective experience, but also upon the tourist state of mind at that particular moment in time (Andersson, 2007).

This makes more prominent the measurement of tourism experiences, to verify which and how, different experiences influence the destination image and are considered to add value to the destination holistic (tangible and intangible) offering. Since, these aspects significantly and directly impact the tourist's behaviour and satisfaction and their likelihood of a return visit in the future (Assaker et al., 2010; Yuksel et al., 2010).

3. METHODOLOGY

The empirical research will be undertaken using structured and unstructured methods. At an exploratory phase the attributes and scales will be selected by reviewing the literature relating to destination image and tourism experiences. In the following stage, a primary questionnaire will be applied to tourists visiting the Algarve. Subsequently, those who responded to the first questionnaire after their stay will receive a second questionnaire by e-mail. The data gathered from their replies will be assessed in two steps using AMOS statistical software Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) methodologies to investigate the impacts of their experiences on the destination image.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The holidaymakers have today many options at their disposal to meet their travel needs, therefore this investigation will contribute to understand the impacts of the tourists' experiences on the destination image of the Algarve. It will also assist marketing managers to define and create more effective and competitive marketing strategies, which can only be done after the region's perceived strengths and weaknesses have been identified. Additionally, stakeholders will be able to determine how the supply side can improve the value of their product offering and service. A distinctive and attractive destination would boost the perceived image of the destination.

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