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Future research directions in tourism marketing

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to formulate and discuss future research avenues for the marketing of tourism services.

Design/methodology/approach – The approach taken in the paper is to review the relevant literature and focus on the key themes most important for future research on tourism marketing.

Findings – The paper finds that there are a number of research avenues for tourism marketing researchers and marketing practitioners to conduct investigations on but the most important areas are consumer behavior, branding, e-marketing and strategic marketing.

Practical implications – The paper is relevant to tourism firms and destination management organizations in the development of marketing activities/capabilities to increase their customer base. In addition, as this paper takes a global perspective it is also helpful to compare different international research directions.

Social implications – Changing demographics and the aging of the global population mean different marketing approaches will be needed to market tourism services to older consumers and also consumers from developing countries such as China and India.

Originality/value – This paper is a key resource for marketing practitioners wanting to focus on future growth areas and also marketing academics interested in tourism marketing that want to stay at the forefront of their research area of expertise.

Keyword(s):

Tourism; Marketing; Tourism development; Strategic marketing.

1. Introduction

As the global population ages and travelling becomes cheaper and quicker than it is today and tourism will continue to be a cornerstone of the global economy. The increased emphasis on sustainability and lifestyle decisions will also heavily influence tourism and the way it is marketed in the future. This special journal issue has included some of the most cutting edge research on developments happening in tourism marketing research. However, it is also important to point out the research areas that still need to be addressed in order to have a more global and refined understanding of where tourism research is heading and what academics, practitioners and policy analysts can do in order to better understand tourism marketing. The aim of this paper is to highlight some fertile research areas and stress how more interdisciplinary research is required related to tourism. Table I presents the main research topics identified in the tourism marketing literature. We focus on the research areas that have been addressed in the papers of the special issue to clarify and identify future research avenues.
The structure of this paper is as follows. First, suggestions for future research in the areas of consumer behavior—market segmentation, brand management, e-marketing—use of new technologies and strategic are discussed. As the objective of this special journal issue was to contribute to the existing literature and develop new knowledge on tourism marketing, the above topics are stated as major research areas worthy of further academic and practitioner inquiry. The next section of the paper discusses how future research on tourism marketing needs to link more to other marketing and management areas of study. The final section of the paper concludes the paper by stating that tourism marketing is an interesting and exciting area of expertise and will continue to grow in the next decades.

2. Consumer behavior – market segmentation, targeting, positioning

Consumer behavior is a dynamic and eclectic field of tourism marketing (Mattila, 2004). Global consumption of tourism means that there are many different aspects of the environment people are influenced by. Consumption patterns are changing globally as more people become classified as middle-class in developing countries such as China and India and can afford more time to travel. More people worldwide can afford to stay in hotels but the geographic origin of these consumers is changing. The changing nature of the global hotel industry means that future research should discuss in more depth how consumers' decision marketing processes are changing (Louviers et al., 2003). As consumers are aging this will create changing demands in what services and facilities are offered to tourists. More research is required on the mature consumer and how tourist resorts will be affected by these changes. For example, Moschis et al. (2003) highlighted that more research is required on how mature consumers respond to monetary incentives. Kim and Geistfeld (2003) also found that the demand for full service restaurants will increase because of the aging population and stressed the importance of further research focusing on this demographic segment of the population. Emotional or nostalgia attachments are components of tourism marketing that Shoemaker and Bowen (2003) highlighted as future research in customer loyalty for tourism companies. Owing to the changing online marketing tools consumers utilize in choosing a tourism destination (Poria and Oppewal, 2003), more research is required on how consumers respond to new technologies.

Another research avenue for consumer behavior studies in tourism marketing is to further analyze the cross-cultural differences of the global travel market. Mueller et al. (2003) found that Irish and American consumers have a different perception of service encounters. In addition, as found by Prebensen et al. (2003), consumers also differ globally due to their individuality and ethnic background, which is an important direction for future research. For example, German immigrants in America may differ in terms of their consumption behaviors due to their ethnic background. Teye and Leclerc (2003) studied the consumption patterns of cruise ship passengers from an ethnic perspective but future research should also examine ethnic minorities and immigrants' particularities. More research should also further substantiate ethnic segments using the approaches taken by Sirakaya et al. (2003) who analyzed Japanese visitors to Turkey. An alternate approach that is worthy of more research is to examine vacation styles as a segmentation factor as utilized by Dolnicar and Leisch (2003) and Chen and Uysal (2003) with an ethnic perspective to examine in further detail how tourism is affected by both geography and culture.

Tourism can take a variety of forms from families travelling together for weekend excursions to university students taking study abroad programs. Future research on tourism needs to further identify the changing consumer habits of various segments of the population from baby boomers to generation Y. Space travel is now a reality for some wealthy individuals but as technology develops and people have more leisure time it will be interesting to see how quickly companies marketing tourism services adapt their advertising campaigns to take advantage of new destinations. How tourism changes and the likely technology changes that will occur are worthy of a deeper understanding of what people perceive as destination tourism. Other research methodologies should also be used in future research in order to triangulate research findings on destination image.
Most studies on segmentation in tourism utilize demographic, geographic, behavioral or a psychographic approach (Tsiotsou, 2006). However, as Tsiotsou and Vasioti (2006) highlighted, segmenting tourists is a combination of factors, some of which have not been researched thoroughly enough in previous studies. These factors important to finding out in more depth how to best differentiate tourists may be a person's entrepreneurial orientation to risk taking activities or their propensity for new or innovative experiences. These new segmentation approaches can be complemented with the existing research in order to assist in gaining more confidence on the right methodological approaches to segment tourists (Tsiotsou, 2006). For example, Pizam et al. (2004) found that high risk seeking tourists score higher in physical activities but they did not incorporate the entrepreneurial literature research on entrepreneurial orientation. Thus, combining these two literature approaches to the research on tourism segmentation would be an interesting avenue for future research endeavors.

Future research on segmenting tourism customers also needs to focus more on the relationships between different segmentation approaches in order to investigate whether these approaches are mutually exclusive or are interdependent on each other (Tsiotsou, 2006). For example, tourist resort customers can be segmented geographically according to what country they are from, their income level but also their entrepreneurial proclivity. Moreover, more research needs to investigate the different ethnic sub-groups within a geographic region to find out if this also impacts on a person's tourism activities. Previous research on segmentation has focused on identifying homogenous groups of customers that have similar attributes but future approaches should look not at the similarities but the differences that people have and why different groups of consumers may frequent the same tourist resort.

3. Brand management

Branding is a strategy used to differentiate products and companies, and to build economic value for both the consumer and the brand owner. There a variety of different brands that are used in tourism marketing from travel agents, companies advertising tourism products such as hiking equipment to destinations like Canada being a brand (Hudson and Ritchie, 2009). Hence, there are a number of different directions that future research on branding in tourism marketing can take.

One of the most important concepts linked to branding is brand equity. Brand equity refers to the added value with which a brand endows a product and to the addition of the brand's attributes including reputation, symbols, associations and names. Customer-based brand equity and the financial-based brand equity have not been examined adequately in the tourism marketing literature requiring further research attention. Future research in tourism should also examine the degree of implementation of strategic brand management processes in tourism services and specifically, examine the four steps involved as recommended by Keller et al. (2008):

1. identifying and establishing brand positioning;
2. planning and implementing brand marketing campaigns;
3. measuring and interpreting brand performance; and
4. growing and sustaining brand equity.

Moreover, the two well-known branding strategies, brand extensions and co-branding should be examined and evaluated in the tourism industry.

Most importantly in order to evaluate the successfulness of a marketing campaign it is important to measure efficiently whether brand image is perceived both by visitors and consumers of tourism products and services in the same way (Skinner, 2008). Therefore, the current research methodologies that examine tourism brand effectiveness need to be thoroughly reviewed and refined before advancing the current state of research on branding within tourism marketing. One of the major gaps on tourism marketing is related to how to adequately measure performance for destination branding.
efforts (Frias et al., 2007). As performance can be defined as having both financial and non-financial aspects, the effects of tourism marketing may be difficult to measure. Future research should take more of a longitudinal approach to the measurement of performance to see the long-term impact of tourism marketing. Furthermore, monitoring of tourism marketing efforts that focus on brand image should be undertaken with a variety of different stakeholders involved. These stakeholders can include visitors, government organizations and the local community that have a variety of different perspectives on tourism branding (Hudson, 2008). Further research is also required on developing more complex and recursive conceptual models that encompass these stakeholders to help understand the relationships between branding and tourism marketing.

The image of a destination is an important aspect of tourism marketing. However, there is no generally accepted definition or measurement instrument to measure destination image. Most definitions contain a cognitive and affective component but more research is required how these two components can be combined in a standard and universal definition. Moreover, as there is limited research that investigates the differences between image and other concepts in tourism marketing such as attitudes and personality, it is important to conduct further research on images in a variety of different global contexts.

4. E-marketing and use of new technologies

Tourism businesses all over the world are currently facing rapid changes due to market globalization, intensified competition, economic recession, and the dynamic evolution of new technologies. Tourism is in the forefront of information communication technologies (ICTs) adoption and e-business in the area of e-marketing (E-Business Watch, 2006) because the use of new technologies facilitates tourism services in reaching their customers, in offering customized services, and in competing effectively with other intermediaries and distribution channels. Although tourism businesses are considered early adopters of new technologies, research shows that there is an under-utilization and under-exploitation of these technologies. Examining the reasons for the under-exploitation of ICTs constitute an urgent research directive. Moreover, because it has been supported that the internet does not impact positively all tourism sub-sectors, future investigations should focus on the degree of ICT adoption and the resulted variations of tourism services performance by sub-sectors. Moreover, due to the inconsistencies in the literature, examining the role of e-marketing on tourism businesses performance becomes an emerging research topic.

New technology applications such as mobile services (mobile TV, mobile WEB) and Web 2.0 constitutes significant future research areas in tourism marketing. The importance of these topics comes from the resulted changes in both, consumer behavior and tourism firms management. New technologies benefit tourism consumers because minimize transaction costs, bring higher quality products to the market, share market information, lower uncertainty and aid in distribution channel efficiently. For example, Web 2.0 is essentially altering the behavior of tourism consumers in their search, decision-making process, and after consumption response. Tourists no longer only receive information and consume tourism services but they become the producers of information about tourism suppliers and destinations. Various Web 2.0 applications such as collaborative trip planning, social and content sharing networks result in new products/services and travelers’ involvement within business operations. Thus, these new tools transform travelers from passive consumers to active prosumers (producers and consumers) of travel experiences. There is a need to develop new decision-making models by examining the role of user-generated-content and social networking in making trip decisions. Moreover, testing various technology acceptance models in tourism is becoming an emerging research topic in understanding tourism prosoumers. Based on sound theoretical frameworks and models introduced and tested in other disciplines and business settings (e.g. Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action; theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991); technology acceptance model (Davis, 1986); and unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (Venkatesh et al., 2003)), marketing research should examine their applicability in the new generation of tourism consumers in order to gain a better understanding of their behavior. Accordingly, travel and tourism
firms are currently reevaluating and altering their business models in order to accommodate the needs and wants of their customers, and make them more involved into their business decisions.

However, the implementation of new technologies jeopardizes the work of traditional tourism intermediaries such as travel agencies. Travel agencies are being threatened not only by integrated tour operators, which control their own distribution channels, but also by the expansion of alternative distribution channels such as the internet, Teletext, call centers, and even travel TV channels (Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Emerging Markets, 2004). The internet is changing the landscape of the travel distribution process and will result in retail travel agencies experiencing lower business performance. Specifically, airlines will increase their direct communication with customers to reduce expenses while virtual travel agencies will increase their market share by shift customers away from traditional travel agencies which will experience tremendous business decreases (Vasudavan and Standing, 1999). As a result, the traditional intermediate function of travel agencies is in jeopardy due to disintermediation. Travel agencies need to respond effectively to challenges of the new era by adopting technological innovations, by following the evolution of travel products and demand changes, and by using new distribution channels. Up to now, there is limited research on how travel agencies are responding or planning to respond to these changes in order to survive in the marketplace. Do travel agencies redefine their operational models or alter their businesses in dealing with these new developments? Do they become more market oriented to compete effectively and gain sustainable competitive advantage? Do they introduce new strategies into their business? These are only a few of the questions that can be raised and need to be answered using a variety of research methods.

5. Strategic marketing

A lack of work on strategic issues and distribution processes in relation to travel and tourism has been already identified in the literature (Bagnall, 1996; Riege and Perry, 2000). The key reason for this is that up to recently marketing for tourism services has been focused not on the consumer, but on the destination or outlet, with marketing strategies being related to the products offered (Williams, 2006). As marketing within this sector has evolved however, the offer has become increasingly less important due to the enormous heterogeneity of consumers’ needs, motivation and behaviors and the changing of the global economic and social conditions. Thus, tourism firms and destinations realized that they need to redefine their strategies to respond effectively to these changes.

Riege and Perry (2000) have proposed three strategic approaches that may be used in the tourism industry: the consumer-oriented approach, the competitor-oriented approach and the trade-oriented approach. The first approach refers to the use of a differentiated (target marketing) or undifferentiated marketing strategy depending on market conditions. The second approach focuses on competition where the role of marketing is to develop, maintain or defend the position of a tourism organization. The trade-oriented approach focuses on intermediaries and it might be more relevant to the travel and tourism industry. According to this approach, the distribution of travel and tourism products/services is the most important activity along the tourism chain. Riege and Perry (2000) recommend the combination of the three approaches as a guide for public and private travel and tourism organizations. However, their model has not been tested yet nor examined in each tourism sub-sector in order to evaluate its applicability and probably identify distinct influential factors.

One of the most interesting issues discussed in the marketing and tourism literature is marketing orientation. Marketing orientation has been studied in marketing in terms of its antecedents and consequences as well as its conceptualization and operationalization. For example, external factors such as government regulations and internal attributes such as access to appropriate managerial and marketing capabilities (human resource constraints) were found to be significant predictor of market orientation in the Chinese tourism industry (Qu et al., 2005). A recent review of literature on market orientation identified only four studies in travel and tourism services and almost exclusively used hotels as their sample (Tsiotsou, 2010). Using a sample of 329 travel and tourism services from
Greece and Lithuania, Tsiotsou (2010) reports that of the three components of market orientation, only customer orientation is directly related to tourism firms' performance whereas competitor orientation and inter-functional coordination constitute indirect determinants. The role of market orientation and its components on travel and tourism services performance is an emerging topic in tourism marketing research. Further investigations on market orientation in various industry sub-sectors (e.g. airlines, tour operators, travel agencies, convention centres, and resorts) and countries are needed in order to gain a better understanding of this strategic approach and its role on tourism services performance.

Consumer relationship marketing constitutes a contemporary strategic orientation of travel and tourism businesses and a research framework for retaining customers. This strategic approach is taken by travel and tourism firms as a response to fierce competition and consumers' reduced loyalty to tourism service providers. Currently, travel and tourism firms emphasize emotional/affective factors and develop loyalty programs in an effort to create strong customer relationships (Shoemaker and Bowen, 2003) and achieve sustainability.

Theoretically, relationship marketing attempts to explain consumers' decision-making processes by taking into account not only rational reasoning but also emotional states. Variables such as trust, commitment, attachment, and loyalty represent the cornerstones of relationship marketing. Relationship marketing research in tourism is embryonic comparing to the previously discussed topics. Resource exchange theory (Morais and Zillifro, 2003), mathematical rough set theory (Au and Law, 2002), artificial neural networks (Tsaur et al., 2002) and the Markov process (Kozak et al., 2002) are some of the theoretical and methodological approaches taken in gaining an understanding of the relationship building processes and factors influenced. Research topics investigated in relationship marketing either focus on consumer behavior or on organizational characteristics as perceived by its employees or customers. Thus, Sui and Baloglu (2003) studied patronage behavior of casino club members whereas Back and Parks (2003) and Oh (2002) studied customer satisfaction as antecedent of loyalty. The degree of market orientation (Kim et al., 2006), the firm's reputation in relation to dependability and consumers' familiarity (McIntosh, 2002), and corporate image (Christou, 2003) have been examined as antecedent of relationship marketing. However, most of the above studies focus on loyalty as the main outcome of relationship marketing and disregard other significant factors such as purchase intentions, word-of-mouth and customer value. Further research is also needed on the antecedents of loyalty such as love, service personality, tourism involvement and self-expression.

In addition, the above studies take a “snapshot” perspective although relationship as a construct is longitudinal in nature. Because relationships with consumers develop and evolve over time, longitudinal studies are of great importance to tourism marketing research in all of the industry sub-sectors. Thus, studies should identify the most appropriate models of relationship marketing for each sub-sector since differences are expected due to the nature of their business and their structure. For example, tourism destinations (e.g. cities) and destination marketing organizations differ in their marketing goals and their customers' segments from hotels and resorts located in isolated tourist destinations whose major markets are mostly novice leisure tourists. Another future research area on the topic is to identify the means that travel and tourism firms need to develop and adopt from other industries in order to create effective customer relationship management.

Experiential marketing constitutes one of the latest strategic developments in marketing. Marketers have come to realize the increased commoditization of their services where customers' perceptions of competitive advantage diminish as well as their satisfaction (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Therefore, they are trying to add experiential aspects to their products/services so they differentiate themselves from competitors and achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). Experiential marketing has become a cornerstone of recent advances in marketing with a great potential for its application in tourism marketing.
Experiential marketing as many other marketing advances has been largely neglected by those involved in tourism marketing. While in other industries experiential marketing has become the cornerstone of their strategic orientation, marketing in the travel and tourism does not seem to be taken this direction yet (McIntosh and Siggs, 2005). Initial research attempts on this area have been focused on the personal and affective aspects of tourists' experiences in natural and heritage settings (Schanzel and McIntosh, 2000; McIntosh, 2002), the consumption experience on adventure leisure activities (Arnould and Price, 1993) and emotional reactions and subjective responses to the consumption experience (Bigne and Andreu, 2004). However, the experiential aspects of tourism remain relatively unexplored and therefore, research is needed on identifying the unique elements of the tourism experience, and the strategic and tactical steps involved in staging an experience.

6. Epilogue

As tourism research grows gradually in scope and rigor over the years, tourism marketing research seems to attempt to keep up with the dynamic evolutions and match industry's research demands in relation to the diversity of topics. This paper has discussed future research directions for tourism marketing. Much more research needs to be conducted on this exciting area of study. Pivotal areas of study were highlighted as being important areas for future research to address in tourism marketing. The last section of the paper discussed the need for a more interdisciplinary perspective of tourism marketing that encompasses a variety of academic study areas to fully understand the unique area of tourism marketing.

There is an abundance of literature linking tourism management to marketing. The focus of this special journal issue has been tourism in the context of marketing intelligence and planning but more research should focus on the interdisciplinary nature of tourism marketing. Currently there is a limited amount of research linking tourism to entrepreneurship. As many aspects of tourism from the novel approaches to marketing tourism services to the use of new technology to create new types of attractions for tourism purposes (e.g. sport centers, theme parks) are fundamentally entrepreneurial it is important that other perspectives or theoretical foundations are utilized in future tourism research. Future research could take a stakeholder perspective with tourism entrepreneurs and members of industry to include research on public management with strategic marketing in order to better understand the dynamics and complexity of tourism marketing. In addition, future research should take into consideration different global perspectives of tourism marketing that are found in alternative forms of tourism such as medical tourism and sports tourism. More interdisciplinary research is needed using the foundations of other scientific fields such as ethnography, entrepreneurship and management.

Methodologically speaking, it seems that there is an over-reliance on field surveys, a neglect of experiment and scope for the employment of qualitative methods. As it has been already addressed, research in tourism needs more originality in the topics addressed and the research methods used. A broader research agenda needs to be developed in order to make the research more relevant to tourism services managers. It becomes apparent that tourism marketing research needs more rigor, longitudinal perspectives, and more field experiments designed to reveal causal relationships.

We hope that the papers included in this special journal issue will stimulate more research on tourism marketing and this paper will provide directions for further investigations.
Table I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research areas and topics in tourism marketing research</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current research areas and topics in tourism marketing research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market segmentation, targeting, positioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demand models/pricing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic marketing/marketing concept</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References


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