Repositório ISCTE-IUL

Employing mindfulness, images and experience evaluation to predict perceived value of travel experience: the role of perceived authenticity

Abstract

This study aims to explore the influence of mindfulness on perceived value of travel experience (PVTE) via destination image components and evaluation of travel experience. We also examine the potential moderating effect of perceived authenticity on the relationship between experience evaluation and PVTE. Data (n=370) were gathered via a self-administered structured questionnaire from travellers departing from Lisbon International airport. Findings highlight mindfulness as a driver to favourable evaluation of the destination image (particularly affective image). Experience evaluation acts as a mediator between destination image and PVTE. Yet, perceived authenticity does not have a moderating but a control effect on the relationship between experience evaluation and PTVE. A discussion of the theoretical and practical implications is also provided.

Keywords: Mindfulness, perceived authenticity, travel experience

Track: Tourism marketing

1. Introduction

Perceived value of travel experience (PVTE henceforth) has been acknowledged as a key concept for delineating tourists' behaviour towards destinations. Based on this premise, many researchers have aimed at unravelling factors that formulate tourists' travel experience (Gallarza & Saura, 2006) or alternatively destination experience (Prebensen et al., 2013), mainly focusing on service quality and monetary cost constructs within a customer satisfaction management conceptualization (Bajs, 2015). Interestingly, although destination image has been utilized as an antecedent of PVTE (Kim et al., 2013), yet the widely accepted attribute-based conceptualization of destination image (Gartner, 1993) has not been implemented in examining PVTE, so far. Furthermore, even though researchers have recognized the importance of mindfulness in explaining tourists' cognitive, affective and behavioural responses (Moscardo, 2009), still this construct has not been included in implementing value-based theory related models within a tourism destinations context. To further understand these relationships, evaluation of tourist experience is incorporated as an explanatory mechanism, while perceived authenticity is included as a moderating variable (Figure 1). With regards to the contribution of this research, it is of both theoretical and practical relevance. From a theoretical point of view, to the best of our knowledge there is no previous evidence on conceptualizing the influence of mindfulness on PVTE via destination image components and evaluation of travel experience. Practically, this study might serve as a basis for gaining a better understanding of tourists' experience formation and offer practitioners and DMOs insights into effective design and implement suitable marketing activities.
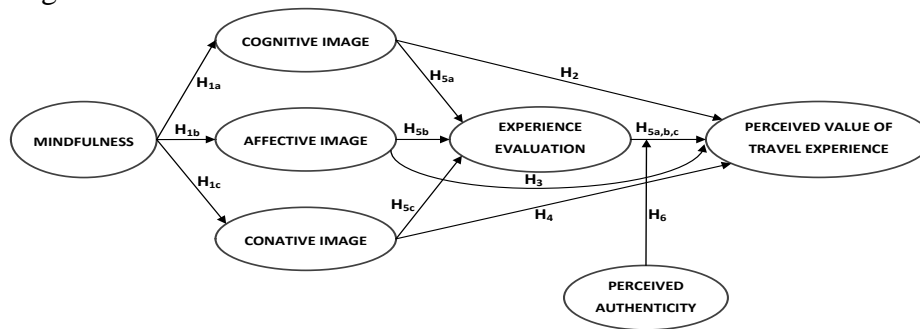
Figure 1: Theoretical model under investigation.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Mindfulness

Mindfulness has been conceptualized as ''the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145). As a concept, it has been explored in both organizational and individual contexts. Individuals who are mindful tend to be more motivated to explore different perspectives and through their high sensitivity or awareness of the environment can bring about increased potential to recognize, evaluate, and exploit opportunities (Rerup, 2005), and have a more receptive attention to current events, realities, and experiences (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007). Mindfulness may differentiate the way individuals live an experience and feel happy or unhappy (e.g., Hollis-Walker & Colosimo, 2011) because it requires vigilance and stable concentration, as well as openness to a continual contact with experience. The present study concentrates on individual mindfulness, which comprises openness to novelty, sensitivity to different contexts, awareness of

multiple perspectives, and focuses on the present (Sternberg, 2000). Yet, the potential effect of mindfulness on destination images and tourists' destination experience has not been studied.

2.2 Destination images

Destination image has been widely studied in tourism context as a set of impressions, expectations and emotional thoughts that tourists have when visiting a destination (Stylos, Vassiliadis, Bellou, & Andronikidis, 2016). Gartner's (1993) approach of the destination image is the most followed and consist of three components: cognitive, affective and conative. The first component reflects the sum of beliefs and knowledge reflecting evaluations of the perceived attributes of the destination (Bigné, Sanchez & Sanz, 2009). The second one expresses the feelings of the tourists toward the destination (Bigné, Andreu, & Gnoth, 2005; Hallmann, Zehrer, & Müller, 2014). Finally, the conative component reflects the tourists' active consideration of a place, city or country as a potential travel destination (Gartner, 1993). Yet, conative image and destinations intentions are two different constructs (White, 2014). Based on the acknowledged role of mindfulness to underpin attitudinal responses (Shapiro et al., 2006), we postulate that highly mindful tourists will tend to form destination images better and, further, evaluate the lived experience. Taken together, our expectation is that:

H1: Mindfulness directly and positively influences tourists' destination image.

    H1a: Mindfulness directly and positively influences tourists' cognitive image.

    H1b: Mindfulness directly and positively influences tourists' affective image.

    H1c: Mindfulness directly and positively influences tourists' conative image.

2.3 Perceived value of travel experience

Perceived value has been conceptualized as a multi-dimensional construct composed by perceived utility, perceived benefits relative to sacrifice, psychological price, worth and quality (Woodruff, 1997). McDougall and Levesque (2000) conceptualize perceived value as the consumer's overall evaluation of what is received and what is given. Following this concept,

Lee, Yoon, & Lee (2007) develop the Perceived Value of Travel Experience (PVTE) with three dimensions: functional value (regards aspect such as fair price, value for money or good quality for the price), overall value (considers and overall perceived value meaning that the destination is valuable and worth it) and emotional value (means the perceived pleasure and joy when visiting the destination). Perceived value affects tourists' choice behavior at the pre-purchase stage, but also influences satisfaction and intentions to recommend and repurchase at the post-purchase stage (Gallarza, Saura, & García, 2002; Lee, Yoon, & Lee, 2007). Hence, we anticipate that:

H2: Cognitive image directly and positively influences tourists' PVTE.

H3: Affective image directly and positively influences tourists' PVTE.

H4: Conative image directly and positively influences tourists' PVTE.

2.4 Evaluation of tourist experience as a mediator

The overall evaluation of tourist experience represents an overview of the destination characterizes the lived experience at a destination (Bigné et al., 2001). A favorable evaluation of the lodgings, museum, architecture, restaurants and landscape of a destination would potentially contribute to enhancing the favourable perception of the destination image, thus leading to a positive assessment of the benefits of the experience lived at the destination. Consequently, the expectation is that:

H5: Evaluation of travel experience positively mediates the relationships between destination images components and PVTE.

H5a: Evaluation of travel experience positively mediates the relationship between cognitive image and PVTE.

H5b: Evaluation of travel experience positively mediates the relationship between affective image and PVTE.

H5c: Evaluation of travel experience positively mediates the relationship between conative image and PVTE.

2.5 Perceived authenticity as a moderator

Authenticity has been associated with places and lodgings expressing the idea of original, true in substance or trustworthy (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). Objective originality is verified by experts (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006), but symbolic authenticity is provided by tourists or consumers (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010), depending on the context and circumstances. In this study, we intend to capture how tourists perceived authenticity of a destination in terms of an evaluation of its originality, genuineness and trustworthy when visiting and living the experience of Lisbon (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Ram, Björk, &Weidenfeld, 2016). The level of perceived authenticity may serve as a catalyst to the relationship formed between the evaluation of the experience and PVTE (Olsen, 2002), therefore, we hypothesize that:

H6: Perceived authenticity moderates the effect of evaluation of travel experience on PVTE, such that effect will be stronger for tourists with a high evaluation of their travel experience.

3. Methods

3.1 Sample and procedures

Data were collected during 15th June – 25th June 2015 via a self-administered structured questionnaire. A team of 9 experienced field researchers of the ISCTE-IUL worked voluntarily on the field in teams of three, with one of them serving as a research coordinator, on a daily basis. Travellers departing from Lisbon Humberto Delgado International airport towards the main Spanish airports were asked to provide their opinions, while waiting in the transit area, between 09:00 and 19:00 h. A total of 442 Spanish tourists were asked to participate, and 382 agreed (a response rate of 86.42%), yielding 370 usable questionnaires with a final response rate of 83.71%. The resulting sample consists of 48.3% male and 51.7% female respondents, with half of them (50.7%) being married and about 12% living alone. The majority of participants were between 40 and 60 years of age with those coming under the 40-49 age band representing 45.2% of total sample). Regarding their educational level, 19.2% have graduated college degree (or studying towards it), and 60.8% are of technical training level. The vast majority of respondents (i.e. 67%) were full-time employees, 5.3% free-lance professionals, 3.2% pensioners and about 1% students.

3.2 Measures

The measurement scales for all three destination image components were adopted, with only slight modifications in the cognitive image one, from Stylos et al. (2016). The scales included in Kang & Gretzel (2012) were utilized to measure mindfulness, as well as evaluation of tourist experience. Perceived authenticity was measured with the scale proposed by Kolar & Zabkar (2010) after some adaptations took place. Finally, the scale suggested by Lee, Yoon, & Lee (2007) was utilized to measure PVTE. 7-point Likert scales were used in all measurement scales (i.e. "1=strongly disagree" and "7=strongly agree"), with the sole exception of affective image where a 7-point semantic differential scale was implemented.

4. Results

Partial-least square structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) technique was employed. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted in order to explicitly specify the pattern of loadings of the measurement items on the latent constructs and prune any indicators with a small contribution to explaining the latent constructs. An initial model with cognitive image modelled as second-order factor was assessed, followed by a first-order factor hierarchical regression analysis that was performed to examine the final measurement model after creating latent variable composite scores for all constructs. Last, the causal relationships shown in Figure 1 were tested to predict the significance of the model paths related to hypothesis testing and the predictive power of the inner model. Composite reliability, as well as convergent and discriminant validity were examined and found to support the factorial structure of the proposed model. The variance inflation factor (VIF) values were found to be ranging between 1.000 and 2.047, indicating that multicollinearity should not be of concern since all values are lower than the cut-off value of 3.3 (Ali *et al.,* 2016). Furthermore, the use of an iterative application of CFA has refined the proposed scales of all constructs but evaluation of travel experience and PVTE, pruning 14 indicators in total due to some factor loadings being below 0.5 (Janssens et al., 2008). The significance of the paths of the final first-order model was examined using regression weights and t-statistics to calculate the corresponding p-values, employing bootstrapping of 5000 samples. As indicated by the path loadings and the associated significance levels, there is support for all research hypotheses, except for H_8. In specific, the effects from mindfulness to the three destination image components have been found strongly significant and positive ($\beta_{CI \to PVTE} = .287$, $\beta_{CI \to PVTE} = .323$, $\beta_{CI \to PVTE} = .236$, p<.001), thus supporting H1, and H1a, H1b and H1c in particular. The direct influences of destination image components on PVTE are all positive and significant except for the conative image one (see Fig. 2), thus providing support for H2 and H3, yet not for H4. Additionally, the effects of all three image components on PVTE via experience evaluation are strongly significant and positive providing support to the H5 system of hypotheses; thus, altogether, experience evaluation construct shapes two partial mediations and also supports an indirect effect between the cognitive, affective images and conative image at one end and PVTE at the other, respectively. In regard to the proposed moderating effect, PLS-SEM analysis does not support it leading to the rejection of H6, although an emerging direct significant and positive effect is exerted from perceived authenticity on PVTE ($\beta_{PercAuth \to PVTE} = .309$, p<.001). The predictive power of this first-order structural model is high explaining R^2=35.7% of variance in experience evaluation and 42.9% of variance in PVTE, respectively. The blindfolding procedure for executing the Stone-Geisser test with an omission distance D=7 produced positive Q^2 values for all constructs (0.100 to 0.401>0), suggesting that the proposed model is of high predictive relevance for all endogenous constructs.

5. Discussion

Past research in the tourism field has examined the effect of mindfulness on subjective well-being. The current study intends to go further and explore the influence of mindfulness on destination images, overall experience evaluation and perceived value of travel experience. The direct effects of mindfulness on each of the three dimension of destination image are significant, and, interestingly, findings show that the influence is stronger on the affective image. This is in line with the attributes of affective image (the feeling of pleasure, enjoy, exciting, fun) (Bigné, Andreu, & Gnoth, 2005; Hallmann, Zehrer, & Müller, 2014), that is further associated to the meaning of mindfulness
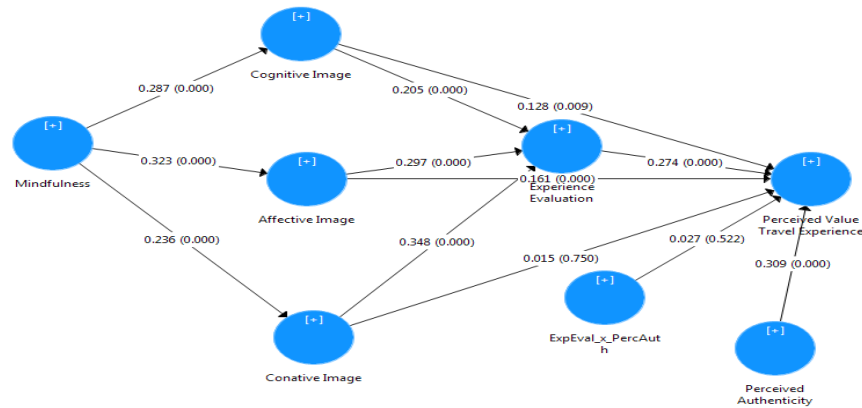
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Figure 2: Structural model results.

(Moscardo, 2009). Mindful tourists tend to be more receptive to events, experiences, and realities (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007) than less mindful tourists that may lead them to increase positive affective experiences, as Cherie and Dianne, (2010) claim. Moreover, the overall experience evaluation seems to have an important role as a mediator between destination image and PVTE. In the current study, it is possible to confirm the effect of brand image on experience evaluation, in line with Bigné et al. (2001). Conative image, or the idealization, dream or desire to visit Lisbon as a destination, emerges as an important image dimension, with its indirect effect on PVTE via experience evaluation ranking first. Although perceived authenticity does not moderate the relationship between overall experience evaluation and PVTE, it exerts a strong control effect. A possible explanation for this effect may be derived from the meaning of authenticity itself, reflecting originality, genuineness, and trustworthiness (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Ram, Björk, &Weidenfeld, 2016) of a destination, as Lisbon demonstrates with its tradition, history, and plenty of heritage and unique architecture. Therefore, these destination authentic characteristics comprise a favorable and a positive perception regarding the value of resources spent to live the Lisbon experience.

6. Conclusions and implications

More studies are needed, and this particular one is a first step in studying the topic. Considering the sample was collected at a single destination, and the perceptions captured come from Spanish tourists only, the current study seeks to bring to light the influence of mindfulness on destination image, evaluation, and perceived value. This study may be replicated using data from different destinations and experiences, as well as from tourists of a different nationality. Regarding managerial implications, this study advises managers of lodgings, museums, as well as DMOs should take into account that mindful tourists tend to live and immerse on the destination experience more intensively than less mindful tourists; when they enjoy the experience than their corresponding evaluation and resulting perceived value of will be higher.

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