

## CHAPTER 3

### EDUCATING TOURISTS AT THE PRE-VISIT STAGE

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### 3.1 Introduction

Within this vast and complicated world of tourism, there are a great variety of destinations. These can grow and develop in different ways. Economic liberalisation can play a leading role in such a process (Hoskinsson, Eden, Lau & Wright, 2000). Concentrating on what we may consider as ‘uniquely situated’ destinations, some voices claim that low socio-economic development is conducive to political instability, intense conflict and the lack of a national identity, which have led very well to economic crises, disasters and the outbreak of diseases (Gould, 2011; Ritchie, Dorrell, Miller & Miller, 2004). Emerging countries are mostly post-colonial, post-conflict, or post-disaster (PCCD) destinations (Bayeh, 2015; Gould, 2011). These nations can be classified in two main groups. On one hand, developing countries in Asia, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East; and secondly, transition economies in the former Soviet Union and China

(Hoskinsson et al, 2000). Séraphin, Ambaye, Gowreesunkar & Bonnardel (2016b) hold that tourism works fine as a strategy for economic development, but, in some conditions, the tourism industry stimulates particular growth in some emerging destinations (Holden, 2013). Nonetheless, emerging destinations, which look to situate as tourist destinations are vulnerable to external factors as instability, political riots and other risks (Ritchie 2004). These risks accelerate the decline of the destination while in some other conditions, destinations can even disappear from the tourism map altogether (Seddighi, Nuttall & Theocharus, 2001). With this, tourism is often esteemed as a complex activity (Korstanje & Tarlow, 2012). In view of this, some destinations have adopted strategies to mitigate their problematic status (Korstanje 2009; Alvarez & Campo, 2014; Tarlow 2014), such as targeting the diaspora as potential tourists (Séraphin & Paul, 2015). To set a clear example, Haiti experienced some changes its Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO) logo in 2012, to adapt its change of image in its marketing strategy (Séraphin, Ambaye, Gowreesunkar & Bonnardel, 2016b). Needless to say, the purpose of a logo is not to simply correct the problem of a country's negative image. A logo is also representative of a destination identity (Riel & Balmer, 1997) and, as such, activates the destination to communicate with potential visitors and *in fine* convince them to visit the destination (Séraphin, Ambaye, Gowreesunkar & Bonnardel, 2016a). What is more important, a DMO logo synthetizes the history and nature of the destination, leading to brand identification and therefore clearer brand management (Aaker, 1997; 2012). In consequence this can also impact on purchase intention, positive emotions (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982), trust, brand equity (Keller, 1993), brand attachment (Ball and Tasaki, 1992), brand commitment and subsequently improves the performance of a destination (Rose, Merchant, Orth & Horstmann, 2016; Séraphin et al 2016b; Park, Eisingerich, Pol & Park, 2013).

Apart from a logo, there may be other marketing material that can capture the essence of the destination, which can lead to brand identification, impact on purchase intention, conveying positive emotions, trust, brand attachment and commitment. In this chapter, it is planned to test the ability of information and communication technologies (ICT) to see if that can be achieved. More specifically, the objective of this research is to design a step by step method that may potentially help in deciding the content of an online platform designed to educate consumers at a pre-visit stage and potentially increase visitors to emerging markets. This method may also potentially help in deciding whether an online

platform is the most suitable to represent and promote a destination. This is carried out by applying the DRA (Dale Robinson Anderson) model to an existing online platform (detailed in the Methodology section later on). This model is the combination of two existing models: The Dale and Robinson (2001) model and the Anderson (2001 – cited in Walters & Mair, 2012) model.

In this respect, Dale and Robinson (2001) forwarded a three-domain model of tourism education and an action plan for its implementation that would meet the needs of all stakeholders (learners, training providers, and employers). As for Anderson (2001 - cited in Walters & Mair, 2012), he put together a framework to test the effectiveness of a disaster recovery message drafted by a DMO. In this chapter, it is argued that a combination of the two models can provide the most suitable ‘recipe’ for a tool that can both educate people about an emerging destination that suffers from a negative image, and at the same time, encourage people to visit the destination. To some extent, this chapter is in line with Zhang (2000) who developed a model of quality management method on the basis of an extensive literature review.

Explicit and aggressive marketing strategies (e.g. planned communication activities, organisation of international sports and cultural events, media strategies, exhibitions, changing the target audience, reducing hotel and flight prices) have proven to be ineffective for destinations suffering from a legacy of political instability and disaster (Séraphin et al, 2016a; Avraham, 2015; Alvarez & Campo, 2014; Seddighi et al, 2001). For this reason, this research has opted for a more subtle strategy, namely through ‘education’ using online materials.

With recent advances in information and communication technologies, there is an interest among marketing researchers and managers to try to understand the challenges and opportunities for emerging markets (Sharma, 2011). This research suggests that education of tourists (Ballengee-Morris, 2002; Orams, 1996) at the pre-visit stage, using new technology as an opportunity for these markets, may contribute to improving a destinations’ image. Existing research on tourists’ education focuses on the visit itself, but generally neglects the pre-visit stage (Séraphin, Gowreesunkar & Ambaye, 2016a). Also, the role of technology in tourism education, and their knowledge of the destination is currently little understood (Neuhofer & Buhalis, 2012). However, it has been shown that the internet provides many opportunities to disseminate knowledge (Liburd &

Hjalager, 2010). Compared to more traditional forms of educational delivery, e-learning can improve student understanding of instructions, which in turn can enhance their motivation to learn and subsequently increase their emotional intelligence (Behnke, 2012). Behnke and Greenan (2011, cited in Behnke, 2012: 13) defined this as: “A measure of one’s ability to use acquired knowledge, abstract thinking, and problem-solving to interpret and guide personal responses to significant internal and external situations”. As for Computer-Assisted Instruction in hospitality management education, it can contribute to stimulating student participation and interest (Law, 2013).

This research can, therefore, be considered as a *continuation* of (a) the research of marketing strategies for developing countries (Zarantonello, Schmitt & Jedidi, 2014; Wei, Samiee & Lee, 2014); (b) the use of internet and social media as an advertising tool (Berthon, Pitt, Plangger & Shapiro, 2012); and (c) product innovation (Sok, O’ Cass & Miles, 2015) when it comes to the education of potential tourist at pre-visit stage (S  raphin, Butcher & Korstanje, 2016c).

This research can also be considered as a *prolongation* of (d) Alvarez and Campo’s research (2014) on the impacts of political conflicts on a country’s image and prospective tourists’ intentions to visit. Indeed it has been suggested that further research should be carried out to fully understand the image change process for countries that ‘suffer from the chronically negative image and who are constantly exposed to political conflicts and other incidents’ (Alvarez & Campo, 2014: 76).

This research can also be considered as a *complement* of (e) Avraham’s (2015) research which argues that restoring the positive image of a destination relies on applying practical measures such as a marketing and sales strategy suitable to the context and situation of the destination.

Finally, this research could also be considered as a *continuation* of: (f) Walters & Mair’s (2012) research, who not only argued that there is limited literature in the area of post-disaster destinations, but who also emphasised the importance of further research in the field of post-disaster messages communicated via broadcast media, internet, social networking sites.

### **3.2 Marketing strategy of destinations with a negative image**

For many destinations, tourism is perceived as a panacea for economic and social development and hence, countries having a strong reliance on tourism invest considerably in visibility, marketability, and appeal of the destination. That said, not all destinations are vested with the same image. Because of this discrepancy, not all of them are performing at the same level. A study conducted by Séraphin, Gowreesunkar, and Blakeley (2016) on under-performing destinations showed that cognitive image formed on such destinations are derived from both internal and external sources; internal sources being from friends, peer and relatives and external sources being from media and public institutions. Likewise, another study by Gowreesunkar and Sotiriades (2017) indicated that image associated with underperforming destinations was termed as negative attributes in the tourism decision-making process and hence, significantly influenced the choice of destinations. According to the study, the image of a destination is an important attribute, as satisfaction and dissatisfaction may occur as a result of the customer's overall evaluation of the information associated with the destination's image. As a result, the type of information attached to a destination contributes in the image formation of a given destination. It is generally argued that marketing and more specifically branding plays an important role in overcoming some of the barriers related to the image. However, a study of Séraphin, Ambaye, Gowreesunkar, and Bonnardel (2016) probed that the process of branding of a destination is very hard to grasp in view of the ambidextrous approach which should be adopted. Destinations with negative images evolve in many ways and the marketing is very difficult to manage. For understanding this, we need to mention that the specialized literature have not studied the functioning of image as well as its evolution in the threshold of time. As Gartner (2000) puts it, the destination image may be defined as 'the attitude, perception, beliefs, and ideas one holds about a particular geographic area formed by the cognitive image of a particular destination' (Gartner, 2000: 295). As for Cooper and Hall (2008: 223), the destination image seems to be a singled version of reality and it affects both an individual's perception of a destination and their choice of destination as the image of the destination is the only evidence that the visitor has of the destination before they visit. Both definitions highlight the importance of image in the decision making the process to visit or not a destination. Even more important, no matter how the tourist acquired the image of the destination, but from his point of view, the perceived image is reality (Cooper & Hall, 2008: 224). Based on the above, and

particularly on the fact that the media play the major role in the way a destination is perceived, it becomes quite obvious that destination with a negative image and destination with a positive image can't use the same marketing approach. Moreover, technology-savvy customers readily capture negative information which reaches through real-time and they share to the online network. Once again, taking the example of Haiti, Séraphin, Butcher, and Korstanje (2016) explain that in this respect, Haiti does not have a 'high profile'. The shantytowns, the coups, etc., are generally the types of places and events broadcasted. The title of this theme, that is also the research question of this theme, makes it clear that there is a difference in the marketing strategy of destinations according to their image. The nature of the tourism industry makes it even more difficult for a destination with a negative image 'to rise from the ashes'. Indeed, the tourism sector is Those factors can cause destinations to decline and sometimes even totally disappear from the tourism map (Avraham, 2015; Séraphin, Butcher & Korstanje, 2016; Alvarez & Campo, 2014). As elaborated above, technology-savvy customers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are now increasingly resorting to online sources to acquire and share information on destinations. Therefore, identifying a marketing strategy for destinations with a negative image is not the main issue per se, rather it is the type of information created on the destination and the medium to be utilized to launch or re-launch the destination that needs to be identified and worked upon. The crafting of appropriate marketing strategies of destinations with poor image needs to take into account various factors, in particular, their online visibility and types of information shared.

Morgan, Pritchard and Pride (2011) discussed a range of destinations (Singapore, Abu Dhabi, Macau, Milan, Australia, Namibia, San Antonio, Slovenia, London, New York, Barcelona, Northern Ireland and Jerusalem) with different histories, reputations, resources, markets, and levels of tourism development. In terms of branding strategies adopted to be competitive, three groups could be identified: (1) the first group that includes Singapore, Abu Dhabi, Macau, Milan, New York, London and Barcelona adopted a strategy based on the organisation of events and the development of landmark projects to gain the reputation of world-leading cities. (2) As for Australia, it focuses its effort of film's theme to build up its image. (3) As for the third group (Namibia, San Antonio, Slovenia, Northern Ireland, and Jerusalem) they adopted a marketing strategy with strong focus on authenticity, culture and a sense of place. For all three groups no matter their history, reputation, resource, market, and levels of tourism development

opted for solution focus on the destination. They are traditional solutions that have so far proven ineffective (Alvarez & Campo, 2011, 2014; Avraham, 2015; Vitic & Ringer, 2008; Walters & Mair, 2012). In this theme, we are going to explore alternative solutions. Some will still focus on the destinations and others will focus on the tourist. The latter is of interest as a limited research focus on the tourists.

As the image of a destination is based upon induced agents, organic agents and autonomous agents (as explained previously), Séraphin, Butcher and Korstanje (2016) argued the importance of educating tourists a pre-visit stage using Virtual Online Learning Material (VOLM) as educated potential tourists are less sensitive to adverse publicity as they develop a special bond with the destination. In this theme, we are going a step further by suggesting an ambidextrous approach by also suggesting education of the tourists during the visit as suggested by Orams (1996).

### **3.3 Improving the image of Post-Colonial, Post-Conflict and Post-Disaster**

The experience of the Arab Spring shows two important aspects. As Avraham (2015) observed, the fact is that tourist destinations in Middle East deploy efforts in locking the action of the media, trying to transform the negative image in a positive one. The post conflict strategies should be taken as a resource the promotional video-information impact, as well as the articulation of effective recovery messages (Walters & Mair, 2012; Alvarez & Campo 2011). While other studies suggest that the involvement of the locals is a crucial factors that explain the success of the emerging destination (Ballengue-Morris 2002; Orams 1996).

All the examples and testimonies are centred on the education of tourists while visiting the destination. This chapter, rather, attempts to make a fresh approach focusing on the pre-visitation stage. The pre-visitation stage is an important phase of information processing and is shaped by personal knowledge and other third party information (Hubner & Gossling, 2012; Seraphin et al 2016c). The literature suggests that the image starts from the ambiguous premise that it is defined by the subjective impression of each person (O'Sullivan, 1996, cited in Seddighi et al, 2001). Such an impression appears significantly formed by the affective disposition instead of the cognitive structure (Alvarez & Campo 2014). This process reinforces while confronts with the established

media discourse while re-educate to the tourist (Seraphin 2013; Reisinger & Steiner 2006; Benhke 2012). While tourism education is generally only seen from the students', academics', practitioners' and employers' angle (Dale & Robinson, 2001), this article considers it as a pre-visit marketing tool. This therefore explicitly aims to counter false or exaggerated negative notions relating to colonialism, disasters and conflicts of the past (both distant and recent). When people have a better knowledge of the true nature of a destination (history, tradition, context, etc), they are more likely to visit it because they will be less open to distortions, exaggerations and unbalanced accounts (Gossling, Scott, Hall, Ceron & Dubois, 2012).

Consumer behaviour can be defined as: "behaviour that consumers demonstrate whilst searching for, buying, using, evaluating and disposing of services and products that are expected to satisfy their needs" (Schiffman, Kanuk & Wisenblit, 2010). More specifically, and based on a tourism context, Kirillova et al (2014) explain that elements that tourists consider as aesthetically pleasing or beautiful (environment, product or services, tourism experience), can contribute to their decision to visit a destination, to return to the same destination and, in the long term, to show loyalty to that destination. The aesthetic case for destinations with a negative image rarely reaches potential tourists due to media focus on risks arising from disasters, conflict and the nation's post-colonial status (S  raphin & Nolan, 2014 a).

Importantly for this study though, Carlson's natural environment model (1979) and the arousal model developed by Carroll (1995) suggest that knowledge and objectivity about the environment can influence appreciation. Their analysis implies that objective knowledge and exposure to more balanced narratives, influence the way potential tourists approach destination choice not just on a cognitive/rational basis, but also on an affective one. Hence the education of tourists can be considered as a way to facilitate a more favourable affective disposition towards destinations with the negative image. Also pertinent here is Connell's view (cited in Stepchenkova, 2013) that non-promotional communications can be more powerful than more explicitly promotional ones. For specific destinations, specific measures must be taken (Gay, 2012; Huang, Tseng & Petrick, 2008, cited in Walters & Mair, 2012). Appealing to education and a desire for knowledge, rather than romantic imagery and persuasive prose, could be more effective in undermining the perception of PCCD destinations through a dark lens.



### **3.4. Consciousness, powers, and drivers for a sustainable form of tourism**

Sustainability is the most pressing issue faced by the tourism industry and more generally speaking, it is the most important issue of this century (Higham et al, 2021), as a result it is shaping every aspect of consumers decision making (Han, 2021). Being pro-environmental is a growing trend, even a living style for many consumers (Han, 2021). However, what is really needed for change to happen is a radical innovation which is going to disrupt current practices, as the incremental innovations implemented so far have failed to bring sustainable changes in the industry. A rethinking of what responsible tourism is and should be achieved need a total rethinking (Burrai et al, 2019). This radical change is likely to happen with the emergence of tourism sustainability activists (S  raphin, 2022; Tranter, 2010), and an education of both locals and visitors (Wang, Zhang, Xiao, Sun, Xia & Shi, 2020). Even if that it has been noticed that when on holidays individuals retain their pro-environmental behaviour (Wang et al 2020), sometimes in happens that this attitude change (Juvan & Dolnicar, 2014). Additionally, it is worth mentioning that despite the fact the education of tourists (and locals) at pre-visit and during the visit stage, plays a significant role in their behaviour (Han, 2021), their level of pro-environment behaviour will vary according to culture, age, gender, social background, education, income, health where they grew up, their personality, etc (Abrahamse, 2019; Balund  , Kim, 2012; Dolnicar, Crouch & Long, 2008; He & Filimonau, 2020; Perlaviciute & Steg, 2019; S  raphin, 2022). To develop this pro-environment consciousness and behaviour, strategies which can be classified as coercive (use of power to force others to do something), legitimate (prescription of action plans), induced (financial resources), and competent (advice to others) are put in place by private and public sector organisations involved in the industry (Saito & Ruhanen, 2017). Having said that, trust is needed amongst all stakeholders for these strategies to be effective (Kikuchi-Uehara et al, 2016; Nunkoo, 2017). Another important element for the development of pro-environment behaviour with customers is the development of an intrinsic, altruistic and biospheric motivation, as opposed to an extrinsic, self-interested, and egoistic motivation (Evans, Maio, Corner, Hodgetts, Ahmed & Hahn, 2012; Sharma & Gupta; Wu, Font & Liu, 2020). This intrinsic, altruistic and biospheric motivation often comes with place attachment (Hong & Kim, 2019), hence why it is important for Destination Marketing Organisation to also adopt affective marketing strategies (Choi & Kim, 2021).

### **3.5 Tour Operators –shaping tourists’ awareness and action**

Tour operators play a powerful role in shaping tourist behaviours both pre and during visit, since they connect destination suppliers with consumers through bundling package components such as accommodation and transport. Online retail distribution has reduced the power of tour operators in controlling tourism flows that shape destination development, and was widely criticised in literature at the turn of the century (see for example Medina-Munoz et al., 2003; Papatheodorou, 2006; Buhalis 2000; Bastakis et al.2004). Paradoxically however, it can be suggested that Covid-19 provides tour operators an advantage in providing assurance to consumers of health and safety procedures, and can play a key role in helping to re-build tourism. Consumers can be faced with complex risk rating information that changes at short notice (see for example the advice issued by Public Health Scotland 2022), and tour operators can assist consumers in providing assurances of the safety of travel arrangements. The Association of British Travel Agents’ (2022) campaign #ReadySteadyTravel for example, provides information for consumers on what to consider when booking, and what to expect at the airport, during the journey and in destination. This merits further research into how consumer decision making post Covid-19 has been influenced in terms of a desire to book through a tour operator, rather than independently based upon the information and support that tour operators can provide.

Tour operators also play an influential role in shaping tourists’ pro-environmental behaviours through pre and during visit communication. Reflecting a wider paradigm shift towards more responsible and less exploitative forms of capitalism, even the largest online retailers can be seen to include information on ‘sustainable’ tourism. This is a significant change to the turn of the century when research identified that operators did not always take a long-term view to destination development, and claimed to lack control over impacts in destination (Carey et al., 1997; Curtin and Busby, 1999; Forsyth, 1995; Klemm and Parkinson, 2001; Miller, 2001; Tapper, 2001). It is encouraging that larger mass-market players now communicate sustainable information alongside specialist businesses that are frequently founded on sustainable principles, and have long communicated desirable behaviours to consumers. ‘Travalyst’ (2021: 14) for example which represents large global players such as Booking.com, Google, Skyscanner, Trip.com Group, Tripadvisor, and Visa, notes “Growing traveller awareness of sustainability. Travellers are already increasingly demanding more sustainable options,

with more than two-thirds (69%) expecting the travel industry to offer more options that deliver on this desire”.

‘Tourism sustainability activists’ are classified by Séraphin (2022) as being passive or active, depending on contextual (such as age, gender, education and background) or person determinants (personality traits). Tour operators’ communication of sustainability information to consumers (defined by Font and McCabe 2017 as ‘market driven approaches’ to sustainability), alongside sustainable product design (‘product driven approaches’) can be considered a key contextual influence on active sustainability activism. Effective consumer information to drive awareness and action is fundamental to tour operators Sustainable Supply Chain Management processes (Richards and Font 2019; Schwartz 2008). As the world transitions out of Covid-19 restrictive travel bans, the importance of consumer education is arguably more important than ever. Gossling et al (2021) write of the risk of returning to ‘business as usual’, perhaps following even more aggressive growth to compensate for losses to the tourism industry. It is evident that in a complex and challenging business environment, all communication ‘touch points’ can shape pro-environmental behaviours and resilient business models. The shift set out in this section from the turn of the century which was characterised by a denial of responsibility towards engagement, needs to gather pace through consistent focus on communication and knowledge sharing.

### **3.6 Conclusions**

When educating tourists at the pre-visit stage, the chapter has shown there are a number of key factors to consider within marketing strategies. In destinations that have incredibly unique histories and heritages, e.g. post-colonial, post-conflict and post-disaster, the emphasis on pre-visit education is potentially paramount to a tourist’s decision making process. Thus, marketing and online artefacts need to reflect this educational journey to obtain more buy-in from potential tourists and increase the potential for tourism within these destinations. Perhaps the crucial message to convey here is that it is possible to have successful tourism within these unique destinations – the evidence is there to support this.

The world has changed significantly since 2020 and the years that followed adapting to COVID-19. Tourism destinations have been badly affected through this time. Thus, the importance of finding recovery that turns into success is essential to so many destinations.

On top of this, we have a society now, more than ever, focused on critical issues surrounding sustainability and sustainable tourism. This means that the tourism industry has needed great agility to cope with all these external demands and challenges. The destinations that can best manage the complexities are likely to be the ones achieving long-term growth and survival. There is a lot to consider and there are likely to be winners and losers within this process. Yet, we would argue that something effectively implemented like pre-visit tourist education can help to build successful marketing strategies.

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