

Imagery Processing - An Investigation of Sport Tourists' Travel Decision Making

Ryan Wang, University of Florida

Kyriaki Kaplanidou (Advisor), University of Florida

**Sport tourism
Abstract 2013-249**

**Saturday, June 1, 2013
9:20 AM**

**Poster
(Ballroom)**

Sport-related travels have been recognized as a crucial revenue source for the global travel and tourism industry (Ritchie & Adair, 2010). Sport tourism is defined as "leisure-based travel that takes individuals temporarily outside of their home communities to participate in physical activities, to watch physical activities, or to venerate attractions associated with physical activities" (Gibson, 1998, p. 49). Many regions of the world are now sharing this growing trend for tourists to partake in sport-related activities. For example, holidays taken by Europeans have become more sport-oriented due to the growing emphasis on health and quality of life. More than half of all outbound travels made by German tourists (55%) and Dutch tourists (52%) contained sport-related activities annually between 1997 and 1999 (World Travel Organization, 2001).

Many scholars have studied sport tourism based on destination image, which is conceptualized as individuals' perceptions and beliefs of a destination (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991) and is usually composed of many attributes uniquely or commonly associated to certain destinations (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). These attributes could refer to the cognitive domain, such as infrastructure and attractions, as well as affective features, including excitement and friendliness (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007). In addition, destination image also contains conative components representing individuals' (re)visit intention (Gartner, 1996). Destination image has been found to serve as influential antecedents of various tourists behaviors, such as attitude, visitation, and willingness to engage in word-of-mouth behavior (Gibson, Qi, & Zhang, 2008).

The formation of destination image can be divided into three stages, namely organic, induced, and complex image (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). At the organic stage, prospective tourists' form preliminary images based on information that is not initiated by destination sites or promotion agencies (Gunn, 1988). Potential tourists could further incorporate commercial information disseminated by travel destinations and/or intermediary travel agencies to develop the induced image. The final stage of destination image is the complex image developed after actual visitations (Gartner, 1993; Gunn, 1988). That is, the major distinction between complex image and organic/induced image relates to tourists' actual visitation. Complex image is more credible and detailed compared with organic/induced image (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). According to Gartner (1993), prospective tourists' often developed pre-travel destination images (i.e., organic and induced image) based on perception instead of actual experience or reality because it is difficult for prospective tourists to "test drive" their future trips. Hence, except returning visitors, first-time travelers often have to make travel decisions based on organic and induced images that are characterized as lacking of details and credible personal experience.

One potential approach can be utilized to help first-time travelers develop a more concrete complex image relates to the use of "imagery processing." MacInnis and Price (1987) defined imagery as "(1) a process (not a structure) by which (2) sensory information is represented in working memory" (p. 473). That is, rather than a form of mental structure or schema in which knowledge is stored, imagery is a process of visualizing and representing concepts or sensory information in human's working memory (Lutz & Lutz, 1978). By conceptualizing imagery as a mental process, people are able to interpret the same information previously stored in schemas or to process incoming information in a mechanism that is distinct from analytical processing – a processing style usually requires individuals to systematically weight product attributes. Imagery-based processing and analytical processing are fundamentally different from each other. Analytical processing is more verbal and semantic and less attached to sensory information, whereas imagery processing is more holistic and more closely associated with multi-sensory responses such as olfactory, textile, and visual information. Feelings, emotions, and ideas could be represented in mental image as the result of using imagery processing (MacInnis & Price, 1987). According to previous literature, the use of imagery processing could allow prospective tourists to develop a "consumption vision" to try out their future trips (Phillips, Olson, & Baumgartner, 1995). By forming a consumption vision, prospective tourists could simulate a richer and more credible mental representation of travel destinations that is similar to complex destination images and, in turn, increase their visiting intentions.

2013 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2013)

The purpose of this study is to directly examine the relationship between prospective tourists' use of imagery processing and their travel decisions. A between-subjects (processing style: imagery vs. analytical vs. control) experiment will be utilized to directly compare the effect of imagery processing and analytical processing on prospective tourists' visiting intentions and attitude towards advertised travel destinations. Manipulation of processing will follow the procedure used by Thompson and Hamilton (2006), and data analysis will use ANOVA.

The expected results can help sport tourism scholars to better understand the effect of different information processing styles on tourists' travel decisions. Existing tourism-related literature primarily relied on using many extrinsic (e.g., trip-related elements) or intrinsic variables (e.g., socio-demographic background) as a proxy of travelers' decision making process, while failing to consider different information processing strategies travelers may actually employ in making travel decisions (Jun & Holland, 2011). In light of this gap, this study aims to help researchers and marketers of sport tourism gain a better understanding of the potential beneficial effect created by prospective tourists' use of imagery processing to encode destination information and the subsequent impacts on their travel decision making. In addition, many existing literature predominantly focused on fostering a desirable destination image that is superior in local attractions and infrastructures as a way to lure more tourism activities (Gibson et al., 2008). Nevertheless, the expected results would suggest that solely improving destination image may not be sufficient. Instead, travel destinations should also emphasize encouraging prospective tourists to use imagery processing in order to create a consumption vision that can mentally represent diverse features of travel destinations and, in turn, lead to a heightened visiting intentions and a more desirable attitude expressed by prospective tourists.