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THE ROLE OF SENSORY MARKETING IN THE CREATION OF A TOURISM EXPERIENCE

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SUMMARY

Purpose

Sensory marketing is a recent concept that was initially considered in the field of experience marketing and retail, and later in the field of tourism, regardless of the fact that tourists have always experienced a destination with their five senses. Only in recent years has tourism industry adopted the concept of sensory marketing as a marketing strategy in order to create a competitive advantage in the rapidly growing tourism industry, therefore empirical studies on sensory marketing in tourism are scarce. The paucity of sensory marketing studies in tourism results in insufficient research of the relationship between sensory marketing and tourist experience, as well as the consequences of tourist experience resulting from stimuli in the sensory environment. The reason for this is reflected precisely in the dynamism, intangibility and challenging measurement of tourist experience, and authors mostly limit themselves to descriptions of dimensions of tourist experience, singling out the sensory dimension as one of the significant ones, therefore the relationship between sensory marketing and tourist experience remains insufficiently researched, which defines the research problem. Therefore, the main purpose of the doctoral thesis is to prove that it is possible to influence tourist experience of visitors regarding a tourist destination and their behavioural intentions through sensory marketing. The main goal of the paper, in accordance with the observed gap in the available scientific literature and recommendations for future research, is to develop a theoretical foundation based on the theoretical and empirical findings so far and to create a valid and reliable conceptual model for assessing the impact of the implementation of sensory marketing on the affective and cognitive states of tourists and on the consequences of tourism experience, i.e. satisfaction with tourist experience, destination attachment and tourist behavioural intentions.

Methodology

In order to test the conceptual model, quantitative research was conducted. The survey method was used for data collection, and the form for data collection is a structured questionnaire designed on the basis of previous research and modified according to the needs of the research. Given that the measuring scales of the constructs were originally developed in English, they were therefore subjected to a content validity check performed by seven experts in the field of marketing and tourism, based on whose suggestions and comments the research instrument was improved. Furthermore, in order to check the content validity of the survey questionnaire, its clarity and comprehensibility, a pre-test was conducted on a sample of 48 respondents. The questionnaire was then translated into German and Italian with the help of one translator and three native speakers. After designing the survey questionnaire, it was tested through a pilot study on a purposeful random sample of 102 respondents in order to perform an analysis of the psychometric characteristics of the survey questionnaire, and the obtained results of the pilot study were used in the analysis of the results related to the assessment of the validity and reliability of the measuring instrument, after which the final version of the survey questionnaire was formulated. The main quantitative research was conducted on a purposeful random sample of 429 respondents. Collected primary data were analysed using univariate and multivariate statistical analysis methods, namely descriptive statistical analysis, explorative factor analysis, reliability analysis and structural equation modelling using partial least squares method (PLS-SEM). After conducting the quantitative research, exploratory qualitative research was conducted. For these purposes of research, an interview method was used with 10 stakeholders in a tourist destination, and an effort was made to determine their attitudes and opinions on the knowledge of the concept of sensory marketing, the importance of senses in tourist experience and their influence on behavioural intentions, as well as the importance of levels of application of the sensory marketing strategy. The processing of primary data collected through interviews was carried out using content analysis.

Findings

By assessing the measurement model it was observed that the hapticscape contributes the most to the formation of perception of destination sensescape followed by tastescape. Comparing research by Buzova et al. (2021) who developed destination sensescape index that was used in this research; hapticscape represents the second construct that contributes the most to the formation of construct sensescape in urban destinations, while the first refers to the visualscape, which differs from of this research. At the same time, the results of previous research on sensory marketing in the tourist context document visual impressions as the most prominent ones reported by tourists (Xiong et al., 2015; Lv et al., 2020; Kastenholz et al., 2020), while the visualscape in in this research, it is only in the third place of contribution in shaping the construct perception of destination sensescape. Another construct that contributes to shaping the construct perception of destination sensescape is the tastescape, i.e. the importance of local gastronomy in rural destinations, which in the research of Buzova et al. (2021) is in third place. In this research, the soundscape contributes the least to shaping the construct perception of destination sensescape, which is also confirmed by the results of the research by Buzova et al. (2021). The smellscape as the penultimate construct that shapes the perception of destination sensescape is in accordance with the research of the author Buzova et al. (2021) in urban tourist destinations.

The assessment of the structural model showed that there were positive and statistically significant influences between the constructs perception of sensescape and affective responses, perception of sensescape and cognitive responses, affective responses and satisfaction with tourist experience, cognitive responses and satisfaction with tourist experience, satisfaction with tourist experience and destination attachment, and satisfaction with tourist experience and behavioural intentions. The strongest relationship was established between the constructs of perception of destination sensescape and affective responses. In addition to the quantitative research, the results of the qualitative research conducted through personal structured interviews with stakeholders of the tourist offer and decision makers in rural tourist destinations indicate familiarity with the term sensory marketing (60%) and recognition of the importance of the senses (100%) when experiencing a tourist destination. However, they give the most importance to the sense of sight (60%), followed by the sense of taste (50%), all senses (40%), smell (30%), and hearing (10%) and touch (10%). It is clear that, unlike the results of the quantitative research, which showed that the sense of touch contributes the most to the perception of destination sensescape, the stakeholders in tourism believe that the sense of sight comes first. The sense of taste is in the second place of importance in qualitative research, and it occupies the same place in quantitative research, that is, the tastescape next contributes to the formation of construct of perception of destination sensescape.

Furthermore, all respondents recognise the importance of stimulating the activation of tourists' senses in a tourist destination for future behavioural intentions, and for the implementation of a sensory marketing strategy in a tourist destination, the majority of respondents see the responsibility of the tourist boards together with the stakeholders of the tourist offer.

Originality of the research

The research subject of this paper is the research and assessment of a complex conceptual model of connectivity research and evaluation a complex conceptual model of the connection between the perception of destination sensescape, affective responses, cognitive responses, satisfaction with tourist experience, destination attachment and behavioural intentions. Therefore, the research results of the doctoral thesis represent a contribution to the scientific field of social sciences, the field of economics, the field of marketing, the field of sensory marketing in a conceptual, methodological, and applied sense.

The scientific contribution of the conceptual part of the paper is manifested in a systematic review of the literature and a critical analysis of previous conceptual and empirical research in the field of sensory marketing and tourist experience. At the same time, the contribution is visible in the design and testing of the conceptual model for measuring the connection between the perception of destination sensescape, tourist experience and behavioural intentions, as well as in the adjustment of measurement scales used to measure the basic constructs in the model and the testing of the relationship between variables determined by the conceptual model.

The scientific methodological contribution is manifested in the use of an innovative approach in the collection of data on the subject of research and their processing. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods enabled a comprehensive understanding of sensory marketing and tourist experience and their connection from the point of view of tourists and decision makers in the destination. At the same time, the contribution is manifested in the adjustment of measurement scales for measuring the perception of destination sensescape, affective and cognitive responses, satisfaction with tourist experience, destination attachment and behavioral intentions, testing of the conceptual model for determining the role of sensory marketing in the creation of tourist experience, knowledge of the influence of the perception of destination sensescape on affective and cognitive responses, as well as on satisfaction with tourist experience, destination attachment and behavioural intentions.

In terms of application contribution, results of the research inform meaningfully about the strategic directions that destinations can follow using sensory marketing to attract tourists, their satisfaction, attachments and recommendations in today's highly competitive tourism industry. At the same time, the contribution is visible in the practical knowledge of rural tourist destinations because previous empirical research was conducted in an urban tourist destination.

The limitations of the research are visible in the selection of the research site, i.e. geographic limitation, time limitation because the research was conducted during the main tourist season, the disadvantages of using a survey questionnaire as a data collection technique (such as unintelligibility, length) and qualitative methods of data collection, i.e. interviews.

Keywords sensory marketing, tourism experience, satisfaction with tourist experience, destination attachment, behavioural intention, PLS-SEM

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