

Repositório ISCTE-IUL

Deposited in *Repositório ISCTE-IUL*:

2023-04-19

Deposited version:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Marques, C., Vinhas da Silva, R. & Antova, S. (2021). Image, satisfaction, destination and product post-visit behaviours: How do they relate in emerging destinations?. *Tourism Management*. 85

Further information on publisher's website:

[10.1016/j.tourman.2021.104293](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2021.104293)

Publisher's copyright statement:

This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: Marques, C., Vinhas da Silva, R. & Antova, S. (2021). Image, satisfaction, destination and product post-visit behaviours: How do they relate in emerging destinations?. *Tourism Management*. 85, which has been published in final form at <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2021.104293>. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with the Publisher's Terms and Conditions for self-archiving.

Use policy

Creative Commons CC BY 4.0

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a link is made to the metadata record in the Repository
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

IMAGE IN EMERGING DESTINATIONS, TOURIST SATISFACTION AND POST-VISIT INTENTIONS: THE ROLE OF UNIQUE IMAGE

Abstract

This study proposes a conceptual model that sheds light on how the destination image of emerging tourist destinations relates to tourism satisfaction and intention to subsequently recommend the place and purchase its products. Destination image is studied through three components – cognitive, affective, and unique. Unique image has been overlooked in previous research and few studies focus on its measurement. This study uses a new method of measuring it through text-mining of user-generated blog posts. Findings from a sample of 314 foreign visitors to Sofia, Bulgaria, reveal that the affective image influences tourist satisfaction and post-visit behaviour; the cognitive component has a significant effect on all the constructs, except for tourist satisfaction, whereas unique image only influences the intention to recommend and purchase destination country products. Joining together two streams of research, this study also argues that the intention to recommend a destination spot influences the intention to buy its products.

Keywords: destination image, unique image, emergent destinations, Sofia, post-visit intentions towards country's products

1. Introduction

Destinations, just like products, compete against one another as consumers often pick their next holiday destination by opting between places with similar attributes, including climate, sports facilities, safety, etc. (Qu *et al.*, 2011; Chiadmi *et al.*, 2017). There are several factors which influence choice of destination, nevertheless destination image is one of the most significant decision-making attributes as it helps to differentiate a place in consumers' minds (Marchiori & Onder, 2017). Previous research has also evidenced that destination image is related to tourism satisfaction and/or post-visit intentions to revisit or/and recommend (e.g. Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Bigné *et al.*, 2001; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008; Qu *et al.*, 2011; Baloglu *et al.*, 2014; De Nisco *et al.*, 2015; Chiu *et al.*, 2016; Prayag *et al.*, 2017), making it a good tool to predict tourist behaviour, whilst creating meaningful and tailored offerings.

The destinations which normally grab attention in academic research are mostly places where over-tourism is already setting in, and marketing strategies are already in place (e.g. studies of Chen & Tsai (2007), Chi & Qu (2008), Elliot *et al.* (2011), Baloglu *et al.* (2014) and Prayag *et al.* (2017)). However, there are also destinations which are emerging as new frontiers of tourism but are yet to be developed as tourism products. Still in their infancy as tourism products, with scarce information provided by tourism agents (as per the induced level of image formation proposed by Gunn (1972)), tourists perceive the image of an emerging destination differently from that of a mature destination. Consequently, the way tourists evaluate a destination, their post-visit behaviour and the inter-relationship between all these variables may differ as well. The current paper focusses on the study of destination image in the context of emerging destinations, those which have not yet been able to successfully create an identity or market strategy, that allows for a unique tourist destination positioning in what is a cut-throat global tourism market.

In the literature, destination image is usually scrutinized as a multi-dimensional construct of two components – cognitive and affective. Previous research has often overlooked a third important component – the unique destination image. The latter has proved to have a stronger influence on forming the overall image of a destination than the affective cue and that is important as a key differentiator of the destination proposition (Qu *et al.*, 2011). There are only a small number of studies which examine the perceptions of the unique features of a destination (e.g. Qu *et al.*, 2011; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993), and even fewer which study their measurement. Identifying the unique elements of a

destination should be the starting point of every positioning strategy as these elements are critical for the establishment of meaningful differentiation (Crompton *et al.*, 1992).

Previous research has shown that when travelling abroad, individuals tend to augment the information search for local products and modify their attitudes towards them (Hallberg, 2005). Although the extensive body of literature within the tourism destination image and the country-of-origin image areas, both providing support for the notion that the image of a place has significant influence on consumer behaviour, research empirically testing combined elements from the two fields is scarce, in particular, regarding the influence of destination image on tourist intentions and consumption-related behaviour concerning products from these countries/destinations (Elliot *et al.*, 2011; De Nisco *et al.*, 2015, 2016). The current study intends, not only to incorporate the intention to recommend and to buy products made in the country of destination in the model, as previous studies do, but also relate it with intentions to recommend the tourism destination, a relationship not yet studied.

In summary, the current study contributes to a better understanding of destination image and its impacts on tourist satisfaction and post-visit intentions. A conceptual model is proposed and analysed in the context of emerging destinations in order to provide answers to the following research questions:

(1) How does the image of an emerging destination influence tourist satisfaction, intention to recommend the destination, and post-visit intentions towards country's products?

More precisely, this study is aimed at explaining how destination image, tourist satisfaction, and the post-visit intentions of foreign visitors towards the destination itself and the country's products are related. A conceptual model is proposed which adds some variables and relationships to already tested frameworks.

Sofia, Bulgaria, is chosen as the emerging tourism destination. Sofia is one of the emerging cities where the number of foreign visitors is constantly growing, although a defined vision and strategy for tourism have not yet been implemented. The city was ranked by Mastercard's Global Destination Cities Index study (Mastercard, 2017) as the third fastest growing European city of destination in terms of international overnight visitors from 2009 to 2016. This study also discusses practical implications for emerging destination marketeers, in particular Sofia marketeers and tourism managers in order to successfully create an identity or market strategy to

position the city as a unique tourist destination in the global and increasingly competitive tourism market.

(2) **Does unique image play a key role as a component of destination image?**

The affective, cognitive, and unique image are examined as components of the overall destination image using data from international tourists visiting Sofia.

Unique image has often been overlooked in previous studies. This study augments the literature on unique destination image by studying the perceptions held of the unique features of Sofia by using a method to extract measures based on text mining of user-generated content (UGC).

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1. Destination Image

Destination image has been widely defined as impressions or perceptions of a place. Hunt (1975) proposed that image is a perception held by potential tourists about a specific destination whereas Um and Crompton (1990) described it as a holistic construct. It is also often referred to as the mental picture which an individual has of a certain place (Bigné *et al.*, 2001; Kotler *et al.*, 1993). Tasci *et al.* (2007) define it as “an interactive system of thoughts, opinions, feelings, visualizations, and intentions towards a destination” (Tasci *et al.*, 2007: 200), stressing on the complex nature of image and its components.

Most researchers have conceptualized destination image as a multidimensional construct of two components: cognitive and affective (e.g. Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Hosany *et al.*, 2007; Baloglu, *et al.*, 2014; Lopes, 2011). The cognitive component is related to the beliefs and knowledge which one holds about the attributes of a certain place, that is, cognitive evaluation of image is based on factual knowledge, personal beliefs, meanings, and memories. On the other hand, the affective component is related to the emotions and feelings, which a person holds about a place (Baloglu *et al.*, 2014), and it can be either favourable, unfavourable, or neutral (Arslanova *et al.*, 2017). Affect is expressed with positive or negative feelings with varying intensity. On the one end of the spectrum are emotions, such as love and anger, followed by feelings such as satisfaction and frustrations, and moods like boredom or relaxation. At the other end are evaluations such as liking and disliking (Peter & Olson, 1999; Tasci *et al.*, 2007).

According to Kim *et al.* (2009), the affective component is more volatile than the cognitive one as it is based on emotional situations. The authors also found out that cognitive image tends to last longer as it is subject to previously formed knowledge. Baloglu (1999) and Baloglu *et al.* (2014) found out that the influence of these components tends to differ between visitors and non-visitors. The authors suggest that the cognitive evaluation of an image is a more dominant factor among non-visitors, and the affective one becomes stronger once a tourist visits the place.

In their three-dimensional framework, Echtner and Ritchie (1991) suggested that the destination image can have common characteristics as well as unique features. However, contrary to the cognitive and the affective components, the unique component is not that broadly studied in the destination image literature. An example of a study which included unique image is the one by Qu *et al.* (2011) who created a conceptual model of overall

destination image consisting of cognitive, affective, and unique images. The authors found out that the unique attributes of a destination are critical to forming the overall image in consumers' minds, and that they are more important than the affective component. Consequently, a strong unique image is more likely to lead to a more favourable overall image of a destination.

2.2. Tourism Satisfaction

There is generally a debate on whether satisfaction is a cognitive judgment (e.g. Chadee & Mattsson, 1996), an affective state (e.g. Westbrook, 1980), or a combination of both (e.g. Oliver, 1993; Del Bosque & Martín, 2008; Martínez Caro & Martínez García, 2007; Bigné *et al.*, 2005; Chen & Phou, 2013). As customer satisfaction literature evolved, more and more scholars started to investigate customer satisfaction not only with the cognitive approach, but also from a more affective perspective (Del Bosque & Martín, 2008; Oliver, 1993; Martínez Caro & Martínez García, 2007; Chen & Phou, 2013). They started to include different emotional variables into the conceptualization of satisfaction, particularly in the service and tourism research, since these industries have an experimental nature and the consumers' feelings are a big part of their experience (Bigné *et al.*, 2005; Martínez Caro & Martínez García, 2007).

Oliver (1993), adding to his cognitive paradigm an affective component, suggests that satisfaction is also influenced by negative and positive emotions. According to this affective approach, satisfaction is defined as the consumer's fulfilment response – whether or not the product/service was able to provide the desired level of pleasure (Oliver, 1993). The latter, together with arousal, form the two dimensions of emotions (Bigné *et al.*, 2005), where arousal is the extent to which a person feels activated or stimulated (Russell & Pratt, 1980) and pleasure is the degree to which a person feels good, joyful, or happy (Bigné *et al.*, 2005).

In recent years, the mostly adopted approach is a combination of both – the cognitive-affective model – which suggests that satisfaction is influenced by both the cognitive judgments of the consumers, as well as their emotional response to the experience (e.g. Oliver, 1993; Bigné *et al.*, 2005; Martínez Caro & Martínez García, 2007; Del Bosque & Martín, 2008; Chen & Phou, 2013). In this light, the mental processes of assessing the experience are done by the cognitive system, whereas emotions are related to the consumer's feelings towards the service (Del Bosque & Martín, 2008).

2.3. Relationship between Destination Image and Tourism Satisfaction

Tourism satisfaction has been extensively studied in the literature regarding destination image. The positive relationship between the two constructs is well established in past studies (e. g. Bigné *et al.*, 2001; Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Aliman *et al.*, 2016).

One stream of research is dedicated to examining the role of the predetermined destination image in the formation of expectations prior to the trip, which are later used to evaluate satisfaction by comparing them with the actual experience. Tourists depend on their previous knowledge about a destination in order to be able to evaluate whether it can satisfy their needs (Chen & Phou, 2013).

Another stream of research is dedicated to proving the positive influence of destination image on tourist satisfaction (e.g. Bigné *et al.*, 2001; Chiu *et al.*, 2016, Ramseook-Munhurrun *et al.*, 2016; Chi & Qu, 2008; Loureiro & Gonzalez, 2008; Aliman *et al.*, 2016). Bigné *et al.* (2001) report that destination image directly influences perceived quality and satisfaction. Similarly, Ramseook-Munhurrun *et al.* (2015) show that destination image is a direct determinant of satisfaction, and Aliman *et al.* (2016) demonstrate that the higher the destination image which tourists hold, the higher the satisfaction levels. Chiu *et al.* (2016) further evidence that both the cognitive and the affective components of destination image influence satisfaction. Moreover, destination image directly influences attribute-based satisfaction, and destination image and attribute satisfaction are both direct antecedents of overall satisfaction (Chi & Qu, 2008).

Having the aforementioned research in mind, the following hypotheses are suggested:

H1: Cognitive destination image and tourist satisfaction are positively related.

H2: Affective destination image and tourist satisfaction are positively related.

H3: Unique destination image and tourist satisfaction are positively related.

2.4. Post-Trip Intention to Recommend a Destination

Intention to recommend has been studied extensively in the marketing and tourism literature. Confente (2015) did a critical review of 46 studies on word-of-mouth communications (WOM) conducted between 1987 and 2013. Some of the studies were based on the influence of WOM on travel decisions (e.g. Murphy *et al.*, 2007; Leach *et al.*, 2008), online WOM and the features of online reviews (e.g. Stringam & Gerdes Jr.,

2010; Racherla *et al.*, 2013; Park & Allen, 2013), the eWOM influence on travel decisions (e.g. Patterson, 2007), and the motivations of consumers to search for WOM (e.g. Kim *et al.*, 2011).

Current definition of WOM includes not only all types of informal interpersonal communications from people that the consumers know, as in the past definitions, but also sources from online platforms and other influencers which are not related to the brand or the sellers Confente (2015). The emergence of social media networks, blogs, websites, recommendation sites, and virtual communities made it possible for people to share and read each other's opinions about different products, services, and experiences, which led to the emergence of the concept of eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth) (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Confente, 2015). In the tourism industry, websites, such as TripAdvisor, Zomato, and FourSquare, offer a platform for consumers to share their experiences and perceptions about destinations, hotels, restaurants, tours, etc. (Sigala *et al.*, 2012). Positive reviews online work as free advertising for destinations and tourism providers, however negative comments online can have the opposite effect and damage the image and reputation of the company/destination (Chen & Law, 2016). Although eWOM is a relatively new area of research, it has been gaining popularity over the last decade (Chen & Law, 2016). eWOM studies in hospitality and tourism management, in the 2008-2014 period, showed that research was generally related to three topics: the nature and characteristics of eWOM, antecedents of eWOM, and its impact (Chen & Law, 2016).

2.5. Relationships between Destination Image, Tourism Satisfaction, and Intention to Recommend a Place

The literature suggests that both destination image and satisfaction are important antecedents of intention to recommend a place (Bigné *et al.*, 2001; Prayag *et al.*, 2017; De Nisco *et al.*, 2015). Intention to recommend is one of the most important behavioural outcomes triggered by destination image (e.g. Baloglu *et al.* 2014; Bigné *et al.*, 2001; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Qu *et al.*, 2011; Chiu *et al.*, 2016; Prayag *et al.*, 2017). Baloglu *et al.* (2014) showed that cognitive, affective, and overall destination images are all predictors of intention to recommend for first-time visitors, whereas repeat visitors do not rely on cognitive destination image while recommending it.

Tourism literature has also demonstrated that tourists with higher levels of satisfaction are more willing to spread positive WOM (e.g. Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Bigné *et al.*, 2001; Chi & Qu, 2008; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Chiu *et al.*, 2016; Prayag *et al.*, 2017).

This was also shown in the study of Phillips *et al.* (2013), which indicates that both attribute-based and overall satisfaction are predictors of positive WOM. Moreover, Ozturk & Gogtas (2016) researched how the satisfaction of cruise visitors with a destination can influence their intention to recommend it to people in their social and professional network. They suggested that satisfaction with a destination has a positive influence on the word-of-mouth recommendations intentions of the tourists.

Based on the aforementioned literature, four hypotheses are formulated as follows:

H4: Cognitive destination image and intention to recommend are positively related.

H5: Affective destination image and intention to recommend are positively related.

H6: Unique destination image and intention to recommend are positively related.

H7: Tourism satisfaction and intention to recommend are positively related.

2.6. Post-Visit Intentions towards Products made in the visited Country

In general, there are two major concepts which have been studied in the literature with regards to intention towards a country's products: country-of-origin image (COI) and tourism destination image (TDI) (e.g. Elliot *et al.*, 2011; Lee & Lockshin, 2012, Papadopoulos & Heslop, 1986; Hallberg, 2005). Even though they have emerged as separate constructs, both are focused on studying how the image of a specific country/destination could impact on consumer behaviour (Elliot *et al.*, 2011). Interactions between the tourism, product, and overall image of a place have been studied in a very few studies. For instance, Elliot *et al.* (2011) first proposed an integrative model, encompassing both the product and tourism sides of a country image. They studied how the cognitive and affective country image and products and destination familiarity impact the products and destination beliefs as well as their receptivity (i.e. the intentions towards the products and the destination). Later, De Nisco *et al.* (2015, 2016) added tourism satisfaction to the latter model, in order to understand how it influences the intention towards tourism and products made in the country of travel. However, the relationship between the post-visit intentions towards the destination and the destination's products has not been paid the same attention.

In terms of COI, previous studies have demonstrated that customers tend to have a more favourable opinion about products made in countries with positive images (Chattalas *et al.*, 2008; Lee & Lockshin, 2012). Bilkey & Nes (1982) found that the country image alone is an influential factor for consumers to evaluate the quality of products which they have never tried or purchased before. In TDI, Papadopoulos &

Heslop (1986) studied how the opinion of Canadians about another country's products varies between those who have visited the country and those who have not. The authors found a significant difference in the opinions of the two groups, proving that visiting a destination changes how the country's products are perceived. This was further confirmed by Hallberg (2005) who found that travel experiences can cause changes in the travellers' intentions towards products associated with the visited country.

According to the reviewed studies, the following hypotheses are defined:

H8: Cognitive destination image and post-visit intentions towards country's products are positively related.

H9: Affective destination image and post-visit intentions towards country's products are positively related.

H10: Unique destination image and post-visit intentions towards country's products are positively related.

H11: Tourism satisfaction and post-visit intentions towards country's products are positively related.

H12: Intention to recommend a tourism destination and post-visit intention towards country's products are positively related.

2.7. Conceptual Model

Figure 1 presents the conceptual model and the twelve hypotheses. The relationships between the three components of destination image and intention to recommend and post-visit intention towards country's products will be analysed through the mediation of tourist satisfaction.

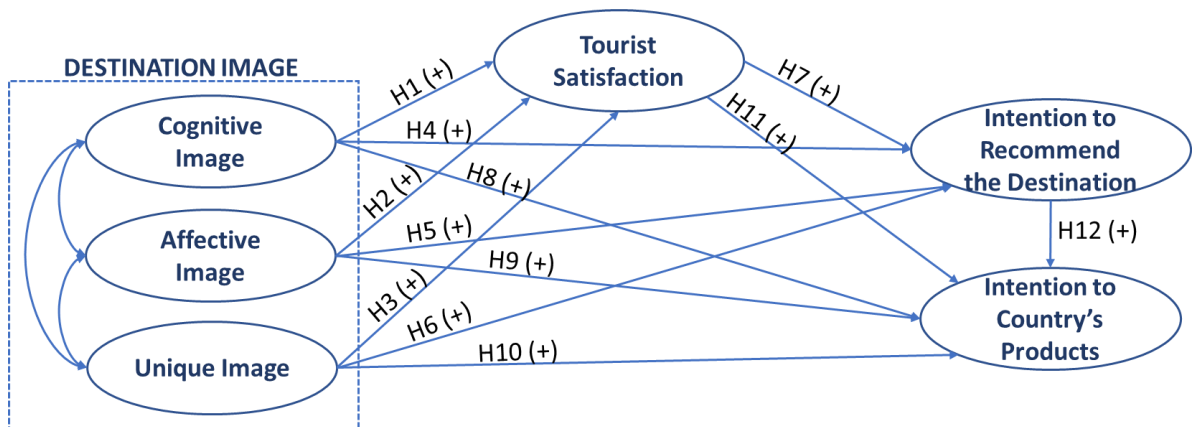


Figure 1: Research model and hypotheses

3. Destination Sofia, Bulgaria

Sofia is the capital of Bulgaria and its largest city, located in the western part of the country. As of 2015, the city has an estimated population of 1,260,120 people (World Population Review, 2017). It is the main administrative, industrial and transportation centre of the country. Moreover, it is one of the oldest cities in the world, and as such, it has a rich cultural heritage with 1400 cultural monuments. It also has a rich cultural life with numerous film, music, and art festivals being hosted there every year.

Sofia is surrounded by three mountains – Vitosha to the south, Lyulin to the west, and the Balkan Range to the north, offering natural attractions and hiking opportunities. Vitosha Natural Park offers opportunities for several adventure and other extreme sports. The Bulgarian government has taken actions into building the image of the city as a sports destination. Many marathons and sports events were hosted in the past years which has led to the title European Capital of Sport 2018.

International tourism in Sofia has significantly increased over the last years. The Bulgarian capital was ranked as the third European city, which registered the highest growth in terms of international tourists for the period 2009-2016. The city was visited by 1.19 million tourists in 2016, which is a growth of 18% in comparison with the previous year (Mastercard, 2017). According to the Bulgarian financial media Capital (Stoilova, 2016), one reason for this was the fact that the low-cost airline RyanAir started operating with 21 flights from Sofia in September 2016. Most of the tourists spend a weekend in the city (Stoilova, 2016). Tourists recognise that the city has a good balance between price and quality of food, accommodation, and nightlife and they are attracted because of its “exotic unfamiliarity” (Stoilova, 2016). Therefore, it is important to work on creating a destination brand and identity. According to the Sofia municipality, the aim is to position Sofia as a “modern European city focused on cultural tourism” (Stoilova, 2016).

4. Methodological Approach

The adopted methodology consists of both a qualitative and a quantitative study. Firstly, a qualitative text analysis of online blog posts was performed to determine the measures of the construct of unique image. The second phase was focused on the quantitative analysis, which included the questionnaire design, sample collection and data analysis.

4.1. Phase I: Qualitative Text Analysis

The first phase of the research process was to identify and create a list of the unique features of Sofia, which were later used to measure the perception of unique image in the questionnaire. In order to identify the items, a text mining analysis of UGC was performed using NVivo 12. Text mining is “a computer assisted technique that is equipped with the capability to extract information and trends from large amounts of textual data, giving an overview of the main issues discussed” (Aureli, 2017:4). Text mining has found wide application in a number of fields, including academic and industry research, social media and web analysis, business intelligence, etc. (Talib *et al.*, 2016). The process of text mining offers different techniques and tools to extract information from a text, including summarization, classification, clustering, natural language processing, etc. The latter could be used for opinion mining, feature extraction, sentiment, predictive, and trend analysis (Talib *et al.*, 2016). In this research, the type of data analysed is UGC in the form of blog posts. The techniques used include text summarization and classification.

The final data set included a total of 72 blog posts published between 2015-2018. All of the posts were extracted from individual blogs written by foreign visitors in English, and the total number of words accounted for 86,395. The type of blogs at hand was on travelling, and the selected posts included guides, tips, and advice about what to do while visiting the city. Moreover, they were based on the personal opinion and experience of the bloggers, who own the websites. After the data was collected, it was coded into an Excel spreadsheet. Additionally, it was corrected for spelling mistakes by running a spell check and the names of tourist attractions were checked to make sure that they were written in the same manner.

The first step after importing the data in NVivo was to code the text into different nodes. Coding is an essential part of qualitative analyses as it helps to gather all of the quotes and references about a particular concept into a separate folder for further exploration. This separate folder is called a node and it serves as a sort of a container for

different themes and concepts. The process of coding into nodes helps to identify patterns and generate ideas in the research materials (Wong, 2008). This can be done both automatically and manually. In this study, coding was done manually as the concept under analysis was to identify unique features. Some studies (e.g. Sotiriadou *et al.*, 2014) have brought it up that the manual data analysis could be subjective, but also more engaging for the researchers.

Each of the 72 blog posts was analysed separately. Common codes were grouped into 10 different nodes and 24 sub-nodes, presented in Table 1, featuring both cognitive and affective features which were considered as unique by the blog writers.

----- INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE -----

4.2. Phase II: Quantitative Analysis

4.2.1. Sample and Data Collection Procedure

To test the proposed model, a survey was conducted on a sample of international tourists. The data collection took place over the course of four weeks in the months March and April of 2018. The questionnaire was administered both face-to-face and online. Face-to-face was done predominantly by asking foreign visitors to fill it on paper or on a tablet in the departure zones of Sofia Airport before leaving the city. Additionally, a smaller number of questionnaires were distributed at the Visit Sofia's tourism office and other institutions, such as museums, galleries, hostels, etc. for self-administration. The questionnaire was also distributed online by contacting people who left social media reviews about the city's attractions during the period of the study. The websites used include Facebook, TripAdvisor, Twitter, and Instagram. The questionnaire itself included 18 questions relating to decision-making factors, destination image, tourist satisfaction, intention to recommend the city, intentions toward the recommendation and purchase of Bulgarian products, socio-demographics of respondents, and characterization of the trip. Appendix 1 presents the questionnaire.

A pre-test was performed on a sample of 58 prior to collecting the final sample. The internal consistency analysis of each construct, more specifically the Cronbach's alpha, was examined in order to see how closely related the items are as a group. Alpha increases as the correlations among items increase, therefore it is known as a measure of the internal consistency of instrument reliability. The reliability scores of Cronbach's alpha for each

construct were between 0.808 and 0.934 and were considered as good and excellent reliability, respectively.

A quota sampling method was applied. This method is used when there is no sampling frame available. The strata were defined by country of origin and age groups, in proportion to the population distribution. As official data about the tourists' characterization in Sofia was not found, unofficial data about the country of origin and age from tourist centres was used instead. In order to avoid bias and diversify the data, the interviewer aimed to collect data on different dates with different flight destinations, as well as on various places in Sofia. At the end of the survey, a total of 314 respondents from 55 countries constitute the sample.

4.2.2. Measures of the Model Constructs

Adapted scales from previous studies were used to create measures for each one of the model constructs. They were selected based on the specific characteristics of the destination. The unique image was measured using the multi-attribute approach (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991), through the 24 features obtained from the qualitative text analysis of the blog posts. These included both cognitive and affective variables which were considered unique by the blog posts writers. The cognitive image measurement was developed by selecting 29 items from previous studies (e.g. Stylos *et al.*, 2016; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Qu *et al.*, 2011; Basaran, 2016; Ramseook-Munhurrun *et al.*, 2015). One additional item "Availability of organized sightseeing tours" was added by the researchers. Similarly, the affective image was measured by 14 variables, four items ('Pleasant', 'Exciting', 'Relaxing' and 'Arousing') developed by Baloglu and McCleary (1999) and the remaining added by the researchers.

Tourism satisfaction was measured by five items which were taken from Yoon & Uysal (2005), Bigné *et al.* (2001), and De Nisco *et al.* (2015). One item ("My visit to Sofia was a wonderful surprise") was also added by the researchers. Intention to recommend was measured by six items, relating to the intention to recommend face-to-face and intention to recommend online. The five measures for the post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products were adapted from De Nisco *et al.* (2015). These statements as well as those related to the unique and cognitive features of Sofia were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) whereas the those related to affective image, tourist satisfaction and intention to recommend Sofia

were measured based on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

4.2.3. Statistical Analysis

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used to test the hypothesised relationships and to validate the proposed model displayed in Figure 1. AMOS 25 was used to estimate the model and the maximum likelihood estimation method was adopted.

The two-stage modelling process proposed by Anderson & Gerbing (1988) was considered. In the first stage, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted in order to properly evaluate the overall measurement model (Anderson and Gerbing, 1982) regarding to the item and construct reliability, and convergent and discriminant validity. In the second stage, the structural component of the model was estimated based on the overall measurement model results. In addition to the estimates of the hypothesised relationships (direct effects between two constructs), indirect and total effects were estimated to assess whether the tourism satisfaction and intention to recommend factors could be considered as mediators. The bias-corrected bootstrap was adopted to produce more accurate confidence limits for the indirect effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The Bollen-Stine bootstrap procedure with 2000 samples was also used to obtain a goodness-of-fit statistic (Bollen & Stine, 1990) appropriate to non-normal data.

Along with the Chi-Square test, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and the Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation (RMSEA) were used to assess the model-data fit. The selection of these indices was made based on Hair *et al.*'s (2014) recommendation to have at least one absolute and one incremental fit indices.

5. Results

5.1. Sample Characterization

The sample is composed by 314 respondents, from which 50.6% are male. The age of the respondents was distributed mostly between 18 and 45 years old, with a higher concentration in the “25-34” range (34.7%). The majority of the respondents have Bachelor (35.7%) or Master Degree (33.4%), average income (41.7%) or above average income (36.0%); 25% come from Southern Europe whereas about 20% come from Western Europe. In terms of separate countries, most tourists came from the United Kingdom (11.2%), Italy (10.2%), United States of America (6.7%), Spain (6.3%), Germany (5.7%), and France (5.7%).

5.2. Overall Measurement Model

CFA were conducted in order to test the overall measurement model. Several items of the measurement scales were dropped from the analysis because of lower item reliability or because they did not assess the model convergent validity criterion. Table 2 presents some measures of the overall measurement model. All items and constructs exhibit reliability, as can be proved by the standardized loadings and CR values, respectively. Regarding the convergent validity, the AVE value for all latent constructs exceeds the minimum required value of 0.50 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988), except that of Unique Image. According to Ping (2009), a low AVE value in a first-time model could be ignored as the model can be viewed as largely exploratory. The Unique Image set of items is a new set of measures that was defined based on the text-mining analysis of the UGC about the city, and consequently it is the first-time the factor is estimated. Therefore, the low AVE of Unique Image might be acceptable in this study since it does not produce major discriminant validity problems. In fact, although the Fornell and Larcker’s (1981) criterion is not verified for some constructs (contrary to what was intended, the square root of the AVE values of Affective Image and Tourist Satisfaction are slightly lower than the correlations between these latent variables and two other latent variables), it can be considered there is evidence of discriminant validity since the values are close from each other (see table 3).

Whereas the skewness and kurtosis values for each item (see Table 2) are within the recommended values to assess the univariate normality (lower than 3 and 7, respectively), the multivariate kurtosis value of 17.934 confirms that the data are slightly departing from multivariate normality (it should be lower than 5). For non-normal data, Bollen-Stine

bootstrap was used to provide the correct p-value for the chi-square statistic to assess overall model fit (Bollen & Stine, 1992). The Bollen-Stine bootstrap p value is slightly lower than 0.01, which recommends the model rejection. However, as Bollen-Sine p is very sensitive to sample size, researchers advise to use also other measures-of-fit as a criterion for model acceptance/rejection (Bollen & Stine, 1992). Therefore, the overall model fit indices indicate an acceptable fit ($X^2=1081.657$ $df=449$, Bollen-Sine $p=0.0079$; TLI=0.887; CFI=0.898; RMSEA=0.067, $p_{Close}<0.01$; 90% CI=(0.062; 0.072)).

----- INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE -----

----- INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE -----

5.3. Hypotheses testing

Table 4 presents the standardised and unstandardised coefficient estimates of the hypothesised direct effects between constructs. 1000 bootstrapped samples and the bias corrected method were used in order to obtain the estimated significance level (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Table 5 presents the standardised estimates of the indirect and total effects.

----- INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE -----

----- INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE -----

Results show that the three components of the destination image have different effects on the model evaluative and behavioural variables. Only the perceptions of affective image people have about the destination directly influence its satisfaction with the city (std. coef.=0.791; $p<0.01$) and its intention to recommend (std. coef.=0.242; $p<0.01$), confirming the hypotheses H2 and H5 respectively. However, the tourist's satisfaction is explained by 62.4% of destination image. The cognitive image also directly influences the intention to recommend the city, although this influence is the weakest (std. coef.=0.138; $p<0.01$); Hence, H4 is confirmed. The unique image only has an effect on the intention towards the country's products (std. coef.=0.168; $p<0.05$), meaning that H10

is verified but H3 and H6 are not. Regarding to the relationship between the evaluative and behavioural variables, the tourist satisfaction positively affects the intention of destination recommendation to others (std. coef.=0.570; $p<0.01$), verifying H7, and indirectly the intention towards the country's products although this latter effect is weak (std. indirect eff.=0.142; $p<0.05$). The intention towards country's products is also directly influenced by the intention to recommend the destination (std. coef.=0.249; $p<0.05$), as well as by the unique image as above mentioned; In addition, it is indirectly influenced by the cognitive image in a very weak way through the intention to recommend (std. indirect eff.=0.040; $p<0.05$). Finally, the tourist satisfaction and intention to recommend can be considered as partial mediators for two relationships; the former mediates the relationship between the affective image and the intention to recommend and the latter between the cognitive image and the intention towards country's products.

Together, tourists' destination image and satisfaction as predictors explain a high proportion of variance in intention to recommend the destination ($R^2=0.782$). Nevertheless, as far as the intention towards a country's products is concerned, their antecedents only account for 18.5% of its variance.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This research aims to study destination image in the particular context of emerging destinations. In this sense, it proposes and tests a conceptual model which aims to examine how the cognitive, affective, and unique components of destination image influence the tourist satisfaction and its post-visit intentions to recommend the destination and towards its products. Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria, was chosen as it was ranked as the 3rd fastest growing city in Europe in terms of overnight visitors (Mastercard, 2017). Examining foreign tourist perceptions of the image of the city upon visiting it, and post-visit behaviours that result from those perceptions, will elicit a better understanding what can be improved in the marketing efforts of the local tourism institutions and businesses.

Results from a sample of 314 international visitors to Sofia provide empirical support to most hypotheses formulated. The hypothesised relationships between cognitive, affective, and unique images with tourism satisfaction (H1, H2, and H3) are not all verified. The results show that the affective component of destination image has a strong impact on tourist satisfaction (H2 is supported). However, cognitive image has no significant effect on tourist satisfaction; unique image in turn, slightly negatively influences tourist satisfaction (using a significance level of 10%). These results agree partially with Chiu *et al.* (2016) who found that both affective and cognitive components influence satisfaction, although affective image has a stronger effect on satisfaction than cognitive image. Our results however, are not consistent with those of others studies, perhaps due to the latter having different premises; for instance, Kozak & Rimmington (2000), Bigné *et al.* (2001), Chi & Qu (2008), Loureiro & Gonzalez (2008), Ramseook-Munhurrin *et al.* (2015) and Aliman *et al.* (2016) found a positive relationship between destination image and tourist satisfaction although they have not decomposed destination image. Similarly, Chen & Tsai (2007) results suggested that destination image has not a direct but an indirect effect on satisfaction through trip quality and perceived value. In addition, Prayag *et al.* (2017) confirmed that both overall destination image and emotions arising from positive consumption experiences influence tourist satisfaction. Emotions have been defined as affective states charged with episodes of intense feelings related to a referent (Prayag *et al.*, 2017) and have been proven to influence satisfaction (e.g. Del Bosque & Martín, 2008). In the current study, affective images are emotional associations made with the city of Sofia. Thus, a parallelism may be drawn between the effects of Sofia's affective image on satisfaction and the emotions-satisfaction relationship of Prayag *et al.* (2017).

Regarding the determinants of intention to recommend, the results provide support for H4, H5, and H7. The affective destination image has the strongest influence on the intention of tourists to recommend Sofia (std. total effect of 0.693 through satisfaction, although the direct effect is 0.242). Apart from the affective image, WOM is also influenced by tourist satisfaction and cognitive image. Tourist satisfaction has a strong impact on intention to spread positive word-of-mouth, reiterating previous research (e.g. Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Bigné *et al.*, 2001; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008; Phillips *et al.*, 2013; De Nisco *et al.*, 2016; Ozturk & Gogtas, 2016; Prayag *et al.*, 2017). As for the components of destination image, the findings confirm Chiu *et al.* (2016) in which the authors found that the affective image has a direct influence on loyalty whereas the cognitive image has only an indirect influence on loyalty through affective image and satisfaction. Likewise, Baloglu *et al.* (2014) also found out that the affective component has a stronger effect on intention to recommend than the cognitive either for first time or repeat visitors to Jamaica. Similar to its impact on satisfaction, perceptions of the unique destination image also have an impact on WOM (using a significance level of 10%), albeit very small. Even though every image component has an indirect influence on intention to recommend in Qu *et al.*'s (2011) study, they all have different degrees of strength. The cognitive image is the strongest component of image influencing WOM, followed by unique image; The affective component is the one with the weakest influence, contrary to tourists' perceptions of Sofia in the current research.

The findings regarding the determinants of intentions towards recommendation and purchase of Bulgarian products support just two of the proposed relationships (H10 and H12). Firstly, although unique destination image is the only image factor which directly influences post-visit intentions towards products made in Bulgaria, the affective and cognitive images also have a positive effect on this construct through satisfaction and WOM. This finding is partially aligned with the results of Elliot *et al.* (2011), perhaps because Sofia is not a well-known destination. Using data from South Korean consumers attending a travel show in Seoul in order to assess their images of Japan and the USA, the study suggested that the affective country image directly impacts product receptivity for both Japan and the USA, although the effect was stronger for Japan. However, the cognitive image of these countries only influences product receptivity when mediated by product beliefs. This particular relationship is stronger for the USA than for Japan. Secondly, the current research results show that the construct of intentions towards Bulgarian products is not directly influenced by tourist satisfaction, but by positive

WOM. These results are consistent with De Nisco *et al.* (2016) who found that the higher the tourist satisfaction, the higher the tourist willingness to recommend and buy Italian products. Finally, the intention to recommend the city had the strongest direct impact on the intentions towards Bulgarian products upon visiting Sofia.

The theoretical contribution of the current work to the literature on tourism marketing is threefold. All contributions are enunciated below, together with the practical implications for the tourism of Sofia, an emerging destination.

Firstly, it is one of the few studies which analyses destination image, not only with its cognitive and affective components, but also adding uniqueness. In addition, this research not only provides further insights on the influence of unique image on intention to recommend the destination, and post-visit intentions towards products made in the visited country, but it is also the first study to test the influence of unique destination image on tourist satisfaction. Moreover, it also uses a new updated methodology to extract unique features of destinations based on text-mining of UGC, in this case, blog posts about tourists' experience in Sofia. Text-mining of UGC proved to be an effective method, as it not only makes access to information easier and faster but also reflects vivid visitor experiences.

According to Qu *et al.* (2011), identifying the unique elements of a destination should be the starting point of every positioning strategy as these elements are key differentiators. As this research shows, in the context of Sofia, unique image has a significant influence on tourist post-visitation behaviour, namely on recommendation and purchasing intentions of Bulgarian products. As Sofia is an emerging tourist destination, policymakers need to promote its unique features, using imagery emphasizing interesting characteristics of the city, which makes it unique.

Secondly, a conceptual model is put forth, adding several variables to already tested frameworks, namely unique destination image and post-visit intentions towards products in an emerging destination. Findings show that affective image influences all the constructs. Moreover, it also has the highest impact on almost all the constructs, except for post-visit intentions towards products, where the most influential construct is traditional word-of-mouth. Additionally, a path of relationships is derived from the parameter estimates: affective image – tourist satisfaction – intention to recommend the destination – intention towards country's products. These suggest that the way tourists feel during their stay is the most influential factor in their travel experience. Therefore, as tourism is based on experiences, tourism businesses should be focussed on creating

offerings which are able to invoke a positive affective evaluation in consumers, as this will lead to a better overall image, increased satisfaction levels, and positive word-of-mouth offline and online. Electronic word-of-mouth could be especially beneficial since it does not only provide positive feedback about the image of Sofia, but also of the services being offered there, such as tours, hotels, restaurants, etc. Regarding the cognitive component of destination image of Sofia, it has a significant impact on all the constructs, except on tourist satisfaction. It is the least important destination image component to influence post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products but is more influential than unique image in recommendation intention. The cognitive image had little impact on the behavioural outcomes, perhaps because it referred to attributes related to local cuisine, accommodation and local products. These results may be attributable to Sofia being an emerging destination whose image has not yet been consolidated.

Thirdly, this is one of the few studies which empirically tests the influence of the different components of destination image on tourists' post-visit intentions towards products made in the visited country (De Nisco *et al.*, 2015; Elliot *et al.*, 2011). The study links two streams of research, COI and TDI, integrating tourism with country's products, thus exploring the crossover relationships between them. The current study shows that all destination image components significantly influence post-visit intentions towards Bulgarian products, but affective image has the strongest impact. Furthermore, unique image has a direct positive influence on the intentions towards products after visiting the country, regardless of any other variable. As the unique image items resulting from the CFA focus essentially on a multicultural city with its own peculiarities like the open book market, squat shops, etc., it is not surprising to find a relationship to Bulgarian products. This should be considered by tourism professionals and officials in the way they present the local products to international tourists. Finally, this is the first study to test the relationship between the intention to spread positive WOM and post-visit intentions to recommend and buy Bulgarian products. Results show that only the traditional WOM has a significant effect on the intention to recommend and buy Bulgarian products once the tourists are back in their country.

This study highlights the idea that in an emerging destination all the image components contribute in different ways to image and branding destination (Qu *et al.*, 2011). The affective image of an emerging destination must be noted in creating the destination identity and used for its positioning strategy as suggested by Baloglu & Brinberg (1997). The cognitive image component should gradually be created in the

tourist's mind, since it also has a strong influence on post-visit behaviours as has been evidenced in research on mature destinations. The importance of unique image, on the other hand, is related to its usefulness in positioning the destination brand and differentiating it from other potential destinations (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Qu et al. 2011). In particular, regarding to its effects on intentions towards the country's products, the higher the unique image tourists have, the higher will be their intention to recommend and purchase the country's products.

7. Limitations and recommendations for future research

This study has some limitations that should be listed. The first limitation is related to the sample composition. Some of the age groups, namely 65 or older and 55-64, are under-represented in the study. Future research should use a sample including a more represented respondents from these age groups. Another limitation is that the questionnaire was only in English. During the data collection, there were several occasions when tourists visiting Sofia could not fill out the survey because they were unable to understand. The questionnaire needs to be translated into different languages, based on statistical data about the country-of-origin of the tourists. A third limitation is related to the low AVE value of the Unique Image factor. Although the AVE value could be improved by dropping items with large measurement error variance, it could result in an item set of higher AVE value which could be less content or face valid than before items were dropped (Ping, 2009). Furthermore, as some researchers do not consider AVE as a measure of convergent validity, but rather prefer reliability and since the unique image factor and its items demonstrate strong reliability, it was decided to keep the unique image factor composed by eight items and a low AVE value. However, the resulting unique image factor is provisional, and more measurement work is needed. The fourth limitation is that the three components of destination image were measured in the final model with very few items. As Sofia is an emerging destination, tourists have different views on destination image. Some items consequently showed low intra-correlations and were thus removed from the overall measurement model. The items that remain in the model are those in which diverse sources of information converge (Kim & Chen, 2016) allowing tourists to form a common image of Sofia.

Future research should test the proposed conceptual model in different emerging capital cities in Europe and compare it with the current findings. The method of studying unique destination image by text-mining of UGC (whether it is blog posts, website

reviews, social media posts, etc.) should be replicated for other cities. For instance, studying neighbouring capital cities (Bucharest, Athens, Skopje, Belgrade) could provide insights on how they differ and what makes each unique.

References

- Aliman, N. K., Hashim, S. M., Harudin, S., & Wahid, S. D. M. (2016). Tourists' satisfaction with a destination: An investigation on visitors to Langkawi Island. *International Journal of Marketing Studies*, 8(3), 173–188.
- Anderson, J., & Gerbing, D. (1988). Structural equation modeling in practice: A review and recommended two-step approach. *Psychological Bulletin*, 103(3), 411–423.
- Arslanova, L., Agapito, D., & Pinto, P. (2017). Tourism destination image of Russia in the perspective of the Portuguese market. *Journal of Spatial and Organizational Dynamics*, 5(2), 146–158.
- Aureli, S. (2017). A comparison of content analysis usage and text mining in CSR corporate disclosure. *The International Journal of Digital Accounting Research*, 17, 1-32.
- Bagozzi, R., & Yi, Y. (1988). On the Evaluation of Structural Equation Models. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Sciences*, 16, 74-94.
- Baloglu, S. (1999). A path analytical model of visitation intention involving information sources, socio-psychological motivations and destination images. *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, 8(3), 81-90.
- Baloglu, S., & Brinberg, D. (1997). Affective Images of Tourism Destinations. *Journal of Travel Research*, 35(4), 11-15.
- Baloglu, S., & McCleary, K. (1999). A model of destination image formation. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 26(4), 868-897.
- Baloglu, S., Henthorne, T. L., & Sahin, S. (2014). Destination image and brand personality of Jamaica: a model of tourist behaviour. *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, 31(8), 1057-1070.
- Basaran, U. (2016). Examining the relationship of cognitive, affective, and conative destination image: A research on Safranbolu, Turkey. *International Business Research*, 9(5), 164-179.
- Berli, A., & Martín, J. D. (2004). Factors influencing destination image. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 31(3), 657-681.
- Bigné, J. E., Sanchez, M. I., & Sanchez J. (2001). Tourism Image, evaluation variables and after purchase behaviour: inter-relationship. *Tourism Management*, 22(6), 607-616.
- Bigné, J. E., Andreu, L., & Gnoth, J. (2005). The theme part experience: an analysis of pleasure, arousal and satisfaction. *Tourism Management*, 26, 833-844.

- Bilkey, W. J., & Nes, E. (1982). Country-of-origin effects on product evaluations. *Journal of International Business*, 13(1), 89-99.
- Bollen, K. A., & Stine, R. (1990). Direct and indirect effects: Classical and bootstrap estimates of variability. *Sociological Methodology*, 20, 115–140.
- Bollen, K. A., & Stine, R. (1992). Bootstrapping Goodness-of-Fit Measures in Structural Equation Models. *Sociological Methods and Research*, 21(2), 205-229.
- Chadee, D., & Mattsson, J. (1996). An empirical assessment of customer satisfaction in tourism. *The Services Industrial Journal*, 16(3), 305-320.
- Chattalas, M., Kramer, T., & Takada, H. (2008). The impact of national stereotypes on the country of origin effect A conceptual framework. *International Marketing Review*, 25(1), 54-74.
- Chen, C., & Phou, S. (2013). A closer look at destination image: Image, personality, relationship and loyalty. *Tourism Management*, 36, 269 – 278.
- Chen, C. G., & Tsai, D. (2007). How destination image and evaluative factors affect behavioural intentions. *Tourism Management*, 28, 1115-1122.
- Chen, Y-F., & Law, R. (2016). A Review of research on electronic word-of-mouth in hospitality and tourism management. *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration*, 17(4), 347-372
- Chevalier, J., & Mayzlin, D. (2006). The Effect of Word of Mouth on Sales: Online Book Reviews. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 43, 345–354.
- Chiu, W., Zeng, S., & Cheng, P. S. (2016). The influence of destination image and tourist satisfaction on tourist loyalty: a case study of Chinese tourists in Korea. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 10(2), 223-234.
- Chi, C. G.-Q. & Qu, H. (2008). Examining the structural relationships of destination image, tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty: An integrated approach. *Tourism Management*, 29, 624-636.
- Chiadmi, N. E., Ladhari, R., & Souiden, N. (2017). Destination personality and destination image. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 32, 54 – 70.
- Confente, I. (2015). Twenty-five years of word-of-mouth studies: A critical review of tourism research. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 17(6), 613-624.
- Crompton, J. L., Fakeye, P. C., & Lue, C.-C. (1992). Positioning: The Example of the Lower Rio Grande Valley in the Winter Long Stay Destination Market. *Journal of Travel Research*, 31(2), 20-26.

- De Nisco, A., Mainolfi, G., Marino, V., & Napolitano, M. R. (2015). Tourism satisfaction effect on general country image, destination image, and post-visit intentions. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 21(4), 305-317.
- De Nisco, A., Elliot, S., & Papadopoulos, N. (2016). Country Image, Tourist Satisfaction, and Future Visit and Product Purchase Intentions: An Integrative Model. *Travel and Tourism Research Association: Advancing Tourism Research Globally*, 16. Retrieved from: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/ttra/2016/Academic_Papers_Visual/16.
- Del Bosque, I. R., & Martín, H. S. (2008) Tourist satisfaction: a cognitive-affective model. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 35, 551-573.
- Echtner, C., & Ritchie, B. (1991). The meaning and measurement of destination image. *The Journal of Tourism Studies*, 2, 2-12.
- Echtner, C., & Ritchie, B. (1993). The measurement of destination image: an empirical assessment. *Journal of Travel Research*, 31(4), 3-13.
- Elliot, S., Papadopoulos, N., & Kim, S. S. (2011). An integrative model of place image: Exploring the relationships between destination, product, and country images. *Journal of Travel Research*, 50(5), 520-534.
- Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 18(1), 39–50.
- Gunn, C. A. (1972). *Vacationscape: designing tourist regions*. Washington: Taylor & Francis.
- Hair, J. F. J., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., & Anderson, R. E. (2014). *Multivariate data analysis* (7th ed.). Essex, UK: Pearson New International Edition.
- Hallberg, A. (2005). *Post-travel consumption country-of-origin effects of international travel experiences*. Doctoral PhD dissertation, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.
- Hosany, S., Ekinci, Y., & Uysal, M. (2007). Destination image and destination personality. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 1(1), 62-81.
- Hunt, J. (1975). Image as a factor in tourism development. *Journal of Travel Research*, 1(3), 1-7.
- Kim, H., & Chen, J. S. (2016). Destination image formation process: a holistic model. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 22(2), 154-166.
- Kim, S. S., Mckercher, B., & Lee, H. (2009). Tracking tourism destination image perception. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 36(4), 715-718.

- Kim, E. E. K., Mattila, A. S., & Baloglu, S. (2011). Effects of Gender and Expertise on Consumers' Motivation to Read Online Hotel Reviews. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 52, 399–406.
- Kotler, P., Haider, D. H., & Rein, I. (1993). *Marketing places*. New York: The Free Press.
- Kozak, M., & Rimmington, M. (2000). Tourist satisfaction with Mallorca, Spain, as an off-season holiday destination. *Journal of Travel Research*, 38(3), 260-269.
- Leach, M. P., Liu, A. H., & Winsor, R. D. (2008). The Impact of Attitudes, Word-of-Mouth, and Value Congruence on Conference Participation: A Comparison of Attending and Non-attending Organizational Members. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 16(3), 246–269.
- Lee, R., & Lockshin, L. (2012). Reverse country-of-origin effects of product perceptions on destination image. *Journal of Travel Research*, 51(4), 502-511.
- Lopes, S. D. F. (2011). Destination image: origins, developments and implications. *Revista de Turismo Património Cultural*, 9(2), 305-315.
- Loureiro, S. M. C., & González, F. J. M. (2008). The importance of quality, satisfaction, trust, and image in relation to rural tourist loyalty. *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, 25(2), 117-136.
- Martínez Caro, L., & Martínez García, J. A. (2007). Cognitive-affective model of consumer satisfaction. An exploratory study within the framework of a sporting event. *Journal of Business Research*, 60(2), 108-114.
- Mastercard (2017). *Mastercard Destination Cities Index*. Retrieved from: <https://newsroom.mastercard.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Mastercard-Destination-Cities-Index-Report.pdf> (last accessed on 10 September 2018).
- Marchiori, E., & Onder, I. (2017). A comparison of pre-visit beliefs and projected visual images of destinations. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 21, 42–53.
- Murphy, L., Mascardo, G., & Benckendorff, P. (2007). Exploring Word-of-Mouth Influences on Travel Decisions: Friend sand Relatives vs. Other Travellers. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 21, 517–527.
- Oliver, R. (1993). Cognitive, affective and attribute bases of the satisfaction response. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 20, 418-430.
- Ozturk, U. A., & Gogtas, H. (2016). Destination attributes, satisfaction, and the visitor's intent to revisit and recommend. *Tourism Geographies*, 18(2), 194-212.

- Papadopoulos, N., & Heslop, L. A. (1986). Travel as a correlate of product and country images. In T. E. Muller, *Marketing* (pp. 191-200). Canada: Marketing Division, Administrative Sciences Association of Canada.
- Park, S., & Allen, J.P. (2013). Responding to Online Reviews: Problem Solving and Engagement in Hotels. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 54(1), 64–73.
- Patterson, I. (2007). Information Sources Used By Older Adults for Decision Making about Tourist and Travel Destinations. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 31, 528–533.
- Peter, J. P., & Olson, J. C. (1999). *Consumer behavior and marketing strategy*. Boston: Irwin McGraw-Hill.
- Phillips, W. J., Wolfe, K., Hodur, N., & Leistritz, F. L. (2013). Tourist word of mouth and revisit intentions to rural tourism destinations: A case of North Dakota, USA. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 15, 93-104.
- Ping, R. A. (2009). Is there any way to improve Average Variance Extracted (AVE) in a Latent Variable (LV) X (Revised)? [on-line paper]. <http://www.wright.edu/~robert.ping/ImprovAVE2.doc>.
- Prayag, G., Hosany, S., Muskat, B., & Del Chiappa, G. (2017). Understanding the Relationships between Tourists' Emotional Experiences, Perceived Overall Image, Satisfaction, and Intention to Recommend. *Journal of Travel Research*, 56(1), 41–54.
- Preacher, K. J., & Hayes, A. F. (2008). Asymptotic and resampling strategies for assessing and comparing indirect effects in multiple mediator models. *Behavior Research Methods*, 40(3), 879–891.
- Qu, H., Kim, L. H., & Im, H. H. (2011). A model of destination branding: integrating the concepts of the branding and destination image. *Tourism Management*, 32, 465-476.
- Racherla, P., Connolly, D.J., & Christodoulidou, N. (2013). What Determines Consumers' Ratings of Service Providers? An Exploratory Study of Online Traveler Reviews. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management*, 22(2), 135–161.
- Ramseook-Munhurrun, P., Seebaluck, V. N., & Naidoo, P. (2015). Examining the structural relationships of destination image, perceived value, tourist satisfaction and loyalty: case of Maritius. *Procedia Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 175, 252-259.
- Russell, J. A., & Pratt, G. A. (1980). A description of the affective quality attributed to environments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 38, 311–322.
- Sigala, M., Christou, E., & Gretzel, U. (2012). *Social Media in Travel, Tourism and Hospitality; Theory, Practice and Cases*. London: Ashgate.

- Sotiriadou, P., Brouwers, J., & Le, T. A. (2014). Choosing a qualitative data analysis tool: a comparison of NVivo and Leximancer. *Annals of Leisure Research*, 17(2), 218-234.
- Stoilova, Z. (2016). “Дискретният туристически бум в София [The Discreet Tourism Boom in Sofia]” Newspaper Capital, https://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ikonomika/obshtestvo/2016/11/20/2866308_diskretniiat_turisticheski_bum_v_sofiia/ (last accessed on 1 September 2018).
- Stringam, B. B., & Gerdes, J. Jr. (2010). An Analysis of Word-of-Mouse Ratings and Guest Comments of Online Hotel Distribution Sites. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 19(7), 773–796.
- Stylos, N., Vassiliadis, C. A., Bellou, V., & Andronikidis, A. (2016). Destination images, holistic images and personal normative beliefs: Predictors of intention to revisit a destination. *Tourism Management*, 53, 40-60.
- Talib, R., Hanif, M. K., Ayesha, S., & Fatima, F. (2016). Text mining techniques, applications and issues. *Journal of Advanced Computer Science and Applications*, 7(11), 414-418
- Tasci, A. D. A., Gartner, W. C., & Cavusgil, S. T. (2007). Conceptualization and operationalization of destination image. *Journal of Hospitality Tourism Research*, 31(2), 194-223.
- Um, S., & Crompton, J. L. (1990). Attitude determinants in tourism destination process. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 17(3), 432-448.
- Westbrook, R. A. (1980). Interpersonal affective influences on consumer satisfaction with products. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 7, 49-54.
- World Population Review (2017). *Bulgaria Population*. Retrieved from: <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/bulgaria> (accessed on 9 September 2018).
- Wong, L. (2008). Data analysis in qualitative research: a brief guide to using NVivo. *Malaysian Family Physician*, 3(1), 14–20.
- Yoon, Y., & Uysal, M. (2005). An examination of the effects of motivation and satisfaction on destination loyalty: a structural model. *Tourism Management*, 26, 45-56.

Table 1: Nodes and sub-nodes extracted from UGC

Nodes	Sub-nodes
Attractions	
	Alexander Nevsky Cathedral
	Ivan Vazov National Theatre
	National Palace of Culture
	Slaveykov Square open book market
	Square of Tolerance
	Statue of Saint Sofia
	Vitosha Boulevard
	Vitosha Mountain
Adjectives	
	Multicultural city
	One of the oldest capitals in Europe
	Quirky and charming city
	City of contrasts
	The cheapest capital in Europe
	Underrated tourism destination
Communist History and Heritage	
	Soviet Architecture and Buildings
Delicious and distinctive traditional cuisine	
	Vegetarian and vegan-friendly destination
Availability of hot mineral water	
Selection of Free Walking Tours	
Great Wi-Fi connectivity	
Sofia nightlife	
Squat shops	
Street art	

Table 2: Descriptive and reliability measures of the overall measurement model items

Items	Loading	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Cognitive Image (AVE=0.552; CR=0.892)					
Good quality of accommodations	0.627	3.777	0.887	-0.622	0.386
Good variety of accommodations	0.581	3.793	0.860	-0.586	0.540
Good quality of restaurants	0.913	4.172	0.836	-1.153	1.790
Good variety of restaurants and cuisines	0.771	4.140	0.823	-0.850	0.693
Appealing local food cuisine	0.785	4.178	0.932	-1.285	1.659
Variety of products that promote local culture	0.517	3.898	0.888	-0.595	0.226
Good value for money	0.512	4.431	0.752	-1.296	1.574
Affective Image (AVE=0.514; CR=0.840)					
Pleasant	0.875	5.825	1.250	-1.817	4.178
Exciting	0.775	5.366	1.262	-0.914	0.880
Relaxing	0.694	5.188	1.368	-0.761	0.068
Interesting	0.853	6.041	1.159	-1.906	4.748
Cosy	0.715	5.268	1.354	-0.749	0.136
Unique Image (AVE=0.344; CR=0.807)					
Ivan Vazov National Theatre	0.521	3.885	1.033	-0.693	-0.031
Square of Tolerance	0.525	3.529	1.012	-0.254	-0.329
Slaveykov Square open book market	0.568	3.363	0.973	-0.299	-0.020
Multicultural city	0.543	3.436	1.176	-0.330	-0.764
City of contrasts	0.515	3.869	1.004	-0.666	-0.055
Street art	0.642	3.334	0.998	-0.205	-0.434
Squat shops	0.602	3.118	0.999	-0.218	0.004
Sofia nightlife	0.567	3.459	1.039	-0.334	-0.166
Tourist Satisfaction (AVE=0.522; CR=0.845)					
My visit to Sofia is worth my time and effort.	0.811	6.127	1.216	-2.070	5.012
My travel experience to Sofia exceeded my expectations	0.874	5.659	1.419	-1.211	1.148
In comparison with other similar places I've visited before, Sofia is a better destination for tourism	0.706	4.557	1.610	-0.340	-0.518
My visit to Sofia was a wonderful surprise	0.874	5.344	1.547	-0.876	0.125
Overall, I am satisfied with my travel experience in Sofia	0.885	6.086	1.234	-1.931	4.191
Intention to Recommend (AVE=0.670; CR=0.858)					
I will recommend Sofia to my friends/family/ colleagues	0.915	6.025	1.328	-1.876	3.639
I will speak about my good impressions of Sofia to my friends/family/colleagues	0.917	6.121	1.250	-2.095	4.822
I will be able to give helpful information about Sofia to my friends/family/colleagues	0.710	6.140	1.045	-1.863	5.277
Intention towards Country's Products (AVE=0.717; CR=0.910)					

Once at home, I hope to be able to find Bulgarian products in local shops	0.861	3.459	1.069	-0.394	-0.425
Once at home, I would like to buy Bulgarian products	0.927	3.541	1.039	-0.384	-0.382
Once at home, I would be willing to search for Bulgarian products.	0.862	3.443	1.081	-0.232	-0.650
I will recommend to my friends/family to buy Bulgarian products.	0.774	3.793	1.020	-0.646	-0.033

Table 3: Correlation values between constructs (a)

	Cognitive Image	Affective Image	Unique Image	Tourist Satisfaction	Intention to Recommend	Intention towards Country's Products
Cognitive Image	<i>0.743</i>					
Affective Image	0.575	<i>0.717</i>				
Unique Image	0.407	0.471	<i>0.587</i>			
Tourist Satisfaction	0.479	0.707	0.318	<i>0.722</i>		
Intention to Recommend	0.576	0.729	0.414	0.747	<i>0.819</i>	
Intention towards Country's Products	0.313	0.356	0.322	0.312	0.382	<i>0.847</i>

(a) Diagonal values represent the square root of the construct AVE value.

Table 4: Coefficient estimates of the model structural relationships

Hyp.	Relationships			Std estimate	Unstd estimate	SE	t Statistic
H1	Cognitive Image	-->	Tourist Satisfaction	0.056	0.099	0.099	0.994
H2	Affective Image	-->	Tourist Satisfaction	0.791*	0.713	0.064	11.156
H3	Unique Image	-->	Tourist Satisfaction	-0.077	-0.142	0.103	-1.380
H4	Cognitive Image	-->	Intention to Recommend	0.138*	0.302	0.101	2.997
H5	Affective Image	-->	Intention to Recommend	0.242*	0.269	0.083	3.258
H6	Unique Image	-->	Intention to Recommend	0.062	0.141	0.103	1.365
H7	Tourist Satisfaction	-->	Intention to Recommend	0.570*	0.702	0.084	8.324
H8	Cognitive Image	-->	Intention towards Country's Products	0.087	0.144	0.126	1.138
H9	Affective Image	-->	Intention towards Country's Products	0.059	0.049	0.105	0.471
H10	Unique Image	-->	Intention towards Country's Products	0.168**	0.288	0.131	2.195
H11	Tourist Satisfaction	-->	Intention towards Country's Products	-0.040	-0.037	0.127	-0.296
H12	Intention to Recommend	-->	Intention towards Country's Products	0.249***	0.189	0.109	1.730

*p<0.01; ** p<0.05;*** p<0.10

Table 5: Standardised total and indirect effects

Independent Variables	Effects	Dependent Variables		
		Tourist Satisfaction	Intention to Recommend	Intention towards Country's Products
Cognitive Image	Total	0.056	0.170**	0.127***
	Indirect	—	0.032	0.0400**
Affective Image	Total	0.791*	0.693*	0.200*
	Indirect	—	0.451*	0.141**
Unique Image	Total	-0.077	0.018	0.176*
	Indirect	—	-0.044	0.008
Tourist Satisfaction	Total	—	0.510*	0.102
	Indirect	—	—	0.142**
Intention to Recommend	Total	—	—	0.249**
	Indirect	—	—	—

*p<0.01; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.10