Nature-Based Destination Image: An exploratory study on the formation of the destination image of the Legal Amazon.

Abstract: This study aims to measure the Nature-Based Destination Image (NDI) of the Legal Amazon among national tourists, verifying the image successors related to satisfaction, WOM /e-WOM, recommendation and revisit. With a predominantly quantitative approach, the study presents two purification stages: 1) group of 15 experts and 2) 151 national tourists. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was used to test convergence and reliability. The findings revealed that 58 variables are suitable to measure the destination image of the Legal Amazon, suggesting internal consistency with good convergence and reliability indexes among the components. As for the positive influence of the image successors, in general the results presented good performances, highlighting the WOM/e-WOM and Recommendation components, the revisit presented high standard deviation.

Keywords: Destination Image, Nature-Based Destination Image, Legal Amazon, Behavioral Intention.

INTRODUCTION

Tourist demand has been increasing the search for personalized destinations, escaping from the common and massified models, and in this movement, nature-based destinations have been gaining prominence (Serrano & Bruhns, 1997). Brazil, considered number 1 in natural attractions in the competitiveness ranking (Word Economic Forum, 2019), had a 27% growth in nature-based tourism (EMBRATUR, 2018), and is expected to grow even more due to the pandemic scenario, tending the search for places that promote isolation and especially "hotels surrounded by nature" (Medina et al., 2021, p. 48).

With this, managers and researchers who work with Nature-Based Tourism (TBN) in the world, in Brazil and in the Amazon, have been gathering efforts to understand how to build a favorable, positive and competitive Destination Image (DI), assuming the more attractive are the attributes of a destination the more competitive it will be (Santos Silva et al., 2016).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nature Based Tourism - NBT

Pointed as relevant to the economic growth of tourism, besides contributing to other types of tourism, Nature-Based Tourism - TBN has represented a strong trend worldwide (Brumatti, 2014; R. Buckley et al., 2001; Hall et al., 2009; Marzuki et al., 2014; Winter et al., 2020).

Defined broadly, its main characteristic is mainly linked to tourist practices carried out in natural environments, covering a wide variety of activities, where nature is the main tourist attraction (Breiby, 2015; Ralf Buckley, 2007; Lundmark & Müller, 2010; Newsome et al., 2002; Taczanowska et al., 2019; Weaver et al., 1999)

Chaves (2021) when analyzing the 78 articles published on TBN in recent years, found in the EBSCO and Tourism Publications - EACH/USP bibliographic bases, an absence of studies on ID dedicated to understanding image formation in nature-based destinations, there being an effort in the literature to try to list possible forms, types or activities related to TBN (Lundmark & Müller, 2010; Marzuki et al, 2011; Pires & Welter, 2011; Vespestad & Mehmetoglu, 2010; Villalobos-Céspedes et al., 2012; Weaver et al., 1999).

Nature Based Destination Imaging

Destination image plays an important role in decision making, influencing destination choice (Chi & Qu, 2008; W. C. Gartner, 1989; Kim et al., 2012; Yen & Croy, 2016). Built after the visit, it can influence satisfaction and behavioral intentions, influencing new visitors to the destination (Potwarka & Banyai, 2016; Wang et al., 2015).

ID can be measured through the cognitive, affective, and conative components modeled most prevalently in the literature on ID (Chaves et al., 2020; William C. Gartner, 1994; Nghiêm-Phú, 2014; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). The cognitive components, refer to the perception about the physical characteristics, attributes of the destination, the affective is related to the emotions, representing the feelings that the tourist has for the destination (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Beerli & Martín, 2004; William C. Gartner, 1994; Kesić et al., 2011). The conative, for a long time, was considered dependent and compared to behavioral intentions by the literature, however, recently it has been treated as independent and distinct from behavioral intentions with relevant contributions in the formation of the ID (Anjos et al., 2017; Pereira, 2018; Stylos et al., 2016, 2017).

Chaves (2021) analyzed 393 articles on ID verified the incipience in studies dedicated to the formation of the BNDI, with gaps in more comprehensive constructs, capable of measuring the BNDI that include the three components. To this end, the following hypotheses were constructed:

- ✓ H1 - IDBN of the Legal Amazon can be measured by a three-dimensional construct (cognitive, affective and conative);
- ✓ H2 - BNDI of the Legal Amazon positively influences the image successors (WOM and e-WOM, revisitation, and recommendation).

METHODOLOGY

Aiming to measure the BNDI of the Legal Amazon destination among national tourists, also verifying the relationship with the image successors, there was the need to test the theoretical matrix of BNDI proposed by Chaves (2021), which consists of 99 variables related to BNDI, based on 36 scientific productions, extracted from a survey that analyzed 471 publications related directly and indirectly to BNDI.

The measurement involved two stages of purification and sampling: one intentional, with a group of 15 experts, for analysis of the constructs and adaptation of the variables to the reality of the Legal Amazon, applied in May 2021, under the technique of online Focus Group (Martins & Theóphilo, 2018); and another by convenience, with 151 national tourists who had already visited the Amazon, held in June 2021, through an online survey sent via Instagram and email.

For data analysis, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was used, with the implementation of the correlation matrix by the Weighted Least Squares (WLS) extraction method, (Hayton et al., 2004; Osborne et al., 2014), the convergent validity of the constructs with Bartlett's sphericity and KMO (Kairer-Meyer-Olkin) and the reliability of the results by McDonald's Omega (Field, 2011; Hair et al., 2009; Hayes & Coutts, 2020).

RESULTS

At the end of the analysis with the group of experts, of the 99 existing variables of the initial proposition, 71 variables were kept, analyzed by Content Validity Coefficient (CVC) (Hernandez-Nieto, 2002), and for the variables suggested by the qualitative approach (Sampieri et al., 2013).

In the second purification, with the national tourists, in addition to other factors such as, socio-demographic aspects, concentration of visitations, nature-based tourism profile, the formation of the basic components of the BNDI image of the Legal Amazon destination was verified. The results of this step showed that of the 71 variables, 58 presented good indicators to measure the BNDI of the destination of the Legal Amazon.

The factoring of the components suggested interpretability of the correlation matrix of the items, obtaining the respective Bartlett's sphericity values with $p < 0.001$ and KMO with values above 0.800 (Field, 2011), and reliability accuracy of the formation of the factors, Omega McDonald's with measures above 0.700 (Hayes & Coutts, 2020). Reinforcing the existence of internal consistency and convergence in much of the cognitive, affective and conative component constructs. The reliability indices were higher than the indices presented in studies conducted in

other destinations (Anjos et al., 2017; Carballo & León, 2017; Matovelle & Pillajo, 2017; Pereira, 2018; Scherer et al., 2015; Stylos et al., 2016, 2017; Suleman et al., 2015).

Regarding the successors of the formation of the image of the legal Amazon destination, we opted for descriptive analysis, containing the mean and standard deviation of the variables questioned to the Brazilian tourists. The results showed good performances, in highlight the components of WOM/e-WOM and recommendation, with averages of 6.79 and 6.67 and standard deviation of 0.48 and 0.62, satisfaction maintained a good evaluation with an average of 6.33 and a standard deviation of 0.80 respectively, however, revisit presented an average of 5.89 and a high standard deviation of 1.29, it is believed that certain factors such as, distance, cost and travel time may have compromised this result, future investigations of the real reasons are indicated.

IMPLICATIONS

Este estudo apresentou contribuições teóricas, empíricas e gerenciais testando a Matriz Teórica de IDBN (CHAVES, 2021) no destino Amazônia Legal, junto aos turistas nacionais, atualizando discussões referentes à imagem de destino ID e IDBN. Indica-se testar os resultados junto aos turistas internacionais com uma amostra maior e com uso de estimadores com propriedades psicométricas ainda mais robustos, a fim de validar um modelo de mensuração da IDBN e comparar o comportamento dos resultados, ou ainda testar a matriz em outros tipos de destinos baseados na natureza.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this study, besides filling theoretical gaps related to the BNDI, contributes with the presentation of a scale of 58 attributes tested in the Legal Amazon destination. With good rates of convergence and reliability the hypotheses were confirmed, pointing out that the destination's management strategies should maintain good performances in relation to infrastructure, tourist activities, fauna and education and protection, inserting actions that highlight even more the Amazon flora, enhancing emotions and personal contributions that the destination can provide.

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