

DEVELOPING A GENERALIZED APPROACH TO TOURIST ETHNOCENTRISM (GATE) TO INVESTIGATE EFFECTS ON TOURIST DESTINATION IMAGE

SUMMARY

In this era of globalization, consumer behavior research is confronted with the challenging task of deciphering the mysteries behind international purchase behavior. As a cross-cultural consumption phenomenon, tourism essentially entails a quest and encounter with the otherness, which are often articulated in the traveler's involvement with the worlds, values, and lives of those inhabiting other cultures. Considering that tourists travel within an environmental bubble which tends to dictate the degree to which one exposes himself/herself to the strangeness of the host society (Cohen & Cooper, 1986), the central argument of this dissertation posits that tourists however, as ordinary people, are not immune to intergroup biases, which constitute important behavioral determinants. Hence, at an empirical level, the concept of ethnocentrism can play an important role in the study of tourist behavior at different levels of the travel process. The present study extends the concept of ethnocentrism, which denotes the tendency to judge other cultures according to the standards of one's own, to the field of tourism in order to investigate its effects on tourist destination image.

A narrative review of seminal accounts from marketing, sociology, psychology, tourism, and intercultural communication provided the necessary background, which helps to position the present study in relation to theoretical advances achieved within this body of literature. By adopting an analytical stance towards the reviewed literature, seven obstacles of theoretical, empirical, and methodological nature were identified under the label 'research gaps', which have subsequently been translated into four research aims (RA), namely: (1) conceptual extension; (2) paradigm shift; (3) conceptual analysis and validation; and (4) empirical investigations. These aims were set to represent the analytical tasks which have formed the basis for three peer-reviewed publications.

The theoretical nature of the first and second research aims was upheld by the Social Identity Theory (SIT) and the Environmental Bubble Theory, respectively. In contrast, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) which essentially underpinned the empirical nature of

the third and fourth aims attested for the suitability of a post-positivist paradigm, which in turn, prioritized the use of a quantitative design reinforced by a proposed methodological bypass. Owing to that, three datasets were collected in the cosmopolitan city of Pretoria (South Africa) on a face-to-face basis, using structured surveys between May 1st and September 14th, 2018. While the first dataset was assigned to exploratory analyses (n = 260), the second set served in confirmatory analyses and hypotheses testing (n = 302) which proposed Zimbabwe as a tourist destination. Subsequent to that, a replication study suggesting Japan as a destination was conducted using the third dataset (n = 346) in order to enable a comparison of results.

In an effort to make a timely contribution to the burgeoning body of literature on ethnocentrism in tourist behavior research, the first research aim (i.e., *RA1*) began by addressing the overemphasized socio-economic approach to ethnocentrism, which has prevailed in the consumer behavior literature since the mid-1980s. The researcher, therefore, developed the Generalized Approach to Tourist Ethnocentrism (GATE), which considers biased perceptions held towards out-group members and their culture, while moving beyond the traditional scope of the home country's economy.

Owing to the operationalization needs of the newly developed approach, the existing Generalized Ethnocentrism (GenE) scale was proposed as a tool to quantify the GATE in tourism research. Nevertheless, the conventional way of approaching travel experience from an outbound tourism perspective presented a methodological obstacle to sample adequacy when importing constructs to the field of tourism. In response to that, *RA2* embarked on an analysis of literature on globalization, virtual reality, and co-creation along with new debates on suicide travel. The results supported an Inbound Approach to Travel Experience (IATE), which argues for the adequacy of samples made of respondents lacking travel experience, from the premise that tourist experiences are co-owned by tourists and local communities with whom they have engaged with during their travel. The IATE was devised to act as a methodological bridge aiming to bypass the need to conduct additional qualitative studies, hence facilitating the adoption of the GenE scale as a tool to operationalize the GATE in tourism.

With respect to *RA3*, the GenE scale was explored and modelled for application in tourism. In addition to the fit and robustness of the proposed model, the second dataset also confirmed the psychometric properties in terms of internal consistency, composite reliability, convergent and discriminant validity. The GenE was presented to tourism research as a Type-II reflective first-order formative second-order construct, whose

causal indicators approach human interaction from inter-cultural, and interpersonal perspectives. At an inter-cultural level, the scale captures the biased views that tourists may hold towards the cultural attributes of some destinations, when comparing to either their own or -possibly, to one that is perceived as culturally similar. This dimension was operationalized by three items, which were collectively named 'Cultural Bias'. At an interpersonal level, the in-group's biased judgments were not directed towards the culture, but instead, they were aimed at the out-group members. This suggested that tourists, as ordinary people, can also hold biased judgments towards members of local communities for a wide range of reasons, which may well extend beyond cultural differences. The four items identified under that dimension were collectively named 'Personal Prejudice'.

The final research aim (*RA4*) required the application of the newly developed approach (GATE) via its operationalized mode to investigate the effects of ethnocentrism on cognitive, affective, and conative image of Zimbabwe and Japan, in view of perceptions of cultural distance and levels of ethnocentrism. Consequently, the structural model GATE→Destination_Image was created to test for main effects, mediation effects, and multigroup moderation effects. In addition to measurement invariance of the composite, confirmatory requirements pertaining to psychometric properties, as well as the fit and robustness of the model, were once again fulfilled from the remaining datasets. The effects of ethnocentrism were found to be destination-specific in the sense that it negatively affects the image of less competitive destinations. Japan still managed to maintain a positive image regardless of levels of ethnocentrism. Cognitive states were found to mediate the positive effects with respect to Japan, hence suggesting that Japan's image is designative (i.e., based on cognitive categorizations of the landscape). In the case of Zimbabwe, however, the negative effects of ethnocentrism were explained by affective states, thus implying the appraisive nature of Zimbabwe's image (i.e., based on attitudes towards environments imbued with personal and cultural meanings). No significant differences were found in the way ethnocentrism affects destination image across groups displaying different perceptions of cultural distance, thus rejecting the hypothesized similarity-attraction relationship.

Through a number of theoretical, empirical, and methodological contributions, the findings of this research have demonstrated important implications not just for the academia and industry practitioners, but also towards pressing global health and environmental challenges (e.g., the current COVID-19 pandemic, and climate change), which increasingly threaten tourist mobility. Research limitations are addressed accordingly.