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Making the right stopover destination choice: The effect of assessment orientation on attitudinal stopover destination loyalty

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the interaction effect between previous stopover visitation and assessment orientation on destination loyalty. Using a quasi-experiment, benefiting from a sample of 200 travelers with a self-reported stopover experience in Dubai, it is found that travelers high in assessment orientation are more loyal to the destination. The effect of previous visitation on destination loyalty is enhanced for high assessors. This research is the first to apply regulatory mode theory to the stopover destination context in the destination marketing literature. From a practical perspective, destination marketers should segment potential visitors using assessment orientation and target on high assessors who have previously visited the stopover destination.

KEYWORDS

Stopover; destination marketing; attitudinal loyalty; regulatory mode; assessment orientation; Dubai

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Recent research has shown positive associations between previous visitation at a destination and destination image (Pike, Kotsi, Mathmann & Wang, 2020) and between destination image and attitudinal destination loyalty (Im, Kim, Elliot & Han, 2012). For any commercial organization seeking to profit directly from sales, a measure of loyalty is a form of 'goodwill,' which can be calculated by accounting measures such as the net-present-value (NPV) of future earnings (see, for example, Leone, Rao, Keller, Luo, McAlister & Srivastava, 2006). However, destination marketing organizations (DMOs) are not directly involved in the sales of the services that result in visitation, and therefore do not profit from visitation in a commercial sense. For this reason, the concept of consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) has emerged as a potentially more realistic indicator of future performance for destinations. CBBE was initially championed on the broader marketing literature by Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993), supported by the proposition that consumers' perceptions underpin any financial measures of a brand, such as NPV.

CBBE for a destination was first introduced in the tourism literature by Konecnik (2006). At the pinnacle of the CBBE-based hierarchy of consumers' perceptions is attitudinal loyalty, which is the focus of this current study. Pike (2016) suggested that loyalty measures are essential for DMOs for at least three important reasons. First, attitudinal destination loyalty is useful as an indicator of future performance in target markets. Second, it can be a more efficient use of resources to try and stay in touch with some previous visitors from contiguous markets, such as continually trying to reach new consumers in markets cluttered with the noise of marketing communications from competing places and substitute product categories. Third, and following the previous point, prior experience at a destination represents a

potential source of competitive advantage, given the positive relationship with destination image and the likelihood of future visitation.

It has been recognized that consumers' perceptions of destinations play an essential role in travelers' decision-making. Hunt (1975), for example, argued that the image held of a destination is as important as the actual features of the place. This is because of the intangible nature of destination selection, where imagery provides a pre-taste of a place that cannot be tested. As indicated, research has shown a positive relationship between destination image and the likelihood of future visitation (Pike et al., 2020). While there has been a growing body of literature relating to destination CBBE and destination loyalty, there has been little research investigating whether certain traits or characteristics of previous visitors lead to a more positive destination image and higher levels of attitudinal destination loyalty. It is essential to understand the trait variables because all previous visitors to a destination cannot be regarded as one homogenous segment. Not all previous visitors will have equally positive perceptions of the place and the same level of intent to revisit.

The present study aims to fill this research gap by introducing and testing the efficacy of the concept of assessment orientation from the broader marketing and psychology literature in the formation of attitudinal destination loyalty. An assessment orientation suggests consumers seek to achieve their goals by evaluating choice options to enhance decision-making quality (Kruglanski, Thompson, Higgins, Atash, Pierro, Shah, & Spiegel, 2000). Consumers who have a strong interest in making the 'right' decision can be considered 'high assessors.' It is proposed that high assessors are likely to prefer places they have already visited and have more knowledge about. Segmenting travelers based on assessment orientations should have significant effects.

Quasi-experimental design is increasingly popular in tourism and hospitality literature (e.g., Veréb & Azevedo, 2019). It aims to test the causal chain between the manipulated and outcome variables. However, instead of randomly assigning participants to the experimental and control conditions in the true experiment, quasi-experimental design separates participants based on unrandomized factors such as self-selection (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). The benefit of using quasi-experiments is that it can still test the causality when it is not practical or cost-effective to use true experiments. Using a quasi-experimental design, this study, benefiting from a sample of 200 travelers with a self-reported stopover experience in Dubai, is interested in the emerging research relating to the phenomenon of stopover destinations. While it is focused on a specific travel situation, which is a stopover in Dubai during long-haul international air travel, the research aim is relevant to all destination marketers who are interested in understanding attitudinal destination loyalty. This research contributes to the destination marketing literature by applying regulatory mode theory to the stopover destination context. It also contributes to the literature related to the antecedents of destination loyalty by assessing the assessment orientation as an individual difference factor influencing destination loyalty formation.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Repeat stopovers as a travel situation

Travelers' perceptions of a destination are influenced by the travel situation (Barich & Kotler, 1991, Crompton, 1992, Snepenger & Milner, 1990). For instance, individuals going on different types of holidays, such as a stopover, short break, or family summer vacation, might have different perceptions of destinations. Yet, destination image research provides limited insight into the effects of specific travel situations (Gertner, 2010, Hu & Ritchie,

1993). Pike (2002, 2007) provided support for this lack of understanding who reviewed 262 destination image publications between 1973 and 2007 and found only 37 looked at the effects of specific travel situations.

The present study, addressing this gap in the literature, considers the travel situation of a stopover that has been previously visited (vs. has not been visited) by a given traveler. Stopovers have been defined as a stay of between one and three nights at an intermediary port during long-haul air travel *en route* to a further destination (Kotsi, Pike, & Gottlieb, 2018). Previously visited stopovers are of particular interest because the limited stopover destinations on specific routes make repeat stopovers likely. For instance, for travelers planning long-haul air travel between the United Kingdom and Australia, there is a limited number of potential stopover destinations. Dubai, Singapore, and Hong Kong are popular (Pike et al., 2020), making a previous stopover in one of these destinations probable. Moreover, in the case of Dubai (the destination under investigation in this study), previous visitations are known to have a powerful influence on perceptions (Kotsi et al., 2018, Pike et al., 2020). We thus extend on insights regarding stopover destinations by considering the effect of previous stopovers on key traveler attitudes in terms of loyalty and image and contributing a critical contingency on this effect in terms of travelers' assessment regulatory mode orientations. Specifically, we consider whether the positive effect of previous visitation on destination image and loyalty (see Pike et al., 2020) is moderated by travelers' assessment orientations.

2.2 Attitudinal destination loyalty and destination image
The dependent variables of interest in this research are attitudinal stopover destination loyalty and destination image. Attitudinal stopover loyalty is reflected in an attitudinal commitment

to a brand (Aaker, 1991, Keller, 2003, Li & Petrick, 2008). Attitudinal stopover loyalty should not be confused with behavioral loyalty, representing actual behavior such as repeat purchases. In that sense, the attitudinal loyalty construct goes beyond mere behavioral observations such as repeat purchases (Jacoby & Kyner, 1973). A high level of attitudinal loyalty among customers is a critical source of brand equity advantage for a brand (Keller, 2003), such as the stopover destination Dubai. There has been a surge in research on this construct in the tourism destination marketing literature (see, for example, Bianchi & Pike 2014, Chen & Gursoy 2001, Oppermann 2000, Prayag & Ryan, 2012). Previous research operationalized attitudinal destination loyalty in terms of consumers' intent to visit in the future and the extent to which they would recommend the destination to other people (see Chen & Chen, 2010, Eusebio & Viera, 2013).

Destination image is another paramount construct to the destination marketing literature (Pike & Page, 2014), as evidenced by its high popularity in broader tourism research (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991) (for reviews see Chon 1990; Gallarza, Saura & Garcia, 2002, Pike 2002, 2007; Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010). This interest is grounded in the notion that a destination's perceptions are no less critical than tangible features (see Gearing, Swart, & Var 1974, Hunt 1975, Matejka, 1973). Significantly, destination image is predicted to affect attitudinal loyalty (Pike et al., 2020). Moreover, in the context of stopover destinations, Kotsi et al. (2018) found a positive relationship between the destination image of four destinations and attitudinal stopover destination loyalty in a stopover during long-haul international air travel. Thus, building on this research, we consider destination image a critical antecedent of attitudinal destination loyalty.

2.3 Regulatory Mode Theory and Assessment

Regulatory mode theory (Kruglanski et al., 2000, Mathmann et al., 2017b) suggests that individuals pursue goals in accordance with their assessment and locomotion orientations. Assessment constitutes the "aspect of self-regulation concerned with critically evaluating entities or states, such as goals or means, in relation to alternatives in order to judge relative quality" (Kruglanski et al., 2000, p. 794). This means that travelers with a high assessment orientation want to make the right decision (Higgins, 2012). However, if travelers do not have a high assessment orientation, they do not show this motivation and are satisfied with decisions even with limited information. Locomotion is concerned with progress in a decision (like in Nike's "'just do it'" slogan; Kruglanski et al., 2000) and as such differs from low assessment. That is, locomotion refers to a motivation to initiate and maintain forward movement in activities (Kruglanski et al., 2000). Accordingly, if the concern for "making the right decision" drives visitors' preference for locations they have visited, locomotion should not affect it. Importantly, Regulatory mode should not be confused with regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 2012; Lechner & Mathmann, 2020). Regulatory focus theory proposes promotion (a concern for growth) and prevention focus (a concern for vigilance) as investigated by Pike et al., 2020.

In that sense, based on regulatory mode theory, it can be argued that travelers with a strong assessment orientation should take comfort considering stopover options they have visited in the past, given that it helps them to know what they are getting into. This notion is supported by previous research on the relationship between assessment and increased concerns with making the wrong decision (Chen, Rossignac-Milon & Higgins, 2018), consideration of past decision options (Mathmann et al., 2017c), a proclivity for seated decision-making (Mathmann et al., 2017a) and preferences for choosing from a large number of options

(Mathmann et al., 2017b). Thus, based on regulatory mode theory, we argue that individuals with a high assessment orientation who had a previous stopover at that location (vs. not) show a more positive brand image and destination loyalty.

Figure 1 graphically summarizes the relationships between the independent variable, the mediator, and the dependent variable. The following hypotheses were developed to test the proposed relationships:

- H1: The positive effect of a previous stopover on attitudinal stopover destination brand loyalty is strengthened when travelers have a high (vs. low) assessment orientation. Specifically, for those high in assessment orientation, previous visitation increases the attitudinal loyalty; for those low in assessment orientation, previous visitation leads to no change in the attitudinal loyalty.

- H2: Differences in destination brand image explain why the effect of a previous stopover on attitudinal stopover destination brand loyalty is increased for travelers with a high (vs. low) assessment orientation. Specifically, for those with a high assessment orientation, previous visitation increases the destination brand image and, in turn, leads to more positive attitudinal loyalty; for those with a low assessment orientation, previous visitation does not increase the destination brand image and thus leads to no change on the attitudinal loyalty.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

3.0 METHOD

Members of a UK-based consumer marketing research panel were invited by email to participate in an online survey in August 2019. The online questionnaire was developed using Qualtrics software, and the marketing research firm hosted the URL for quality assurance purposes. Introductory filter questions were used to select 200 participants with previous long-haul international flight experience; and then, more specifically, 100 participants who had previously taken a stopover of at least one night in Dubai, and 100 participants who had not ever taken a stopover in Dubai. A 'previous stopover in Dubai' is the independent variable.

The mediator, 'destination brand image,' was measured using four established items (see Bianchi, Pike, & Lings 201, Chi & Qu 2008). The dependent variable, 'attitudinal destination loyalty,' was measured using three established items (see Bianchi, Pike, & Lings 2014, Chi & Qu 2008). A seven-point Likert-type scale was used for each of these seven items, anchored at 1 (Very strongly disagree) and 7 (Very strongly agree). Participants were then asked to complete a standard assessment regulatory mode scale, which involves 12 items (see Kruglanski et al. 2010). A five-point Likert scale was used for these items, anchored at 1 (Strongly disagree) and 5 (Strongly agree). The questionnaire concluded with demographic questions.

Of the 200 participants, none were excluded from the data analyses. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 81 with a mean of 46.70 (SD=17.41), and the gender split was 51.5% male and 48.5% female. A summary of participants' income and education is provided in Table 1, where it can be seen that there is a general spread across the range of categories. As

requested, half of the sample had previously taken a stopover of at least one night in Dubai, and the other half had not previously visited Dubai.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

It is worth noting that this paper used the same sample examined in Pike et al., 2020, through different measures. Pike et al. (2020) used the measures of regulatory focus, and this paper used the measures of regulatory mode. As Kirkman & Chen (2011) suggested, it is acceptable to report the same dataset in multiple papers.

4.0 RESULTS

The Cronbach alphas were .95 for 'destination brand image,' .95 for 'attitudinal stopover destination loyalty,' and .74 for 'assessment orientation.' Linear regression analyses were used to test the interaction between previous stopovers in Dubai and participants' assessment orientation. The main effects of assessment orientation (a) and previous stopover (b) (No = 0, Yes = 1), as well as their interaction (a × b), were inserted in a regression. In support of H1, the predicted two-way interaction between assessment and stopover was significant (β = .79, $p < .05$). While there was no significant main effect of a previous stopover, there was a significant effect of assessment orientation (β = .80, $p < .01$), with assessment orientations predicting higher loyalty overall.

To describe the nature of the interaction effect we used an established SPSS script (Hayes, 2018). We identified the assessment orientation value at which the previous stopover effect changed from non-significant to significant. Specifically, our analysis revealed that the conditional effect of a previous stopover on attitudinal stopover destination brand loyalty

transitioned from non-significant to significant at the assessment value of 2.31 (β = .92, SE = .47, t = 1.97, p = .05; 95% CI = [.00, 1.83]). That is, the effect of stopover on destination loyalty increased with the levels of assessment ($\beta_{Low=2.83}$ = 1.34, SE = .31, t = 4.38, p < .001; 95% CI = [.73, 1.94]; $\beta_{Average=3.42}$ = 1.80, SE = .21, t = 8.42, p < .001; 95% CI = [1.38, 2.22]; $\beta_{High=4.07}$ = 2.32, SE = .32, t = 7.22, p < .001; 95% CI = [1.69, 2.95]). Figure 2 illustrates the interaction effect graphically. These findings support H1 by showing the positive effect of previous stopover in Dubai on attitudinal stopover destination brand loyalty to Dubai is increased when consumers have a high assessment orientation.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

To test the hypothesis that destination brand image serves as a mediator between the previous stopover - assessment orientation interaction and loyalty, a bootstrapped moderated mediation analysis was conducted with the SPSS PROCESS macro (Model 8), Hayes, (2018), which consists of two regression models. Model 1 tested the effects of a previous stopover (a), assessment orientation (b), and their interaction (a × b) on 'destination brand image,' our mediator. Model 2 considered the influence of the moderator, the independent variable, their interaction, and the mediator on the dependent variable, 'attitudinal stopover destination brand loyalty' (c.f. Figure 1).

Supporting predictions, Model 1 highlighted a significant interaction on brand image (β = 1.10, p < .01). Based on Model 2, when including destination brand image, the interaction of previous stopover with assessment orientation is non-significant (β = -.22, p > .05), while the effect of destination brand image on attitudinal stopover destination loyalty was highly significant (β = .92, p < .001), indicating full mediation. Our analysis also speaks to changes

in the indirect effect at varying levels of assessment. For low levels of assessment (value = 2.83) the indirect effect was weaker (β =.96, CI = [.38, 1.61]) than for moderate levels (value = 3.41; β =1.55, CI = [1.13, 1.96]), which in turn was weaker than for high levels of assessment (value = 4.07; β =2.21, CI = [1.63, 2.77])[1]. Importantly, the index of moderated mediation indicated significance (Index = 1.01, *SE* =.31, 95% bootstrapped CI = [.38, 1.61]). This, therefore, supports H2, which predicted that differences in destination brand image explain why the effect of a previous stopover in Dubai on attitudinal destination brand loyalty is increased when customers have a high assessment orientation. Table 2 provides an overview of these relationships.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

5.0 CONCLUSION

This paper investigates the extent to which a consumer's assessment orientation influences Dubai's destination image and attitudinal loyalty towards Dubai as a stopover destination. The first hypothesis that the positive effect of previous stopover experience on loyalty is enhanced for high assessors is supported. Travelers with high assessment orientation want to make the right decision compared with those with low assessment orientation. Previous stopover experience gives high assessors more information to make judgments; thus, the positive effect is enhanced. The second hypothesis that the differences in destination brand image increase for high assessors is also supported. Although not in the formal hypothesis, we found a main effect of assessment orientation on stopover destination loyalty, suggesting that high assessors are more loyal.

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[1] Low, moderate and high levels of assessment correspond to the 16th, 50th, and 84th percentiles of the distribution of assessment in the data.

5.1 Theoretical contributions

This paper makes two theoretical contributions. First, it builds on Pike et al.'s (2020) finding that previous stopover experience influences attitudinal stopover loyalty by assessing how regulatory mode moderates this effect. That is, while Pike et al. (2020) focused on consumer concerns for vigilance (i.e., prevention), we considered consumer motivations for critical evaluation (i.e., assessment). The present research is the first to apply regulatory mode theory in the destination marketing literature, thus enriching the application of regulatory mode theory to the tourism context.

Second, previous research has found factors influencing destination loyalty formation such as involvement (San Martin, Collado, & Bosque, 2013), culture experiences, safety, convenient transportation (Chen & Gursoy 2001), and airport ambiance (Pike, Pontes, & Kotsi, 2021). The present research contributes to the literature related to the antecedents of destination loyalty by showing assessment orientation as an individual difference factor influencing destination loyalty formation. Thus, it answers a call for more research to better understand the antecedents of stopover destination attractiveness and preferences (Kotsi, Pike, & Gottlieb, 2018).

5.2 Practical implications

Several practical implications can be derived from the present findings for destination marketers. Notably, while previous research has suggested that destination marketers segment potential visitors based on whether or not they have previously visited (Pike et al., 2020), this study indicates that such segmentation could be further narrowed by targeting previous visitors with high assessment orientations. Destination marketers may follow our lead and use surveys to measure consumers' assessment orientations. Alternatively, they

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could identify situations and contexts that are known to attract consumers with high assessment orientations. For instance, they could use cookies to target consumers sitting in front of desktop computers (vs. consumers who are currently "on the move" on mobile devices) as assessors prefer seated decision-making (Mathmann et al., 2017c) or by advertising destinations on digital platforms that offer large numbers of travel options, such as Google flights because assessors are known to prefer these platforms (Mathmann et al., 2017b). By targeting these high-assessment individuals, marketing effectiveness could be increased, given the more favorable image and loyalty in this segment.

5.3 Limitations and future research

An important question for future research would be to consider the generalizability of the effects documented in the present work. While the present study focuses on the effect of previous stopovers and contingencies of their effect on key traveler attitudes, it is somewhat limited in terms of the selection of the specific stopover. That is, we only looked at travelers who had been on a stopover to Dubai, and it is an open empirical question whether the presented findings would hold in the context of other stopover destinations like Hong Kong or Singapore or non-stopover destinations. In addition, replications of the moderating effects demonstrated for assessment orientations in different contexts would underline the importance of these traveler motivations for consumer segmentation in the travel and hospitality literature more broadly.

Beyond this, it is essential to note that the present study is only the second study to consider motivational individual difference constructs as a contingency variable in the literature on stopover destinations (for the first study, see Pike et al., 2020). Further research may consider additional contingencies based on related constructs such as consumers need for closure

(Kardes, Fennis, Hirt, Tormala, & Bullington, 2007) or travelers' political affiliations (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003), given that these have already been found to have high predictive value in other marketing contexts (Jung, Garbarino, Briley, & Wynhausen, 2017, Kardes, Fennis, Hirt, Tormala, & Bullington, 2007).

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Figure 1 – Attitudinal stopover destination loyalty following a previous stopover, depending on assessment orientations, mediated by brand image
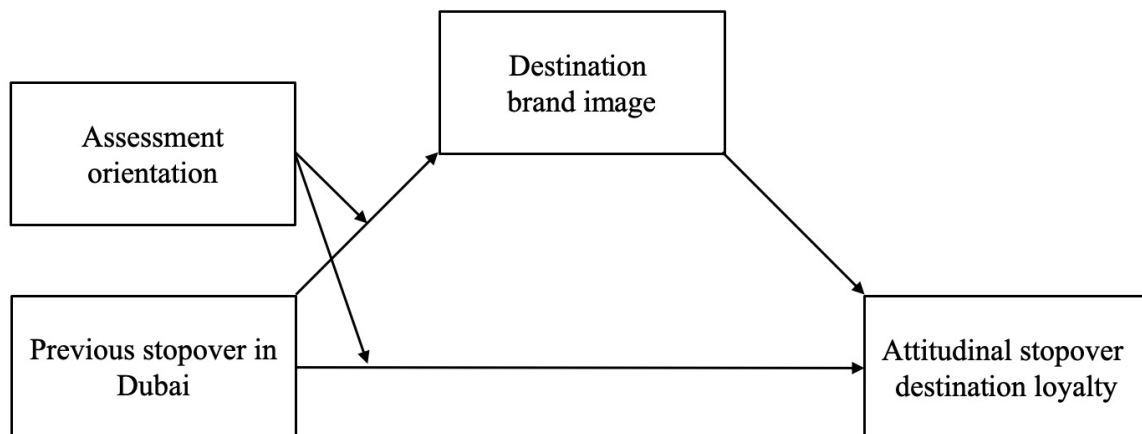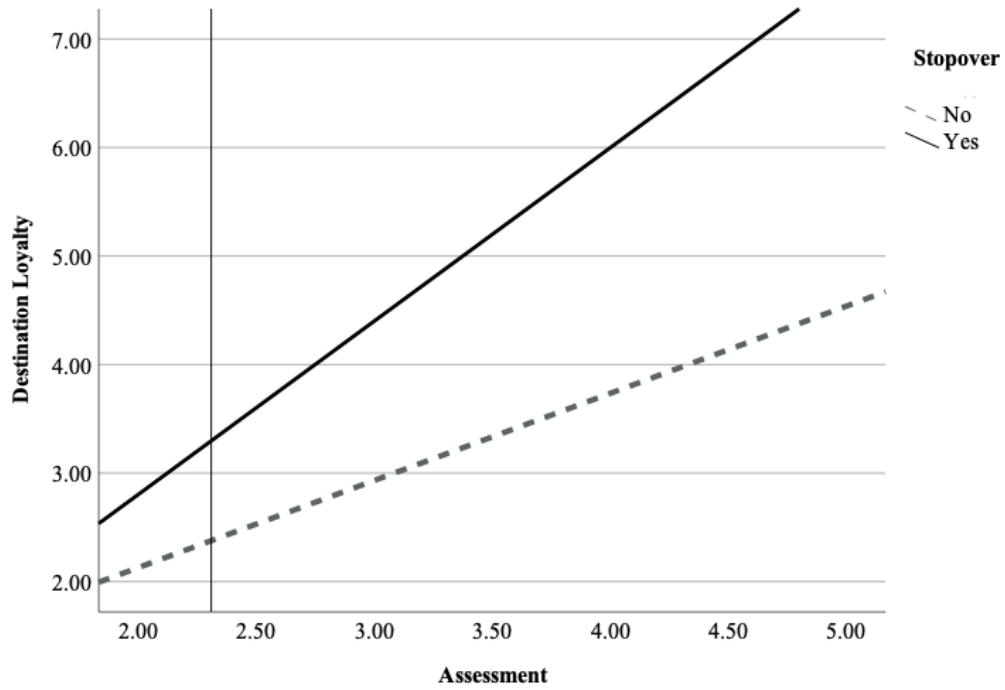
Figure 2 – Assessment orientations moderates the effect of previous stopover on attitudinal stopover destination loyalty[2]

[2] The vertical line demarcates the assessment point 2.31 at which the effect of previous stopover on destination loyalty transitions from non-significant to significant.

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Table 1 – Key characteristics of participants (N = 200)

Item	Level	N	%
Annual household income	< £9,999	22	11.0
	£10,000 - £19,999	30	15.0
	£20,000 - £39,999	45	22.5
	£40,000 - £69,999	39	19.5
	£70,000 - £99,999	22	11.0
	£100,000 +	20	10.0
	Prefer not to answer	22	11.0
	Total	200	
Highest level of completed education	None	3	1.5
	Elementary school	8	4.0
	High school	56	28.0
	Some college	27	13.5
	Associate's degree	8	4.0
	Bachelor's degree	39	19.5
	Post-graduate degree	32	16.0
	PhD	17	8.5
	Total	200	

Table 2 – Moderated mediation analysis

	Destination brand image (M)		Attitudinal stopover loyalty (Y)	
	Coeff.	95% CI	Coeff.	95% CI
Previous stopover (X)	-2.08[+]	-4.43, 0.27	0.99	-0.37, 2.34
Destination brand image (M)			0.92***	0.83, 1.00
Assessment orientation (W)	0.63**	0.16, 1.10	0.23	-0.05, 0.50
$X \times W$	1.10**	0.43, 1.78	-0.22	-0.61, 0.18
Constant	1.06	-0.49, 2.63	-0.46	-1.35, 0.44
	$R^2 = 0.46$		$R^2 = 0.84$	
	$F(3,196) = 55.81, p < .001$		$F(4,195) = 261.46, p < .001$	

[+]$p < .10$, *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.