AN EXAMINATION OF DESTINATION CHOICE BEHAVIOR USING MEME MAPS, IMAGES AND DECISION MAKING STYLES

by

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The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the destination choice behavior of travelers using meme maps, images and decision making styles. The current article-based dissertation entails three separate studies that utilized data collected from Chinese, Arab, Russian and German travelers. The first article included within this dissertation assesses the perceived importance of the attributes that form destination images based on general vacation experiences and opinions of travelers and compares the expected performance of destination attributes of Turkey in attracting travelers from its emerging markets (like China as well as Arab countries) using modified version of Importance-Performance Analysis. The second article identifies traveler segments using a factor-cluster approach based on travel Decision Making Styles (DMS) of individuals, and profiles traveler segments and identifies likely differences between these segments using a series of variables such as tourism involvement, destination images and demographic characteristics. The third and the major article of the dissertation advances and transfers the knowledge of Memetics science into the field of tourism and hospitality by creating meme maps of a major tourism destination within Turkey.

Versatile findings of the three studies advance the theoretical understanding of the decision-making behavior of tourists. Moreover, these findings create new knowledge in tourism by reconceptualizing and refining constructs such as memes, DMS and tourism involvement. Findings also provide invaluable practical management information for destination management.
organizations (DMOs), and the tourism and hospitality industry. More specifically, the first article verifies that different traveler segments can attach different levels of importance and performance to the perceived destination image of the same destination. Specific practical implications were recommended for the Turkish destination management organizations that want to generate tailored marketing strategies for emerging markets. Moreover, while the second article validates the efficacy of the Consumer Involvement Profile, it concludes that the tourism involvement construct demonstrates a multidimensional and unstable structure formation in different tourism contexts. Positioning strategies were developed based on the identified key characteristics of the obtained traveler segments. Lastly, the major article of the dissertation also provides significant theoretical and practical implications. There is no certain and well-accepted methodology and statistical procedure to generate meme maps in the tourism and hospitality field. Thus, the major article also explains the employed methodology and statistical procedures in detail to guide the future research on Memetics in the field. Further practical and theoretical implications are discussed in detail.