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Behavioral responses of 3S tourism visitors: Evidence from a Mediterranean Island destination

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ABSTRACT

This empirical research deepens the current knowledge of tourism destination images by conceptualizing the effects of sun, sand, and sea (3S) tourism. The study investigates its impact on tourist attitude toward 3S tourism. This project also examines the impact of attitudes toward 3S tourism on visit intentions and word-of-mouth intentions as two behavioral outcomes. The study focuses on the mental representations of 3S tourism by tourists. Destination images (mental representations of destinations) can be defined, operationalized, and measured in a variety of ways; this study investigates the images and attitudes held by tourists toward 3S tourism in Cyprus, along with their desired behavioral responses. In the study, 410 survey questionnaires were administered to tourists during the summer of 2017. The results revealed that images of 3S tourism had a positive impact on tourist attitudes. Visit intentions and word-of-mouth intentions were enhanced by improving tourists' attitudes toward 3S tourism.

1. Introduction

The tourism destination image (TDI) has received ample attention from researchers in the field of tourism studies (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Camprubí, Guia, & Comas, 2013; De Nisco, Mainolfi, Marino, & Napolitano, 2015; Govers, Go, & Kumar, 2007; Hunter, 2016; Mossberg & Kleppe, 2005; O'Leary & Deegan, 2005a, 2005b; Silva, Kastenholz, & Abrantes, 2013; Yang, 2016); however, research on specific resources related to 3S tourism is relatively scarce (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). This mode of tourism is dominant in most island destinations and embodies the unique biogeographic characteristics that dominate the motivations of these tourists (Koutra & Karyopouli, 2013). Therefore, it is worthy of careful analysis. While the term 'image' embodies various perceptions pertaining both to consumers, and producers or suppliers (Gunn & Var, 2002), such analysis is germane to the tourism industry and its relationship to tourists.

3S tourism is at the core of the tourist experience. "Indeed it is the creation and interpretation of images that are purchased, anticipated and consumed by the 'experience hungry' tourists of the 21st century" (as cited in Trauer & Ryan, 2005, p. 482). Therefore, TDI is made up of components of a package (i.e. an experience) and 3S tourism captures a large portion of that experience (Vainikka, 2013). In cases such as north Cyprus and other similar island states, 3S tourism will remain the main attraction that motivates tourists to visit. Thus, the tangible and intangible dimensions of this particular attraction demands an understanding of tourists' perceptions as crucial information for destination planning, coastal zone management, environmental concerns, and measures of protection (Garrod, 2008).

The authors embarked on this topic in response to their extended interaction with the case in question and their observation that policymakers and other stakeholders were not directing appropriate attention to it as they managed 3S tourism resources. Therefore, to shake policymakers out of their complacency, this research began by focusing on the demand side as an initial impetus toward further investigation. The epistemological basis of this study is aligned with Jenkins' (1999) sound claim that:

> Destination image is hence a compound representation that is mutable over time and between contexts. It also depends on people's actual experience of the destination; as people become more familiar with it, their image tends to become more realistic, complex and differentiated (as cited in Garrod, 2008, pp.384–385).

The authors have also been immersed in Urry's (2000) classic theorization of tourism as a social phenomenon, which is prone to manipulation by the industry. The question remaining is the nature and purpose of such manipulation. To ground the development of realistic

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policy guidelines, this study focuses on tourists' perceptions of 3S tourism products in North Cyprus because 3S tourism is the main attraction and key tourism resource in North Cyprus and the Mediterranean islands (Trias et al., 2014). Without 3S tourism, the whole tourism profile of this island could change. 3S tourism attributes are irreplaceable resources. Rtichie and Crouch (2003) considered the 3S attributes the core resources making up the fundamental aspects of physiography and climate. The features of the 3S attributes dominate other factors of competitiveness. Evidence of this resource being taken for granted manifests in coastal overdevelopment and beach erosion (Trias et al., 2014), not to mention the violation of principles of 'quality of fit' due to lack of tourism planning and uncontrolled development (Gunn & Var, 2002).

2. Theoretical framework

The tourism destination image may also be labeled a 'destination mental representation' (Kano Glückstad, Kock, Josiassen, & Assaf, 2017), while this phenomenon has been studied by various authors, little attention has been given to its role in 3S tourism. The present study addresses this gap and offers an original contribution. Out of 142 papers published concerning the destination image between 1973 and 2000, only two papers addressed issues related to beach tourism (Pike, 2002). Thus far, three sources of image formation have been identified: (i) supply side or destination agents, (ii) independent or autonomous agents, and (iii) demand side or image receivers as agents (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). This study focuses on the third category and has obvious implications for the first.

Tourists' responses to a TDI, whether negative or positive, depend on the attitudes they have formed toward environments or places based on both perceptual/cognitive and affective components. Beerli-Palacio and Martin-Santana (2004a, p. 658) have suggested that most recent studies have understood the destination image to be formed by "reasoned and emotional interpretation as the consequence of two closely interrelated components: perceptive/cognitive evaluations referring to the individual's own knowledge and beliefs about the object." With respect to previous studies on the issue, our research aligns with Beerli-Palacio and Martin-Santana's (2004b) emphasis on cognition, the evaluation of the perceived attributes of the object, and the importance of affective appraisals related to an individual's feelings toward the object.

As Beerli-Palaci and Martin-Santana (2004a) indicate, the properties creating the image of a destination include its natural resources, public infrastructure, tourism infrastructure, tourism, leisure facilities, social and political factors, culture, history, the natural and social environments, space, and place. For a study carried out on the perceptions of beach quality, coastal areas demand consideration in relation to their cleanliness, the quality of facilities and management, their peaceful atmosphere, scenery, etc. These features play an important role in various decision-making processes, as well as for tourists recommending the destination to others and their re-visit intentions.

While no scale measuring TDIs has yet achieved universal acceptance (Beerli-Palacio & Martin-Santana, 2004b), we assume 3S tourism to be a determining or amplifying factor that overwhelms the formation of a TDI, especially in the case of island destinations. Therefore, the issue of the destination image can take a different trajectory if it is understood holistically. Thus, this study aligns with Beerli-Palacio and Martin-Santana's (2004a) claim that:

> The selection of the attributes used in designing a scale will depend largely on the attractions of each destination [e.g., 3S], on its positioning, and on the objectives of the assessment of perceived image, which will also determine whether specific or more general attributes are chosen (2004a, pp. 659–60).

Our emphasis is on the factors that generate a positive image of a destination, which may not be explained by previous normative models. In fact, few studies have addressed this issue at all (Martín-Santana, Beerli-Palacio, & Nazzareno, 2017). Most of the studies on TDI have been confined to normative models of the destination image, even though the concept of image formation also contains many other unexplored attributes or dimensions. For instance,

> an exploratory study which indicates that the image tourists have of a destination is dynamic and continuously evolving throughout their trip during several key moments (pre-trip, upon arrival, halfway through, on departure, and post-trip), and that various incidents during the trip could have an impact on it (as cited in Martin-Santana et al., 2017, p. 14).

In line with this account, the present study assumes that the 3S tourism experience, as one form of product or attraction, can influence the overall image of a destination. Managers and planners in the context of island destinations must therefore focus on this attribute, especially where the product is a major amplifying factor for the particular destination. Furthermore, Echtner and Ritchie (1993a, 1993b) have elaborated a model, indicating that TDI can be measured by focusing on three continuums: (i) attribute-holistic; (ii) functional-psychological; and (iii) common-unique. In our study, the 'common-unique' attribute is associated with 3S tourism, which also can be elaborated in the context of the assertion by Echtner and Ritchie (1993a,b) that the "destination image should be composed of perceptions of individual attributes (such as climate, accommodation facilities, friendliness of the people)" (p. 2).

At any rate, conventional 3S tourism has entered a phase of general decline (Aguiló, Alegre, & Sard, 2005); in response, some destinations have restructured their 3S tourism to inject the principles of sustainable development. In the meantime, 3S tourism should be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon. According to Prebensen, Skallerud, and Chen (2010), its 'body' dimension is constituted by sun and *warmth,* while the 'mind' dimension is made up of two main constituents: *escapism* and *culture/nature*. Tourists' satisfaction is highly dependent upon tackling such complexity (i.e., body and mind-related motivations).

"Understanding and measuring individuals' mental destination representations [*destination images*] is one of the most frequently studied topics in tourism research" (Kano-Glückstad et al., 2017, p. 3). However, the 3S tourism image and its specific impact on the perception of island destinations as a whole has not been conceptualized. Competing definitions of TDI have complicated these issues further: "Theory has been inconclusive with respect to the elements incorporated in the concept" (Michaelidou, Siamagka, Moraes, & Micevski, 2013, p. 790). Many other researchers have also testified to such inconclusiveness (Calderón García, Gil Saura, Carmelo Pons García, & Gallarza, 2004; King, Chen, & Funk, 2015; Ryan & Cave, 2005; Tkaczynski, Rundle-Thiele, & Cretchley, 2015). In this context, Baloglu and McCleary (1999) made the following assertion:

> Common agreement is that this depends on a cognitive evaluation of objects and the affective responses are formed as a function of the cognitive responses. An overall image of a place is formed as a result of both perceptual/cognitive and affective evaluations of that place (1999, p. 870).

It has been argued in related literature that tourists process different attributes of a destination in different ways. However, all the attributes are packaged in one lump (i.e., experience), which forms an overall 'mental picture' of the destination. Consequently, the holistic image of the destination formed by tourists consists in "both cognitive (attribute-based) and affective component[s]" (Michaelidou et al., 2013, p. 790). While market segmentation has received ample attention, the role of 3S tourism, especially for island destinations, has been under-studied notwithstanding its relevance as an attraction for these destinations. Notwithstanding the numerous definitions of TDI offered by different scholars, the role of 3S tourism might be embedded in the context of the third dimension of the destination image known as 'conation' or

'conative' elements (Pike & Ryan, 2004). "The conative image is analogous to behavior since it is the intent or action component. Intent refers to the likelihood of brand purchase. Conation may be considered as the likelihood of visiting a destination within a certain time period" (cf. Pike & Ryan, 2004, p. 334).

In this study, the 'uniqueness' attribute of 3S tourism is assumed to play a significant role in the mental representation of the whole destination, following Echtner and Ritchie's (2003) formulation. Put differently, 3S tourism is a unique attribute that, in combination with climate and calm seas, characterizes the totality of sun, sea, and sand tourism in certain island destinations. This study suggests that as these destinations are complex systems, complexity theory could shed some light on the interrelationships between the TDI and a broader spectrum of attributes composing the system. The aim is not to test the theory, but it might contribute to understanding how tourists come to pursue key attributes of a destination and their ramifications for tourists' mental picture of the destination as a whole. As stated by Farrell and Twining-Ward (2004. p. 277):

> In order to understand complex systems, it is essential to review progress in fields such as ecosystem ecology, ecological economics, and complexity theory. In the 70s, fieldwork by a group of pioneering ecologists led to new understanding that systems are more than frameworks, rather they are integrated, interacting entities displaying unpredictable behavior.

The 3S resource as an attribute of North Cyprus can be theorized within the cognitive-affective behavioral pattern of beach lovers; in other words, consumers' deepening relationships with product, that is, the destination (Aro et al., 2018). 3S plays a significant role in such a deepening process. At the same time, the complexity of 3S tourism lies in its own exclusive sub-attributes. Sub-attributes of 3S tourism are the carrying capacity implementation to avoid congestion, cleanliness, compatibility of development (i.e., quality of fit) (Gunn & Var, 2002), beach erosion, pollution, presence of unfinished sites, and abandoned buildings. These sub-attributes have not been understood in the context of the overall profile of the beach or even the coast. To strengthen the argument, as Gunn and Var (2002) have suggested, the 3S resource is the DNA of North Cyprus, generating positive emotions and attitudes toward the destination. On the other hand, the emotions felt toward a tourist destination form a diverse combination of feelings about both the destination and the destination brand" (cf. Aro et al., 2018, p. 72). Thus, the formulation of desired attitude and behavior toward a destination is based on the destination's own DNA as its history, nature, and landscape.

2.1. Conceptualizations, model and hypotheses

Drawing on the cognitive-affective model, this study tries to develop and test a conceptual model indicating tourist attitude and behavioral responses toward 3S tourism. A cognitive-affective model is used in tourism studies as the theoretical underpinning of the research model that predicts tourist behaviors (e.g., del Bosque and San Martín, 2008; Jiang, Zhang, Zhang, & Yan, 2018; Han et al., 2019; Oliver, 1993; Mehran and Olya, 2020). For example, Del Bosque and San Martín (2008) extended the expectation-disconfirmation model of Oliver (1993) by inclusion of the destination image (i.e., cognitive factor) and emotion (i.e., affective factor) as predictors of tourist loyalty. Mehran and Olya (2020) tested a conceptual model that investigates the effects of overall image as a cognitive factor and emotion as an affective factor to predict recommendation intention of canal boat tour participants.

In the marketing field, image improves the loyalty of consumers (Paul & Bhakar, 2018). Review of tourism literature also supports the significant and positive impact of image (including destination and overall images) on tourist satisfaction and desired behaviors. For example, Alcaniz, García, and Blas (2009) explained how including an image of the destination significantly boosts tourist intentions to revisit and recommend. Another study by Toudert and Bringas-Rábago (2016) revealed that satisfied and loyal cruise passengers have strong destination images. Han et al.'s (2019) study reported that the overall destination image increases intentions of tourists to revisit and recommend a destination to others. Mehran and Olya (2020) also found the significant and positive impact of the overall image on participant satisfaction and emotion associated with the canal boat tour in France. With this realization, this study proposes the image of 3S tourism as a cognitive image affecting tourist attitude. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1. *: Images of 3S tourism have significant and positive effects on attitudes toward 3S tourism.*

Attitude appears as a significant predictor of consumer behavior (Paul and Bhakar (2018). Lee (2009) showed that tourists' attitude directly increases satisfaction and indirectly affects the future behaviors of tourists visiting Taiwan. Alrawadieh, Prayag, Alrawadieh, and Alsalameen (2019) discussed the possibility that an attitude toward a destination could improve the loyalty of tourists. However, Jiang et al. (2018) found that attitude toward natural soundscapes has not had any significant impact on tourist loyalty in the context of nature-based tourism. In another case, tourists with positive attitudes toward wine tourism expressed their intention to visit a wine region (Pratt & Sparks, 2014). This study attempts to investigate how attitudes toward 3S tourism influence revisit and recommendation intentions of tourists. Thus, the following two hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 2. *: Attitudes toward 3S tourism have a significant and positive effect on visit intentions.*

Hypothesis 3. *: Attitudes toward 3S tourism have a significant and positive*

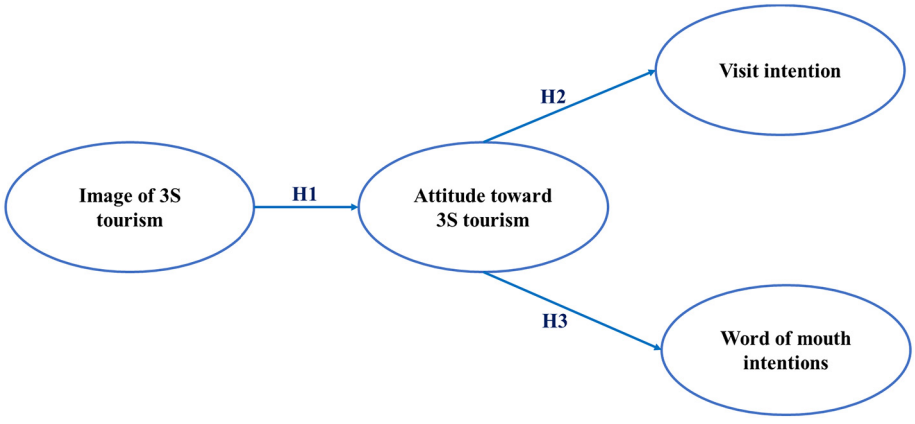

Fig. 1. Research Model.

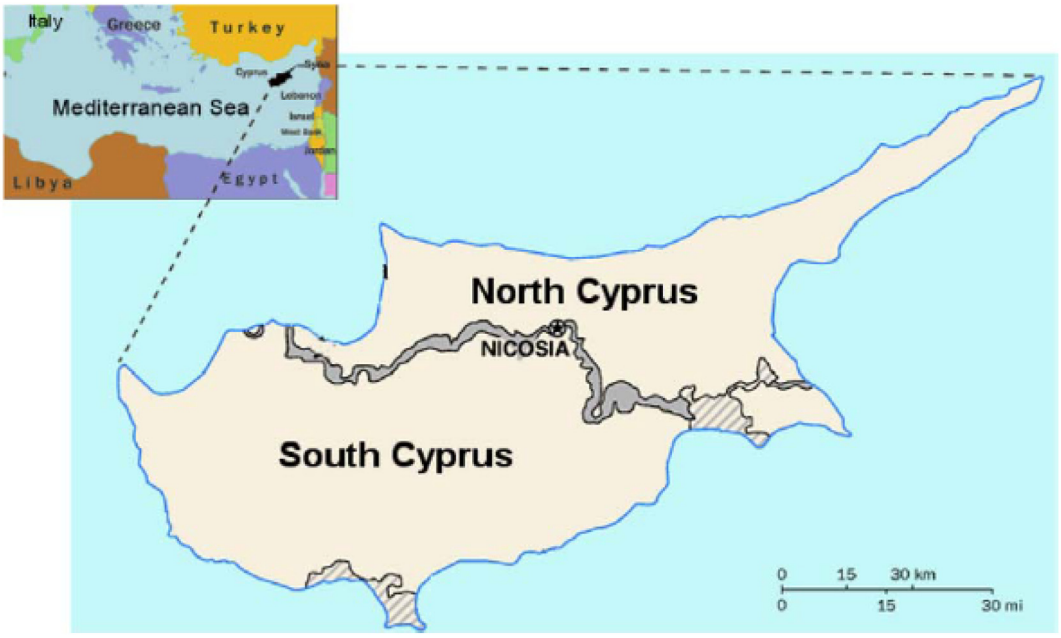

Fig. 2. Location of study area.

effect on word of mouth intentions.

As illustrated in Fig. 1, the conceptual model for this study consists of four variables of the image of 3S tourism (cognitive factor), attitudes toward 3S tourism (affective factor), visit intentions, and word-of-mouth intentions (two behavioral responses).

3. Materials and method

3.1. Study context

North Cyprus, also known as the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus (TRNC), refers to the northern partition of the island of Cyprus, which also contains the Republic of Cyprus, known as South Cyprus (see Fig. 2). Since the 1974 partition, the northern enclave has enjoyed a de facto status as an independent political and economic entity (Akgün, 2010).

The geographical location of North Cyprus makes it an attractive destination for the European and Middle Eastern travel markets. Its climate, notably its long dry seasons, place the island in a competitive position among Mediterranean destinations (Koutra & Karyopouli, 2013). With nearly 3,547,930 arrivals in 2015, the tourism sector enjoys vast economic activity in North Cyprus. In the same year, the ratio of net tourism income to the trade balance reached 43.4%, and the net tourism income registered $746.7 million. Over 12,000 jobs in North Cyprus were attributed to the tourism sector (Ministry of Tourism and Environment, 2015; see also Table 1). According to the tourism ministry of North Cyprus (2017), the number of tourists who enjoy 3S tourism on the island is 1,459,318. The size of the domestic tourism market, which includes Turkish citizens is 1,105,265 and the number of inbound tourists is 354,000.

The island as a whole is popular for its sun, sea, and sand tourism; however, the most attractive and suitable beaches for the purpose of 3S tourism are located in North Cyprus. Also, most of the beaches and coastal areas in the north have remained immune from over-development, in contrast to the southern part of the island. The 3S tourism image of north Cyprus is expected to be a fundamental factor in motivating tourists to revisit the island. It is also influential in forming the island's image on both the cognitive and affective levels. Prebensen et al. (2010) have argued that 3S tourism is a powerful factor in tourists' motivation conceptualization. They believe that 3S tourism is a multidimensional phenomenon. They have suggested two body-related and two mind-related constructs embedded in 3S tourism. 3S tourism offers warmth, fitness, and health (body-related), along with culture, nature, and escapism (mind-related). On this basis, the present study has focused on surveying tourists' images of 3S tourism in North Cyprus.

Table 1
The role of tourism in the north Cyprus economy.

Year	Net tourism income. (million USD)	Ratio of net tourism income to the trade balance
2006	303.2	23.2
2007	381.0	26.2
2008	383.7	24.0
2009	390.7	31.1
2010	405.8	26.9
2011	459.4	29.7
2012	571.9	36.1
2013	613.4	38.9
2014	679.4	41.2
2015	746.7	43.4

Source: Ministry of Tourism and Environment (2015).

Even though North Cyprus is a well-known destination for its 3S resource in the European market, the tourist profile is also changing. For instance, nowadays, new emerging markets, such as that of Russia, are also attracted to North Cyprus. Secondly, if 3S, which is the DNA of North Cyprus, is not understood for its vulnerability due to anthropogenic impact (e.g., coastal second home development), it will lose its natural quality. Ritchie and Crouch (2003) discussed this under the 'microenvironment' (e.g., 3S), in their sustaining destination competitiveness model. They believe destination managers should not be complacent with the microenvironment 'because of its proximity and greater sense of immediacy' (p. 66). Notwithstanding the 3S resource endowment of North Cyprus, there are competitors, including the southern part of the island (known as the republic of Cyprus), Turkey and various North African resorts.

3.2. Data collection procedure

Scale items were derived from past studies in the field of the destination image and marketing. Seventeen items were adapted from

studies by Alcaniz et al. (2009), Baloglu and McCleary (1999), Beerli-Palacio and Martín-Santana (2004a,b), Han et al. (2019), Pratt and Sparks (2014), and Lee (2009). A copy of the questionnaire is provided in the appendix. The research process is illustrated in Fig. I, appendix B. Different items regarding beach qualities that influence 3S tourism activities and the formation of image have been considered. The questionnaire examines visitors' perceptions of scenery/natural attractions, cleanliness and hygiene, accessibility, environmental quality, quality of facilities, safety and security, sports, facilities and activities, climate, calm atmosphere, signage, design of facilities, degree of crowding, and the quality of fit of the buildings and structures on the beach. In addition, coastal management, quality of service, and such characteristics of the host community's performance, like the quality of the beach and appropriateness of land use in and around the beaches, have also been included. The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent) which is recommended over 3, 5, and 10 Likert scales (Olya & Al-ansi, 2018).

Four questions used in this study were derived from Pratt and Sparks (2014) in order to measure the respondents' feelings about 3S tourism. Four items for the measurement of visit intentions and two questions about word-of-mouth intentions have been extracted from Han et al. (2009). A sample of items used to measure visit intentions was “Going to the beach is one of my priorities when in North Cyprus,” while a sample concerning word-of-mouth intentions was “I will say positive things about 3S tourism in North Cyprus.” These six questions were measured using 5-point Likert scales that were rated from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree).

To measure and conceptualize tourist responses to sun, sea, and sand (3S) factors, a cross-sectional survey was designed. Using a convenience sampling technique, questionnaires were distributed among tourists who selected North Cyprus as a destination known for 3S tourism. Prior to the main data collection, scale items were checked using four experts: two from the tourism industry and two from academia. Then a pilot study was conducted with 15 tourists to ensure the clarity, relevancy, and suitability of the research instrument. Aside from a few problems with the wordings of the questions, which were corrected, no substantial changes were needed. The pilot study enhanced both the validity of the instrument and the intelligibility of the questions (Malazizi, Alipour, & Olya, 2018). Questionnaires were written in English; however, one of the researchers was on hand if respondents had any difficulty understanding the language of the instrument. The measurement and research models were tested using structural equation modeling (SEM).

The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first part measured the key variables for the study, namely the image of 3S tourism and attitudes toward 3S tourism in North Cyprus, as well as visit and word-of-mouth intentions. The second section obtained demographic information for each respondent. Empirical studies targeted North Cyrus as their study's context, and it is used to measure tourist demographics (e.g. Karatepe, Baradarani, Olya, Ilkhanizadeh, & Raoofi, 2014; Olya and Altinay., 2016). The survey was conducted during a period of two weeks in July 2017. Since this study focused on 3S tourism activities, the sample was selected from the population of beach users who traveled to North Cyprus. In total, 500 visitors were invited to participate. Among these, 410 cases were extracted as valid and complete and were used for data analysis. The response rate was 82%, and no serious problem of non-response bias is expected. Demographic information for respondents is presented in Table 2.

As Table 2 demonstrates, > 50% of beach users were between 18 and 37 years of age, with progressively less participation by those 38–47 years old (21%), those 48–57 years old (14.4%) and people > 58 years of age (10.2%). A slight majority of respondents were male (51.2%), and > 50% of respondents were married.

Table 2
Demographic information for beach users.

Variable	N	%	Variable	N	%
Age			*Educational Level*		
18–27 years	117	28.5	Primary school	3	0.7
28–37 years	106	25.9	Middle school	16	3.9
38–47 years	86	21.0	High school	55	13.4
48–57 years	59	14.4	College	79	19.3
> 58	42	10.2	University	257	62.7
Total	410	100.0	Total	410	100.0
Gender			*Marital Status*		
Male	210	51.2	Single	180	43.9
Female	200	48.8	Married	230	56.1
	410	100.0		410	100.0
How often do you been travel?			*Purpose of Travel*		
Monthly	27	6.6	Business	38	9.3
Seasonally	121	29.5	Leisure	262	63.9
Yearly	262	63.9	Other (visiting family or friends, etc.)	110	26.8
Total	410	100.0	Total	410	100.0
Income level (Per month/ in USD)					
$0 up to $1000	77	18.8			
$1000 to $2000	114	27.8			
$2000 to $3000	118	28.8			
over $3000	101	24.6			
Total	410	100.0			

Note: (N) represents frequency.

3.3. Analysis of data

There were < 5% missing data across the sample. This finding was computed using the mean replacement technique. As Olya, Alipour, and Gavilyan (2018) indicated, a face-to-face survey improves response rate and the collection of quality data. Two measures of Skewness and Kurtosis were used to check the normal distribution of data. The results show data are normally distrusted as values for both statistics because all items fall within the recommended level of ± 3 (Taheri, Olya, Ali, & Gannon, 2019). A two-step Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach was used. The first step was a measurement test employing Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), while the second step was testing the model using patch analysis. The fitness of both the measurements and the research model was checked using several indices of fit on the data collected, such as X^2/DF, CFI, NFI, PNFI, IFI, and RMSEA (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Bentler, 1990). These analyses were performed using AMOS. The reliability of the measurements was tested using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (Cortina, 1993; Taheri et al., 2019). The means and standard deviations of the variables, as well as the correlations among them, were calculated using SPSS.

4. Results

4.1. Measurement model testing

The results of CFA are illustrated in Fig. 3. In this approach, items of each variable must load significantly onto the relevant dimension. Furthermore, the magnitude of the factor loading should be > 0.4. As shown in Fig. 3, the values for all items were > 0.45 and were significant at the 0.01 level. The model fit statistics were also satisfactory (X^2: 1319.897; df: 318; X^2/df: 4.151; CFI: 0.846; NFI: 0.807; IFI: 0.847; PNFI: 0.732; RMSEA: 0.088.; see Bentler, 1990).

Results for Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) for each variable showed that all alpha coefficients were > 0.7 (Cortina, 1993; Taheri et al., 2019), indicating a good degree of reliability. In terms of construct validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) for all factors was larger than the commonly accepted level of 0.4, as values of AVE for the 3S tourism image, attitudes toward 3S tourism, visit intention,

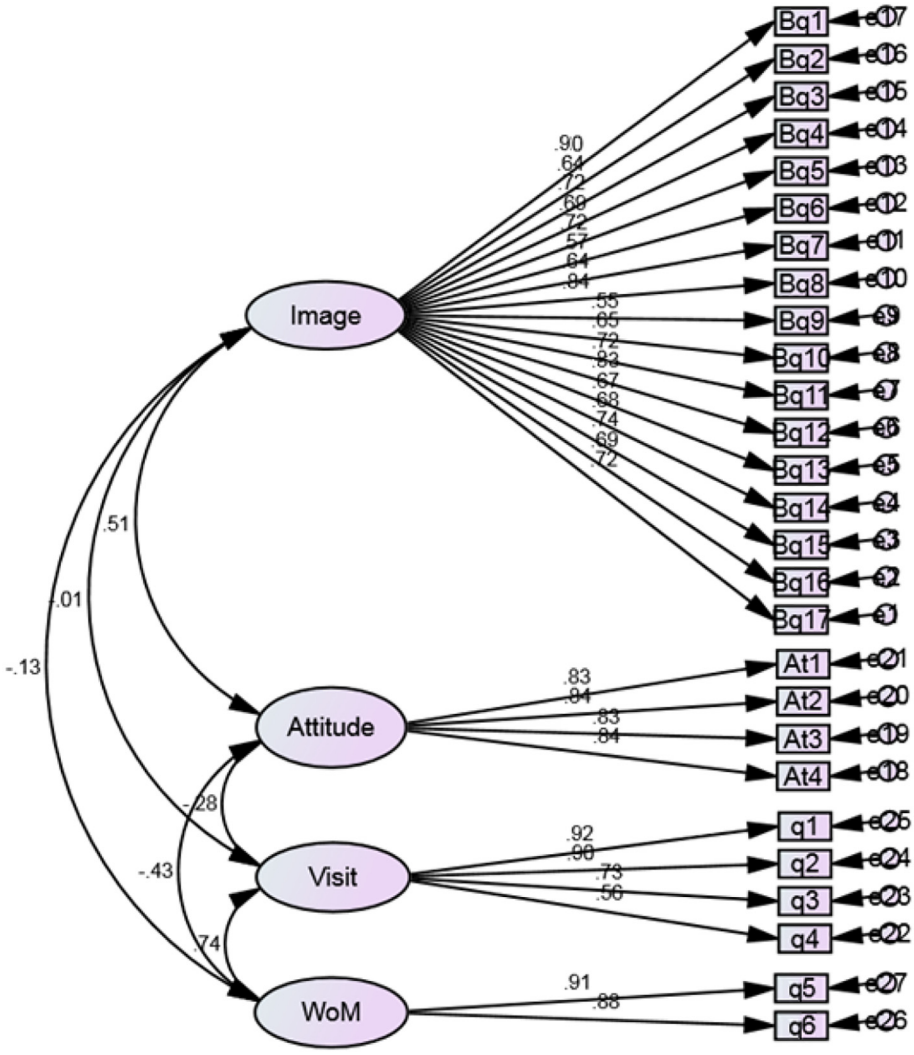

Fig. 3. Results of confirmatory factor analysis.
Note: Image stand for the image of 3S tourism; attitude is the attitudes toward 3S tourism; the visit is visit intention, and WoM is word of mouth intention. X^2: 1319.897; df: 318; X^2/df: 4.151; CFI: 0.846; NFI: 0.807; IFI: 0.847; PNFI: 0.732; RMSEA: 0.088.

Table 3
Means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alpha, and correlations matrix of study variables.

Variable	Mean	SD	α	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4
1. Image of 3S tourism	3.220	0.695	0.923	0.862	0.467	1			
2. Attitude toward 3S tourism	3.690	0.882	0.901	0.861	0.697	0.478**	1		
3. Visit intention	3.923	0.925	0.851	0.852	0.626	0.015	0.251**	1	
4. Word of mouth intention	3.824	0.991	0.892	0.785	0.801	0.128**	0.387**	0.689**	1

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed test). Reliability is measured using α Cronbach's alpha. SD represents the standard deviation.

and word-of-mouth intention were 0.46, 0.69, 0.62, and 0.80, respectively (Table 3). Results of descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and correlations among the study variables are presented in Table 3.

According to the correlation results, images of 3S tourism significantly correlated with attitudes toward 3S tourism ($r = 0.47$, $P < .01$) and word-of-mouth intentions ($r = 0.12$, $P < .01$), as presented in Table 2. However, no significant correlation was found between images of 3S tourism and visit intentions (Table 2). Meanwhile, attitudes toward 3S tourism significantly and positively correlated with both visit intentions ($r = 0.25$, $P < .01$) and word-of-mouth intentions ($r = 0.68$, $P < .01$).

4.2. Results of hypothesis testing

The second step of SEM is model testing. The results of hypothesis testing are illustrated in Fig. 4. Images of 3S tourism were shown to have a significant, positive effect on attitudes toward 3S tourism ($\beta < .50$, $P < .001$). It means that tourists holding a positive image of 3S tourism display more positive attitudes toward 3S tourism. Thus, Hypothesis 1 is supported. As depicted in Fig. 4, the regression coefficient for the effects of attitudes to 3S tourism on visit intentions is significant and positive ($\beta < .50$, $P < .001$). Visitors expressing a strong intention to visit North Cyprus reported a strongly positive attitude toward 3S tourism, supporting Hypothesis 2.

Results for the third hypothesis indicated that attitudes toward 3S

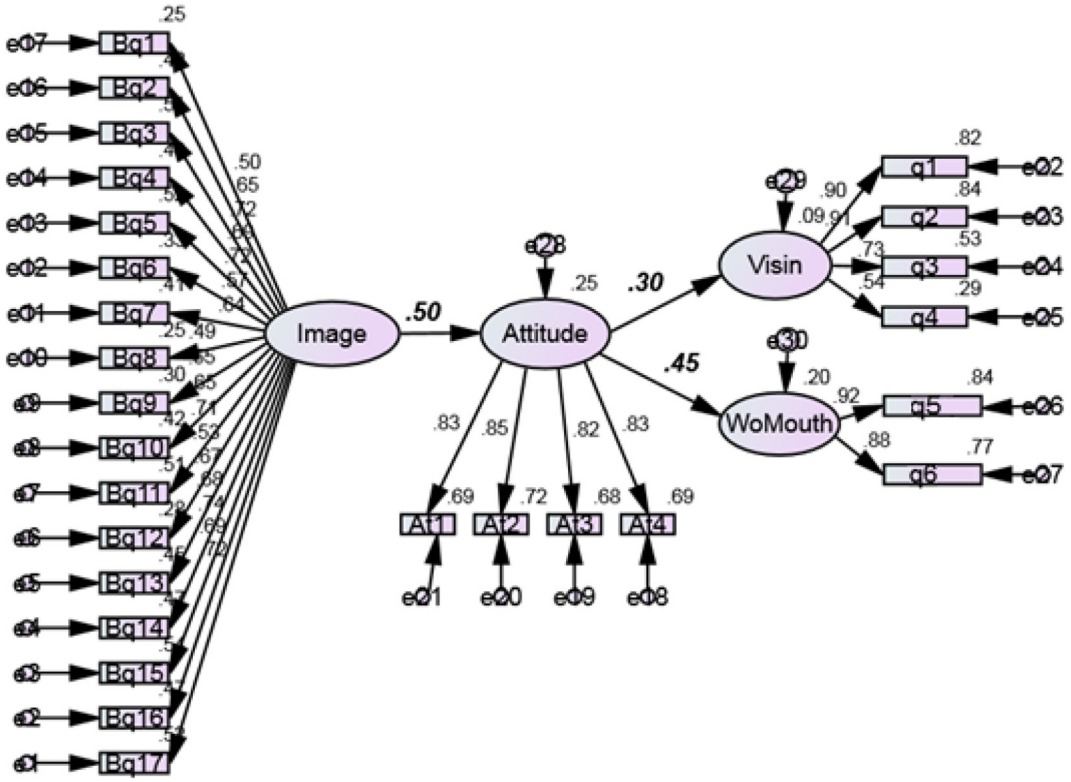

Fig. 4. Results of model testing.
Note: Image: image of 3S tourism, Attitude: attitude toward 3S tourism, Visin: visit intention, WoMouth: word of mouth intention. Fit statistics: X^2: 1536.316; df: 321; x^2/df: 4.786; CFI: 0.812; NFI: 0.775; IFI: 0.813; PNFI: 0.709; RMSEA: 0.096.

tourism have a significant and positive effect on word-of-mouth intentions ($\beta < 0.45$, $P < .001$). As for visit intentions, tourists with strongly positive attitudes toward 3S tourism express a stronger intention to recommend 3S tourism activities in North Cyprus to their friends, family, and relatives, supporting Hypothesis 3. The value of R^2 is 0.20; meaning that 20% of the variation in word-of-mouth intentions is explained by attitudes toward 3S tourism. Meanwhile, statistics for goodness of fit revealed that the model proposed has a tolerable level of fitness to the empirical data (X^2: 1536.316; df: 321; x^2/df: 4.786; CFI: 0.812; NFI: 0.775; IFI: 0.813; PNFI: 0.709; RMSEA: 0.096.). To sum up, all three hypotheses proposed were supported (Fig. 4). The following section offers additional discussion, conclusions, policy implications, and suggestions for further studies.

5. Discussion and conclusion

This empirical study helps to fill a gap in the literature regarding specific activities, whereas most studies about the destination image measure tourists' perceptions based on collective attributes. Each specific attribute, however, may hold a particular affect; therefore, all the attributes making up a TDI cannot be placed on an equal footing. This study focused on one fundamental attribute that plays a decisive role in attracting tourists to such island destinations as North Cyprus. Further investigation of this subject would require a comparative analysis of the role and effect of many attributes to highlight the strength of influences of each of them.

The significance of image of tourism destinations has been researched and discussed widely; the literature has acknowledged the importance of tourists' subjective perceptions and attitudes toward products and activities. Studies have also considered destinations more holistically. This cognitive and affective process eventually influences the visitor's choice of product or visit destination (Gallarza, Gil, & Calderon, 2002; Mehran & Olya, 2020; Paul & Bhakar, 2018). However, when it comes to tourism destinations, the product and its provisions are not as precise within the marketing spectrum as for many non-tourism products. TDI poses a formidable challenge to tourism planners, marketers, and destination managers, and because TDI is complex and multidimensional, a multidisciplinary approach is required.

"The Mediterranean region is, by far, the leading tourism destination in the world, receiving more than 330 million tourists in 2016. This tourism is undertaken mostly for seaside [3S] holidays. During the summer season, the concentration is between 46% and 69% of the total international arrivals" (Tovar-Sánchez et al., 2019, p. 316). This signifies and demonstrates the role of 3S tourism and its ramifications for the sustainability as well as marketing and competitiveness of the destinations in the Mediterranean in general and north Cyprus in particular. While the most visited countries are those with coastal areas around the Mediterranean Sea that also benefit economically, environmental implications are undeniable (Misic et al., 2011). However, the environmental impact cannot be isolated from marketing and competitiveness (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Therefore, 3S tourism, not only in the case of North Cyprus, but for the wider Mediterranean destinations, captures a unique positioning and branding role that demands the (re)evaluation of marketing policies as well as destination planning processes.

The 3S attribute is the foundation and DNA of North Cyprus's tourism product. Ritchie and Crouch (2003) believe that these type of resources are the main attributes upon which the rest of tourism system builds, and they are paramount to sustaining competitiveness. Aguilo et al. (2005) argued that the 3S attributes are also highly vulnerable to overuse and overdevelopment. At the same time, they are taken for granted because of their attraction and persistence in drawing visitors. This process was witnessed in the case of the Balearic Islands (Aguilo et al., 2005). The same processes are occurring in North Cyprus, especially due to the lack of the coastal management system and uncontrolled coastal development.

In this study, 17 items concerning the image of 3S tourism in North Cyprus were adapted for a survey questionnaire; the resulting data can be used as helpful guidelines for improving tourism marketing in North Cyprus. This research hopes to draw attention to the need to address specific components of the destination image, which might require a concentration on certain attributes that would catalyze a stronger image for the whole destination. The findings of the study revealed that destination managers should consider that visitors' overall impression can depend on certain attributes, such as those involved in 3S tourism. These might overshadow other attributes due to their power over both image and affective impressions.

The attributes of 3S tourism play a decisive role in TDI for island destinations. They are a major factor in attracting tourists. Characteristics of the climate of North Cyprus (Olya & Alipour, 2015) contribute to the quality of 3S tourism, especially for the European market, with its short summers and long winters. Therefore, an investigation into the image held by tourists in relation to 3S tourism is crucial; the present study is a step toward this end. The results of this analysis have revealed that the positive images of 3S tourism in North Cyprus are positively associated with affective attitudes. The effective promotion of 3S tourism would be helpful to North Cyprus, which is highly dependent on the image of and attitudes toward these activities.

This empirical study revealed that positive attitudes toward 3S tourism significantly and directly affected the behavioral intentions of tourists. If visitors have positive attitudes regarding 3S tourism in North Cyprus, their intention to visit increases. Similarly, tourists express the intention to recommend North Cyprus as a wonderful destination for 3S tourism activities if they experience positive feelings and attitudes. These results are in line with the findings of Chi and Qu (2008) and Hui, Wan, and Ho (2007) for other destinations.

This study therefore concludes that destination loyalty (as expressed in revisit and word of mouth intentions) is triggered by image as well as attitudes toward 3S tourism at a particular destination. Previous studies regarding destination image have focused on the destination as a whole, while little empirical research has concentrated on a destination in relation to such specific tourism activities as 3S tourism. This focus is important for North Cyprus, where 3S tourism is the main activity of the tourism sector. More efforts are therefore needed to improve image and affect toward 3S tourism in North Cyprus. Overall, this study is one more indication that destinations with 3S tourism will become more competitive if they understand the relationships between motivation and image. As Beerli-Palacio and Martin-Santana (2004, p. 677) have noted: “Therefore, it is essential for a destination in a similar position to be directed toward those market segments whose motivations are linked to the utilitarian functions of rest, relaxation, stress relief, and escape from daily routine.”

Finally, the findings of this study have implications for destination planners and managers, as well as practitioners in tourism and land use policy. The specific image of 3S tourism and its role among attractions and tourism products can provide awareness and direction to pursue improvements for tourism destinations. Such research can help practitioners visualize the strengths of each attribute within one location's image, in comparison to competitors (Perpiña, Camprubí, & Prats, 2017). Furthermore, 3S attributes play a unique role among the spectrum of attractions at island destinations. Their power to draw tourists is indisputable; at the same time, these attributes represent part of a unique landscape endowment that cannot be replaced. This reality should concern policymakers and destination planners and motivate them to design rigorous strategies for the sustainability of these resources. Destination managers can benefit from the findings of this study to identify practical approaches to uphold the value of 3S tourism in destinations highly dependent on such resources.

We acknowledge that this phenomenon is not unique to North Cyprus. It is also relevant to Mediterranean destinations with the same attributes (Cirer-Costa, 2017; Drius et al., 2019). Therefore, the implications of this study are commensurate to other island states which are highly dependent on 3S tourism for attracting visitors. 3S tourism cannot be isolated from coastal problems. One of the threats to 3S tourism, which has marketing implications, is the quality of the coastal areas that encompass the beaches for sun lovers (Matellini et al., 2018). 3S tourism products are a combination of beach, sea, and climate factors. Future 3S tourism destinations, such as North Cyprus and other Mediterranean suppliers of the same product, need to apply a superior value and careful planning to sustain the quality of this type of tourism and its market. As Wesley and Pforr (2010, pp. 774–775) eloquently stated: “While coastal tourism can deliver favorable socio-economic benefits, it is also widely acknowledged that it can also undermine the social-cultural and ecological systems of the place. The negative consequences of an ever-increasing commodification of the coast are, however, not appropriately considered in the planning and management of many coastal areas.” The 3S tourism attributes as the dominant attractions of a destination provide several important implications for tourism managers who want to understand the role of particular attributes of their destinations in the context of the tourists' perceptions which trigger positive behavioral intentions. Based on the findings of this study, managers can appreciate the role 3S tourism plays, and it should not be taken for granted because it is the foundation for tourism structure. Furthermore, 3S attributes, in the case of North Cyprus and other similar destinations, are a force for strengthening the association between positive images and intention to visit on behalf of tourists.

This study has a number of limitations, offering opportunities for further research. A longitudinal study might reveal deeper insight into aspects of destination image. Another more pragmatic limitation of this study was the limited number of sites subject to data collection. It would be highly valuable to target more than one or two sites for data collection. In addition, qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and projective techniques could be combined with quantitative approaches to enrich the results of the investigation. In studies of destination image, there is always a risk of inadvertently forcing respondents to establish differences between tourism destinations whether they perceive them or not, which can lead them to report forced rather than real images and attitudes (Carballo, Araña, León, & Moreno-Gil, 2015). 3S tourism offers memorable tourism experience (MTE) (Zhang et al., 2018), which may influence revisit intention through a mediating effect. Further research can model the experiential facets of 3S tourism.

Authors contributions

Conceptualization and literature review: Habib, Alipour, and Hossein G. T, Olya.

Survey execution: Pegah, Maleki and Sara, Dalir.

Methodology and analysis: Hossein, G.T, Olya and Habib, Alipour.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2019.100624.

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