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RESEARCH NOTE

A DUAL MEDIATION MODEL APPROACH TO EVALUATING THE PERSUASIVENESS OF WINE DESTINATION WEBSITES

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This study utilized dual mediation theory to investigate the persuasiveness of wine destination management organizations' (DMO) websites in influencing user cognition, attitude, and behavioral intention. Data were collected from a wine DMO's database in Australia. Website usability had significant effects on website cognition as well as cognition of wine destination setting and wine products. Cognition of wine destination maps, settings, and wine products produced significant effects on attitude toward wine destination. In turn, attitude toward wine destination influenced further information search and intention to attend wine destination events. These findings will help DMOs to identify critical website and wine destination attributes that users seek to make informed decisions.

Key words: Wine destinations; Destination websites; Dual mediation theory; Australia

Introduction

International tourist arrivals worldwide were approximately 1.138 billion in 2014 (United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2015). Europe observed a total of 588 million arrivals in 2014, whereas the Asia Pacific region saw 263 million (UNWTO, 2015). Yet, Morgan, Prichard, and Pride (2004) argued that, each year, only 10 countries are the recipients of 70% of international tourists, with other countries competing for the rest.

Given the competitive environment destination management organizations (DMOs) should act as a "one stop shop" by providing potential travelers with sufficient information about their goods and services (Ballantyne, Hughes, & Ritchie, 2009). For DMOs, online technologies have enabled global access (Tang, Jang, & Morrison, 2012). However, to date, there has been limited research on the effectiveness of travel destination websites (Cho & Sung, 2012).

In wine-producing countries, wine tourism involves visitation to wineries, wine festivals, and wine shows for which wine tastings and/or experiencing the attributes of the wine region are primary motivators for tourists (Hall, Johnson, & Mitchell,

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2000). Because wine tourism is critical to the local economy, DMOs must create websites for prospective travelers that effectively shape cognitive image, attitude, and behavioral intention toward the destinations (Tang et al., 2012). DMOs need to provide information to potential travelers through a well-designed and well-managed website (Ip, Law, & Lee, 2012) as reliable and credible information has been found to reduce perceived risk associated with travel decisions (Ballantyne et al., 2009; Quintal, Lee, & Soutar, 2010).

Literature Review

In the context of wine destinations, *servicescape* attributes are referred to as *winescape* attributes and potentially influence wine tourist attitude and behavioral intention (Quintal, Thomas, & Phau, 2015; Sparks, 2007; Thomas, Quintal, & Phau, 2011). Users form cognitive evaluations of the destination's winescape attributes by viewing wine destination websites, which in turn influences their attitude and behavioral intention toward the destination (Tang et al., 2012).

Winescape

Winescape is a cultural/viticultural landscape with a "winsome combination of vineyards, wineries and supporting activities necessary for modern production" (Peters, 1997, p. 124). In general, the winescape refers to "the interplay of vineyards, wineries and other physical structures, wines, natural landscape and setting, people and heritage, towns and their architecture and artefacts within them" (Johnson & Bruwer, 2007, p. 277). Quintal et al., (2015) identified seven key winescape attributes. These include three tangible attributes (wine products, complementary products, and signage) and four intangible attributes (setting, atmospherics, wine product value and service staff). Of these seven attributes, three (signage and maps, settings, and the wine product) are relevant to the wine destination websites.

Dual Mediation Model

The dual mediation model (DMM) has its root in the elaboration likelihood model (ELM), which postulates that thoughts are generated in response to a particular stimulus (Karson & Fisher, 2005). The degree of elaboration likelihood determines the relative strength of DMM paths. The indirect path represents the central route of persuasion and operates in two steps. In contrast, the direct path represents the peripheral route of persuasion (Karson & Fisher, 2005).

The DMM extends ELM theory by introducing an ad attitude–brand cognition linkage; namely attitude toward the ad that potentially influences the indirect path or central route to persuasion by fostering message acceptance for the endorser brand. The DMM has been empirically tested and validated in product marketing communications research (Brown & Stayman, 1992).

Research Model and Hypotheses Development

The research model proposed in this study (Fig. 1) is adapted from study by Tang et al., (2012) that examined *destination* websites with the DMM.

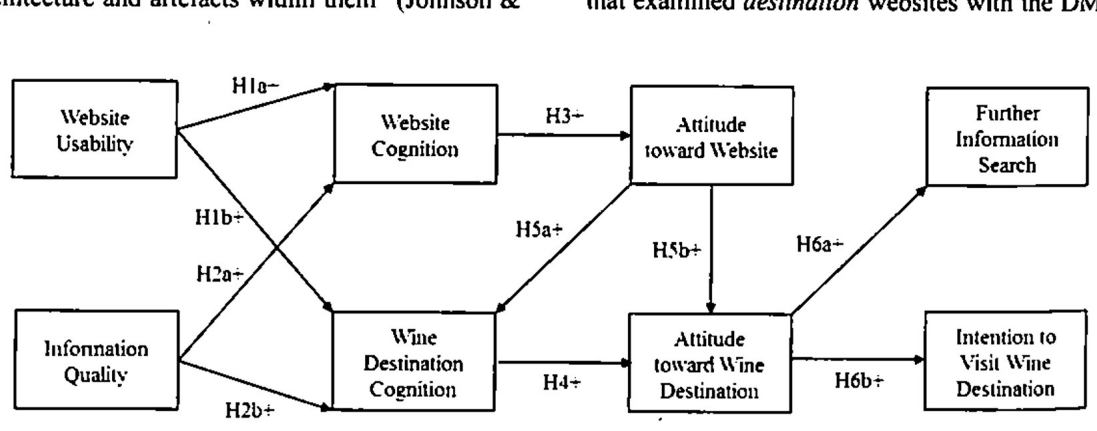

Figure 1. The research model.

Table 1
Scale Items for the Key Constructs

Website usability (Loda et al., 2009)
Is easy to use
Is easy to navigate once you get past the home page
Is well organized
Makes it easy to go back and forth between pages
Has a simple layout of the contents
Is responsive to my request
Information quality (Chiou et al., 2010; Tang et al., 2012)
Useful in providing links to wine industry members
Timely in its news updates
Relevant with news that pertains to the interest of wine lovers
Website cognition (Hwang et al., 2011)
Has created a distinct identity
Has memorable elements
Is unlike other sites that you have visited
Uses many visual images
Wine destination cognition: maps (Thomas et al., 2011)
Interactive maps of cellar doors and their facilities are provided
The map contains useful information of cellar doors and their facilities
The map is aesthetically pleasing
Maps may be downloaded
Good accommodation is suggested
Maps are an important part of the website
Wine destination cognition: setting (Thomas et al., 2011)
Each wine region is depicted by spectacular views
The landscape for each wine region has a rural appeal
The scenery for each wine region is attractively conveyed
Wine destination cognition: wine products (Thomas et al., 2011)
Prices of wine education courses are reasonable
Wine education courses address various needs of wine lovers
Wine education courses are conducted at appropriate times
Attitude toward wine destination (Hwang et al., 2011; Tang et al., 2012)
I feel that the wine RTO has a distinctive voice in the marketplace
I am convinced the wine RTO has credible branding
I have a better impression of the wine RTO
I like the wine RTO
The website is pleasant
I will say positive things about this website to other people
Further information search (Tang et al., 2012)
I would like to search for tourism information about the wine regions from other online sources
I would like to search for tourism information about the wine regions from offline resources
Intention to attend wine destination events (Hwang et al., 2011; Tang et al., 2012)
I plan to attend one of the wine education courses in next 12 months
I intend to attend one of the wine education courses in next 12 months
I will expend effort to attend one of the wine education courses in next 12 months

The current study focuses on a *wine DMO* website and its winescape attributes.

A user-friendly website facilitates the user in processing the information effectively (Rosen & Purinton, 2004). Past researches suggest that a useful website that performs effectively influences more positive cognitions of the website (Qi, Law, & Buhalis, 2008). Subsequently:

H1a: Website usability will positively influence cognition of a wine destination's website.

The usefulness of a website is also likely to affect the users' perception of an endorser brand. Loda, Teichmann, and Zins (2009) investigated potential travelers' perception toward 10 travel destination websites and argued that useful websites

positively influenced perceptions of the destination. Subsequently:

H1b: Website usability will positively influence cognition of a wine destination.

The information quality of a website and its ability to serve users are critical in evaluating the website (Chiou, Lin, & Perng, 2010). Moreover, the visitors' perceptions of information quality positively influence evaluation of the destinations (Tang et al., 2012). Subsequently:

H2a: Website information quality will positively influence cognition of a wine destination's website.

H2b: Website information quality will positively influence cognition of a wine destination.

Consumers' belief about and attitude toward websites are also positively associated. For instance, Hwang, Yoon, and Park (2011) found that diners who hold positive beliefs about the restaurant websites demonstrate more favorable attitude toward the websites. Furthermore, diners having positive beliefs about the restaurant websites also demonstrated favorable attitude toward the restaurants. Subsequently:

H3: Cognition of a wine destination's website will positively influence attitude toward the website.

H4: Cognition of a wine destination will positively influence attitude toward the wine destination.

Karson and Fisher (2005) explain that attitude toward the website influences the cognitive processing of the endorser brand message as conveyed in the website. Also, extrinsic cues such as the website's visual appeal, data sources, endorser attractiveness, music, or the number of arguments presented in the message lead to temporary attitude changes that moderately predict behavior (Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983). Subsequently:

H5a: Attitude toward a wine destination's website will positively influence cognition of the wine destination.

H5b: Attitude toward a wine destination's website will positively influence attitude toward the wine destination.

Table 2
Correlations, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliability (CR) of the Key Constructs

	WSU	WIQ	WSC	MAP	SET	WPD	ATT	FIS	INT	Items	AVE	CR
Website usability (WSU)	1.00									6	0.71	0.97
Website information quality (WIQ)	0.59**	1.00								3	0.54	0.78
Website cognition (WSC)	0.44**	0.37**	1.00							4	0.58	0.84
Wine destination cognition (maps) (MAP)	0.18	0.21*	0.37**	1.00						6	0.73	0.96
Wine destination cognition (setting) (SET)	0.41**	0.36**	0.51**	0.58**	1.00					3	0.78	0.91
Wine destination cog (wine products) (WPD)	0.37**	0.26**	0.33**	0.18	0.23*	1.00				3	0.59	0.81
Attitude toward wine destination (ATT)	0.39**	0.53**	0.37**	0.45**	0.54**	0.30**	1.00			6	0.66	0.94
Further information search (FIS)	0.21*	0.12	0.14	0.26**	0.20*	0.11	0.22*	1.00		2	na	na
Intention to attend wine destination events (INT)	0.24*	0.28**	0.36**	0.23*	0.29**	0.39**	0.35**	0.10	1.00	3	0.93	0.97

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$.

Attitude toward the endorser brand has the potential to influence further information search. Tang et al. (2012) reported that respondents with favorable attitude toward the destinations have been found to search more information about these destinations. Further, Wen (2012) reported that favorable attitude and intention toward the online behavior are positively associated. Subsequently:

H6a: Attitude toward a wine destination will positively influence subsequent information search.

H6b: Attitude toward a wine destination will positively influence intention to attend a wine destination event.

Methodology

A self-administered online survey was employed over a 3-month period. Six hundred users of a wine DMO's website in Western Australia were randomly chosen from the list with a final yield of 103 useable responses. Measures for the constructs were selected and adapted from existing scales for their reliability and applicability to the wine tourism context, as can be seen in Table 1.

Results

An exploratory factor analysis using a VARIMAX rotation with SPSS 22 produced a nine-factor solution that explained 76.5% of the variance with a KMO of 0.83 and Bartlett's test of sphericity of 5,315.37. The information quality did not identify attitude toward the website because some items of the construct showed multicollinearity with attitude toward the wine DMO. The correlations, average variance extracted, and composite reliabilities of the key constructs are presented in the Table 2.

Path analysis with SPSS 22 tested website usability, information quality, website cognition, and wine DMO cognition (maps, settings, and wine products) for their impacts on attitude toward the wine DMO and intention to attend a wine DMO event. Because factor analysis had not identified attitude toward the website, H3 and H5 could not

Table 3
Path Analysis to Test Hypothesized Relationships

	Regressed Relationship	Beta Value (β)	Hypothesis
H1a	Website usability → Website cognition	0.38***	Supported
H1b	Website usability → Wine destination cognition (maps)	0.02	Not Supported
H1b	Website usability → Wine destination cognition (setting)	0.31***	Supported
H1b	Website usability → Wine destination cognition (wine products)	0.36***	Supported
H2a	Information quality → Website cognition	0.20	Not Supported
H2b	Information quality → Wine destination cognition (maps)	0.25	Not Supported
H2b	Information quality → Wine destination cognition (setting)	0.20	Not Supported
H2b	Information quality → Wine destination cognition (wine products)	0.14	Not Supported
H3	Website cognition → Attitude toward website	NA	NA
H4	Wine destination cognition (maps) → Attitude toward wine destination	0.41***	Supported
H4	Wine destination cognition (setting) → Attitude toward wine destination	0.50***	Supported
H4	Wine destination cognition (wine products) → Attitude toward wine destination	0.36***	Supported
H5a	Attitude toward website → Wine destination cognition	NA	NA
H5b	Attitude toward website → Attitude toward wine destination	NA	NA
H6a	Attitude toward wine destination → Further info search	0.23**	Supported
H6b	Attitude toward wine destination → Intention to attend wine destination events	0.40***	Supported
Chi square	144.39		
df	95		
p Value	0.01		
RMSEA	0.07		
CFI	0.96		
NFI	0.90		
GFI	0.85		

Note. RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; NFI, normed fit index; CFI, comparative fit index; AGFI, adjusted goodness of fit index.
**$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

be tested. A summary of the path analysis to test the hypothesized relationships is presented in Table 3.

As depicted in Table 3, there was the goodness-of-fit indices were acceptable ($\chi^2/df \leq 1.5$; RMSEA $\leq$ 0.07; CFI $\geq$ 0.96, NFI $\geq$ 0.90, and GFI $\geq$ 0.85) with the exception of the GFI. As such, the model was deemed acceptable.

Discussion and Implications

Theoretically, this is the first empirical study to apply the DMM to wine destination websites with the aim of understanding the communication process involved in wine tourist decision making. The research model can be replicated in future studies on wine destinations and travel destinations for generalizability. These findings may serve as a basis on which market research projects can be developed to help wine DMOs to evaluate the persuasiveness of their websites.

Managerially, this study will help managers to identify critical website attributes to enhance positive navigation experiences for their prospective visitors. First, the results identify that website usability is crucial in the development of positive website cognition. As such, usability should be the main focus of the DMO when developing a website. Second, that website usability produced a significant effect on website cognition and wine DMO cognition of the settings and wine products. Therefore, it is necessary that websites are organized, simple, and user friendly. Wine DMO cognition can potentially be enhanced by good visuals of the ambience of the wine region as well accessible information about the products. Further, analyses of wine DMO cognition of maps, settings, and wine products suggest that the provision of good visuals can potentially produce more favorable attitude toward wine destinations. Finally, attitude toward the wine DMO had significant effects on future behavior toward the wine DMO, which indicates that wine DMOs should emphasize on eliciting consumer loyalty in their marketing communications.

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