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ABSTRACT

Incidences of negative host-guest interactions have been frequently reported through news and social media during the COVID-19 pandemic. In light of this, the present study examines the exposure of negative information about residents on potential tourists' evaluations of destination image. The findings show that tourists may offset negativity about residents through the concept of compensatory efforts by providing more favorable judgements to other elements of the destination (e.g., culture and environment). The study contributes by highlighting the dynamics of compensatory efforts and impression management on destination image, which are relevant for promoting destinations when travel and tourism recovers from COVID-19.

KEYWORDS: destination image; tourists; host-guest relations; destination marketing; destination management

INTRODUCTION

It has been said that a warm spirit of hospitality is fundamental to destination competitiveness and sustainability (Crouch & Ritchie, 2003). A hospitable spirit from residents may encourage visitation and facilitate interactions between residents and tourists, and many destinations worldwide often attribute their success to being a tourist-friendly environment (Lin, Chen, & Filieri, 2017). With the COVID-19 pandemic, however, negative host-guest relations have become a major issue as there is an increasing number of reports on residents' discontent and conflicts with tourists (Fottrell, 2020). News and social media channels have often attributed the spread of the pandemic to travel and tourism, thereby furthering exacerbating residents' unwelcoming attitudes towards visitors (Ting, 2020). Although tourism will slowly recover, it is unclear how potential tourists may balance such negative information about residents with their overall evaluations of the destination.

The goal of this study is to investigate this issue through two related parts. The objective of Part 1 is to examine the exposure of negative information about residents on potential tourists' subsequent evaluations of pre-trip, destination image via a three group (information: control, positive, and negative) between-subjects experimental design. In the face of harmful information about residents, would such negativity spillover and damage tourists' views of other aspects of the destination as well? For instance, would negativity about local people also spillover to general negativity in evaluating other aspects of the destinations, such as its environment and attractions? Conversely, it is possible that tourists would compensate for this adverse information by strengthening their impressions about other aspects of the destination (e.g., "although local residents are unwelcoming, I still wish to visit the destination because the attractions and environment are beautiful"). The findings of Part 1 highlights the latter, and contributes to the literature on host-guest relations and destination image by connecting them with the concept of compensatory efforts (Kaiser & Miller, 2001). More specifically, the study demonstrates how the (negative) dynamics of host-guest relations could affect potential tourists' evaluations of destination image.

In Part 2 of the study, the objective is to take it a step further and investigate whether negative information would influence the actual behaviors of individuals when they have to write, describe, and share why they are motivated to visit a particular destination. While Part 1 evaluates the effects of negative information on their self-reported evaluations of destination image, Part 2 seeks to examine whether individuals would compensate for negativity by creating a favorable impression of the destination on other individuals. Research in impression management suggests that individuals may alter their behaviors in order to justify themselves (and in this study, potentially the destination they would like to visit) in a positive light (White & Dahl, 2007). Part 2 adopts a novel methodology by recruiting a new and independent sample of 'impression estimators' via a randomized, double-blind process who judges the efforts of a writing task by participants in Part 1. The findings in Part 2 contributes by showing how individuals may compensate for negativity through impression management by sharing a favorable impression of the destination.

Overall, this study contributes to tourism research by showing that individuals not only interpret destination image more favorably, but also behave differently, when given the opportunity to

overcome negative information. The study also highlights the dynamics involved in compensatory efforts and impression management on destination image, which are relevant for destination marketing organizations (DMOs) involved in understanding the influence of negative information about residents that could affect host-guest relations as travel and tourism slowly recovers amidst 'new normal' of COVID-19.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Host-guest relations

Tourism can serve as a platform to facilitate positive host-guest relations, which reflects the exchange of interactions between residents and tourists at a destination (Lin, Chen, & Filieri 2017; Woosnam, Norman, & Ying 2009). A number of previous studies in the literature have examined the importance of fostering such relations. For example, socialisation between tourists and residents can stimulate intergroup relations, and during socialisation, the courtesy and politeness of residents may help develop or strengthen new relationships with tourists (Nadeau, Heslop, O'Reilly, & Luk, 2008). Residents that are willing to interact with tourists can foster a mutual understanding and build positive relationships with each other (Chen, Hsu, & Li, 2018; Tung, 2019).

Despite the importance of positive host-guest relations, there have been reports of unpleasant tourist behaviours at many destinations, thereby reducing the tolerance of residents (Pile, 2017; Tse & Tung, 2020). For instance, tourists violating social norms, vandalizing, and littering have been commonly reported (Tsaur, Cheng, & Hong, 2019). Residents and tourists often share the same physical space, which creates conflicts and disruptions; as a result, residents may respond by performing harmful behaviours. For example, residents may mock tourists to convey a sense of inferiority (Ambroz, 2008). They may also use verbally disrespectful behaviours, such as insulting and giving tourists offensive nicknames (Kozak, 2007). However, unpleasant behaviours by residents are typically passively-aggressive, such as staring at tourists to display a sense of disagreement (Maoz, 2006). They may also be unapproachable and convey an unwillingness to interact with tourists (Ye, Zhang, & Yuen, 2012). Other residents may be rude and unfriendly (Tse & Tung, 2020).

Instances of harmful behaviours against tourists have exacerbated due to COVID-19. In South Korea, some business owners have barred Chinese tourists from private establishments (Fottrell, 2020). In Japan, some residents have avoided contact with visitors (Ipsos MORI, 2020), while in England, abuses in public have been reported (Preston-Ellis, 2020). These actions have sparked a deluge of concerns about host-guest relations. The present study addresses this negative side of host-guest relations by describing residents as unfriendly, rude, and unapproachable to determine the subsequent effects on tourists' perceptions of destination image.

Host-guest relations and destination image

The actions of residents not only impacts host-guest relations, but they could also influence tourists' perceptions of destination image. Destination image reflects an individual's beliefs,

ideas, and impressions of a destination, including its attractions, activities, and accommodations (Ajzen, 2011; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Marine-Roig, 2019). It comprises of both affective and cognitive components (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Lojo, Li, Xu, 2020). The affective component reflects one's feelings or emotions towards a destination, while the cognitive component refers to knowledge and information about the destination. Together, these two components form one's image of a destination (Kim & Yoon, 2003).

Residents play a crucial role in the formation of a tourist's destination image. Residents can act as ambassadors that can communicate the values and meanings of a destination; hence, pleasant host-guest interactions could result in more positive post-travel evaluations of tourism experiences and destination image. Additionally, positive host-guest interactions could lead to the emotional attachment towards residents and overall satisfaction (Pizam, Uriely, & Reichel, 2000). On the contrary, negative behaviours by residents could impact host-guest relations and lead to unfavorable views of the destination. Negative host-guest interactions could elicit tourist dissatisfaction and negative emotional attachment towards residents, which deteriorates destination image (Kozak, 2007). For example, Kour, Jasrotia and Gupta (2020) analyzed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic situation on host-guest relationships and its future impact on travel intentions among tourists in India. The study extracted themes via in-depth interviews and data from participant observation. The findings showed that hosts displayed panic, mistrust and irresponsible behaviors towards guests, which suggests that the pandemic has a highly negative impact on the image of the community and the destination.

Overall, negative host-guest relations are a major issue facing destinations worldwide as there is an increasing number of reports regarding residents' discontent towards tourists, propelling conflicts between residents and tourists (Gutiérrez, García-Palomares, Romanillos, & Salas-Olmedo, 2017). These conflict are often exacerbated by residents' unwelcoming attitudes due to issues such as overtourism and most recently, COVID-19, in which news and social media channels often attribute the spread to travel and tourism (Fottrell, 2020; Ipsos MORI, 2020; Tse & Tung, 2020). Although tourism will slowly recover, it is unclear how potential tourists will balance negative information about residents with their evaluations of other aspects of destination image. The present study suggests that individuals may overcome the effects of negativity by forming favorable impressions towards other aspects of destination image through the concepts of compensatory effort and impression management (e.g., "although residents may be unfriendly to tourists, I would still like to visit the beautiful sceneries and attractions at the destination").

Compensatory efforts through positivity and impression management

Compensatory effort refers to individuals' attempts to interpret their perspectives and experiences differently when faced with adverse views (Kaiser & Miller, 2001). When faced with perceived negativity, individuals may disconfirm views in one area by focusing on the positive aspects of another. For instance, individuals may compensate for concerns about weight by focusing on one's socialability (Miller, Rothblum, Felicio, & Brand, 1995). They may also

devalue the dimensions that are judged by focusing on aspects that are not (Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001).

In tourism, individuals often evaluate their views of a destination across a number of dimensions. These dimensions may include comfort and security, nature and climate, the culture and friendliness of local people, and amongst other aspects of destination image (Ketter, 2016). Yet, it is not uncommon for individuals to be confronted with adverse views (Eid, El-Kassrawy, & Agag, 2019); for example, the news may report about the dangers and safety concerns of certain destinations, while also broadcasting the beauty of its natural environment. Similarly, there are many posts on social media about hostile intergroup relations between residents and tourists meanwhile emphasizing the unique culture of the local people (Chien & Ritchie, 2018). Consequently, individuals who are motivated to travel may find themselves having to justify to others, including their family and friends, why they would still like to travel despite negative host-guest relations at certain destinations (Yang & Tung, 2018).

While research on compensatory effort suggests that individuals may redirect their attention away from negativity in the face of adverse information (Singletary & Hebl, 2009), the extent to which this effort is relevant in one's evaluations of a destination remains unclear. When presented with negative information about one aspect of a destination (e.g., local residents are unfriendly), individuals could potentially exert compensatory effort by increasing the positivity of their views on another dimension of the destination (e.g., environment). Part 1 of this study posits that individuals may overcome the effects of negativity by forming favorable views toward other aspects of destination image, thereby demonstrating the compensatory effects against judgements and preventing a spillover of negativity to other aspects of the destination.

Further to the above, impression management refers to the tendency for individuals to present themselves positively in the presence of others (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Individuals may maximize the significance of their views to enhance self-evaluations and desired social identities (Crocker & Park, 2004). Impression management can motivate individuals to alter their actions to present themselves in a positive light (White & Dahl, 2007).

Recent research suggests that individuals may pay even closer attention to themselves and engage in self-promotion to increase likeability when they feel that they are being judged (Gilrane, Wessel, Cheung, & King, 2019). They may alter their verbal and/or nonverbal behaviors in order to justify their positions (Shelton, Richerson, & Salvatore, 2005). When confronted with adverse information, individuals may adopt a 'try harder' strategy by being even more persistent and assertive in their views. For example, in the face of adverse information (i.e., local residents at a destination are unfriendly), individuals may 'try harder' to convince and justify a good impression about other aspects of the destination (e.g., "Yes, I recognize that there have been reports of hostile relations between tourists and residents, but I am truly motivated to visit this destination; hence, I shall put effort to explain to other individuals, including family and friends, why the destination is truly wonderful").

While Part 1 of this study examines individuals' subjective evaluations of a destination via self-reports, Part 2 seeks to investigate the extent of these effects on individuals' actual writing behaviors when they have to justify why they would like to visit a destination amidst the

presence of negative information. The study posits that the compensatory efforts by individuals to make a good impression would be noticeable even for an independent reader in a double-blind situation.

METHODOLOGY

There are two parts in this study. Part 1 examines the exposure of negative information about residents on potential tourists' subsequent views of destination image via a three group (information: control, positive, and negative) between-subjects experimental design. Part 2 investigates whether exposure to such negative information would influence the behaviors of these potential tourists when they write, describe, and share why they are motivated to visit that destination. An independent sample of 'impression estimators' via a randomized, double-blind process are recruited to judge the efforts of the writing task.

Part 1: Compensatory effects on self-reported judgements

Participants and design

Quota sampling was used to recruit a gender-balanced ratio of participants, and participants were required to have taken at least one international trip within the last two years. One hundred and seventy-seven individuals were recruited online via social media platforms (e.g., WeChat and WhatsApp) to participate in the experiment (i.e., 89 females, 88 males; 54.2% of participants between the age of 18-25, 27.7% between the age of 26-30, and 11.9% between the age of 31-35; 81.9% of participants took between 2-4 trips in the last two years). This sample size is appropriate based on power analysis with G*Power 3.1.9.2, which indicated a sample of 159 for power (1- β) of approximately .80 with a medium effect size (.25) and probability of Type I error of 0.05 (Faul, Erdfelder, & Agag, 2009).

At the beginning of the study, participants were provided with the following instructions:

“Please take a moment to think about three destinations that you have not been to, but would like to visit, within the next two years. These destinations can be for leisure or business, long haul or short haul, individual travel or group tours, and so on.”

They were asked to rank their motivation to visit each of the three destination (i.e., rank #1 represents the destination they were most motivated to visit within the next two years). To avoid ceiling effects from destination choice, only the second ranked destination was selected as the focal destination for the next step (Reis et al. 2010).

Participants were randomly assigned to the conditions. Participants in the 'negative' condition were exposed to an excerpt that described residents at the focal destination as generally unfriendly, rude, and unapproachable as per previous host-guest relations research in the literature (Tung, King, & Tse, 2020). In contrast, participants in the 'positive' condition read a parallel excerpt that described residents at the focal destination as friendly, polite, and approachable. Afterwards, participants rated the extent to which the excerpt expressed residents as (1) friendly, (2) polite, (3) helpful, (4) approachable, (5) warm, and (6) competent based on a

7-point scale (i.e., 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). This served as the manipulation check for the information exposures.

Finally, all participants evaluated the perceived image of their focal destination. Destination image covered a total of 14 items, reflecting destination attributes such as culture, infrastructure, climate, and nature on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) (Baloglu & Mangaloglu, 2001). (Note: participants in the positive and negative conditions were also asked to write and describe why were motivated to visit that destination. Their descriptions formed the basis of the process in Part 2 of this study).

Results

Manipulation check

A manipulation check was conducted ($\alpha = .944$) and the results from analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated significant differences among conditions, $F(2, 174) = 83.393, p < .001$. The manipulation results were as expected, and participants exposed to negative information evaluated lower levels of overall friendliness and approachability of residents ($M = 3.01$) compared to those in the control ($M = 4.69$) and positive conditions ($M = 5.83$).

Evaluations of destination image

All participants evaluated the image of their focal destination using the measurement scale adopted from Baloglu and Mangaloglu (2001). The means and standard deviations of all items in the scale across the three conditions are shown in Table 1. The overall reliability of the scale is .859, which is greater than the recommended score of .70 (Nunnally, 1978).

--- Insert Table 1 here ---

Table 1. Evaluations of destination image items

Items	Negative		Positive		Control	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Interesting Cultural Attractions	6.15	0.805	5.68	1.025	5.59	0.722
Beautiful Scenery and Natural Attractions	6.02	0.799	5.95	0.860	6.19	0.919
Interesting Historical Attractions	5.95	0.990	5.64	1.095	5.56	0.836
Appealing Local Food	5.68	1.224	5.58	1.117	5.31	1.004
Interesting and Friendly People	5.68	1.195	5.46	0.953	5.19	0.776
Unpolluted and Unspoiled Environment	5.56	0.987	5.32	1.238	4.90	1.155
Good Climate	5.56	0.915	5.25	1.092	5.14	0.899
Standard Hygiene and Cleanliness	5.53	1.305	5.14	1.319	4.92	1.149
Good Value for Money	5.53	0.953	5.25	1.154	5.08	0.877
Quality of Infrastructure	5.46	1.150	5.17	1.147	5.20	1.156
Suitable Accommodations	5.44	1.317	5.25	1.123	5.24	1.040
Personal Safety	5.41	1.288	4.95	1.467	4.47	1.466
Good Nightlife and Entertainment	5.34	1.347	5.15	1.324	4.97	1.203
Political Stability	5.15	1.257	5.08	1.179	4.34	1.334

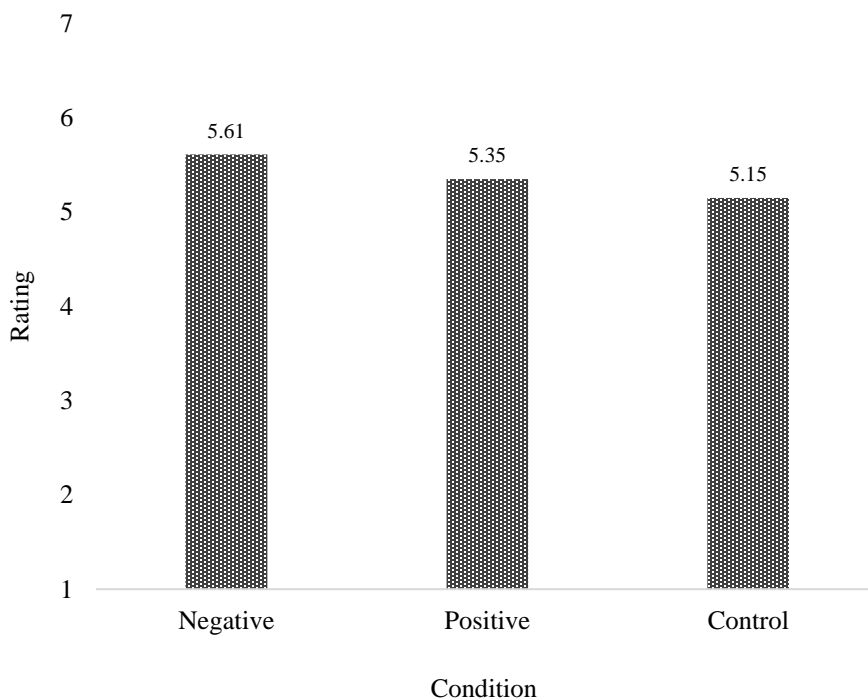
<i>Composite mean</i>	<i>5.61</i>	<i>0.741</i>	<i>5.35</i>	<i>0.586</i>	<i>5.15</i>	<i>0.612</i>
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Note: Items measured on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree)

The results from an analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the composite means of destination image across the three conditions were significant, $F(2, 174) = 7.225, p = .001$ (see Figure 1). Participants who were motivated to travel to the destination – but exposed to negative information about residents – instead compensated by reporting significantly more favorable ratings of overall destination image ($M = 5.61$) than participants in the unrelated, control ($M = 5.15$) and positive conditions ($M = 5.35$). However, there were no compensatory effects between participants in the positive and control conditions as participants who were exposed to positive information about residents did not report significantly higher ratings of destination image compared to those in the control condition

--- Insert Figure 1 here ---

Figure 1. Composite ratings of destination image across conditions

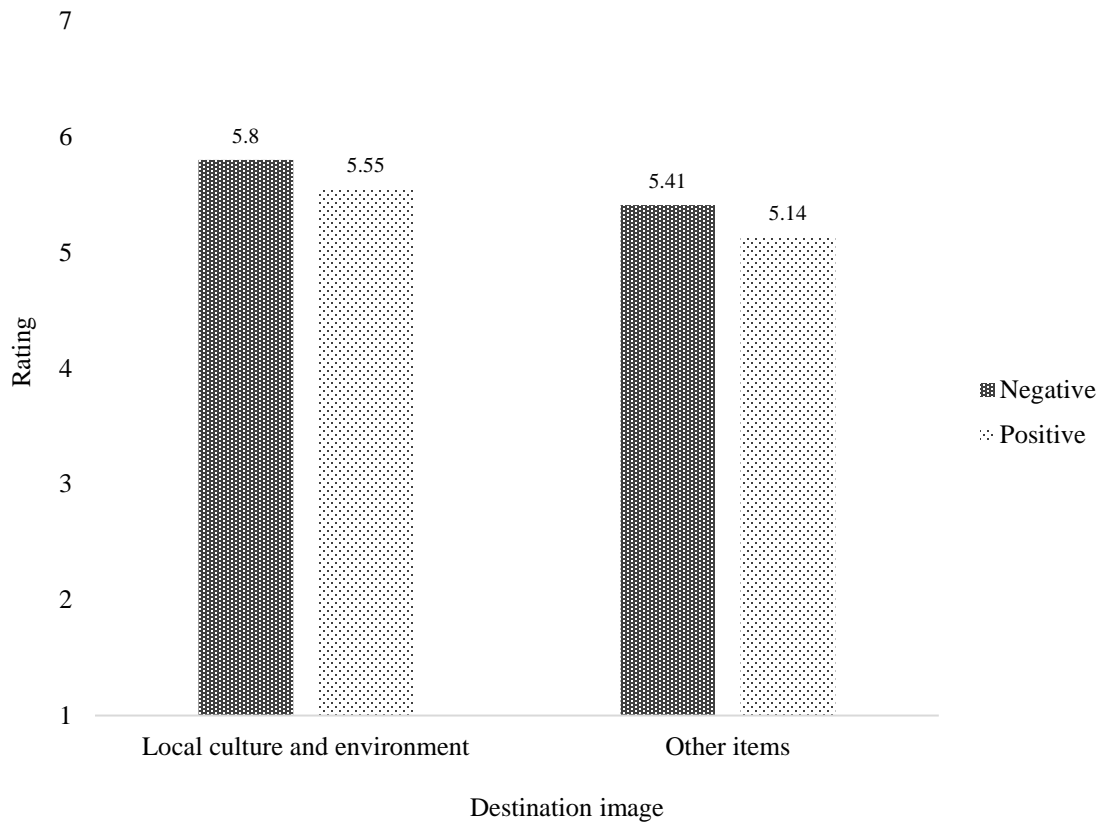


Additionally, as seen in Table 1, 7 out of 14 items that were highly rated were all largely related to the local culture and environment of the destination. Participants exposed to negative information about residents compensated by rating other destination image items ($M = 5.80$) significantly higher than those in the positive condition ($M = 5.55$), $F(1, 116) = 4.512, p = .036$. However, there was no compensatory effect between the positive and control conditions as there

was a nonsignificant difference between the two groups for the remaining items, $F(1, 116) = 2.761, p = .099$ (see Figure 2).

--- Insert Figure 2 here ---

Figure 2. Evaluations of local culture and environment by conditions



Brief discussion of Part 1 and introduction to Part 2

Part 1 provided initial evidence on the effects of compensatory efforts through positivity. Rather than a spillover effect of negativity, participants who were exposed to negative information about residents instead enhanced their perceptions of destination image. More interestingly, in the face of harmful information against residents, participants compensated by providing higher ratings for other aspects of the destination; namely, the culture and environment of the destination.

While Part 1 examined these effects on self-reported views of destination image, Part 2 takes it a step further and investigates whether these motivated travelers would actually make extra efforts to justify the favorable image of their chosen destination. The extent to which this occurs remains unclear (e.g., “There are negative information about residents but I am motivated to travel to this destination; therefore, this destination must be wonderful in other areas. I will need to put more effort to convince someone why I would like to travel to the destination and to share the better aspects of this destination”). Impression management motives suggests that individuals may alter their behaviors (i.e., in this study, the amount of effort into their descriptions about the destination to an independent reader) in order to justify themselves and their focal destination in a positive light (White & Dahl, 2007).

Furthermore, while Part 1 was based on participants' self-reports, Part 2 adopts a novel approach by recruiting 'impression estimators'. Impression estimators represent a new set of participants who will judge the amount of effort in the descriptions written by participants in the different conditions in Part 1. In other words, the process in Part 2 is based on 'others'-reports of the compensatory efforts from participants in Part 1 (i.e., participants in Part 2 assesses the descriptions written by participants in Part 1).

Part 2: Compensatory effects on behaviors through impression estimation

Participants and design

Similar to Part 1, quota sampling was used to attempt to achieve a gender-balanced ratio of participants, and only participants who have had recent traveling experiences were included. Seventy-four impression estimators were recruited (i.e., 36 males, 38 females; 40.5% of participants between the age of 18-25, 54.1% between the age of 26-30; 75.7% of participants took between 2-4 trips in the last two years). This sample size corresponds to the number of participants in Part 1 who wrote the descriptions (note: some participants in Part 1 exited the study when they reached this writing section).

A randomized, double-blind process was used to distribute the essays to the impression estimators. The authorship team did not know which condition (i.e., positive or negative) the essays were from, and did not distribute them to the estimators. The essays were randomized to the estimators, and the estimators were uninformed of the conditions. A third party with no authorship in this study executed this process.

After receiving and reading the essays, the impression estimators completed two blocks of questions. Block 1 consisted of two questions rated on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree): "The writer seems to place a high value on the destination"; and "The writer seems to value the destination." This sought to assess the extent to which the estimators felt the writer emphasized the destination in their essays. Block 2 consisted of three questions rated on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree): "The writer placed a lot of thought"; "The writer spent a lot of time"; and "The writer produced quality work". This block sought to assess the impressions of effort used in writing the descriptions.

Results

The estimators evaluated the impressions of the destinations and efforts made by participants in Part 1. The means and standard deviations of the ratings are shown in Table 2. The reliability results of the 'destination estimation' in Block 1, and 'effort estimation' in Block 2 are .963 and .936, respectively. Both values are greater than the recommended score of .70 (Nunnally, 1978).

--- Insert Table 2 here ---

Table 2. Evaluations by impression estimators between conditions

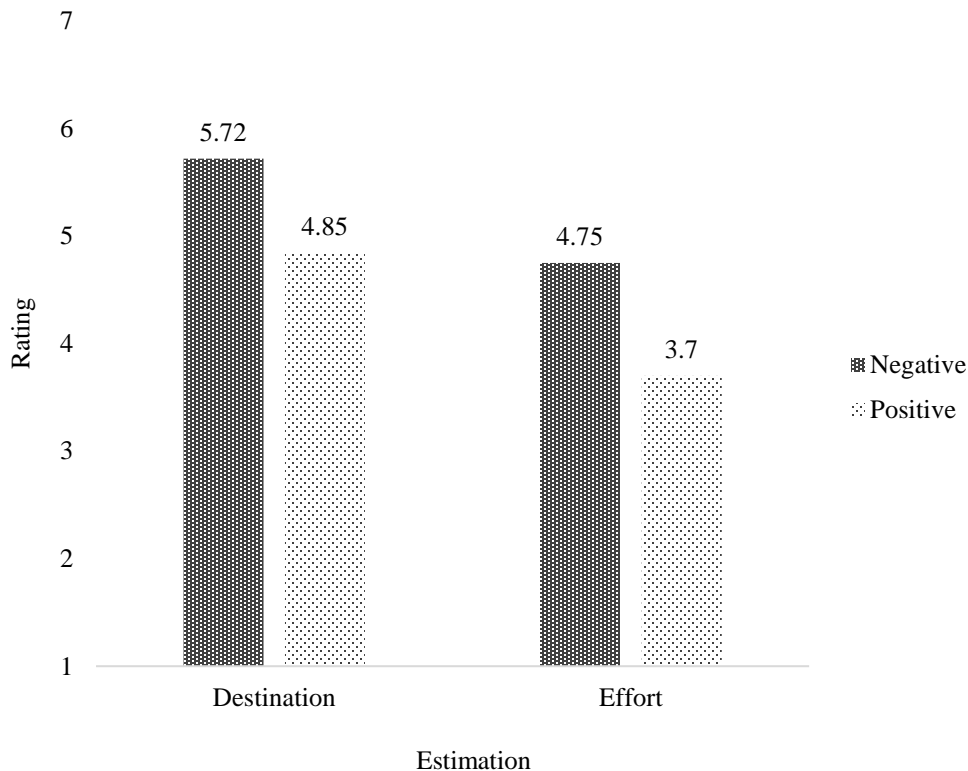
Estimation	Negative		Positive	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Destination				
The writer seems to place a high value on the destination.	5.74	1.109	4.78	1.510
The writer seems to value the destination.	5.71	1.244	4.93	1.439
<i>Composite mean</i>	<i>5.72</i>	<i>1.129</i>	<i>4.85</i>	<i>1.464</i>
Effort				
The writer placed a lot of thought.	5.09	1.357	3.95	1.467
The writer spent a lot of time.	4.47	1.542	3.30	1.324
The writer produced quality work.	4.71	1.567	3.85	1.272
<i>Composite mean</i>	<i>4.75</i>	<i>1.415</i>	<i>3.70</i>	<i>1.247</i>

Note: Items measured on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree)

The result of an independent samples t-test on the composite means of destination estimation between the two conditions was significant, $t(72) = 2.825, p = .006$. The impression estimators provided a more favorable judgement for participants in Part 1 who were exposed to negative ($M = 5.72$) than positive information ($M = 4.85$) about the destination. Similarly, the estimators also rated the descriptions written by participants in the negative condition as higher quality and more thoughtful ($M = 4.75$) than those in the positive condition ($M = 3.70$), $t(72) = 3.409, p = .001$ (see Figure 3). Collectively, these results suggest that motivated travelers who were exposed to negative information about residents actually compensated by putting more effort into telling other individuals why they would truly like to visit the destination despite reports of hostile host-guest relations.

--- Insert Figure 3 here ---

Figure 3. Estimations of destination and effort by conditions



Brief discussion of Part 2

Part 2 demonstrates the potential effects of information exposure (i.e., positive or negative) on the behaviors of participants when they had to write about the destination. Impression estimators rated higher levels of effort from participants who were exposed to negative than positive information about residents. The impression estimators also suggested that participants in the negative information condition placed a higher value on the destination overall. To reiterate, the findings of Part 2 show that negative information about residents actually enriched the compensatory efforts of individuals when they had to write and express why they would like to visit a destination.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly amplified negative perceptions of tourists from host communities worldwide. Reports of harassment and discrimination against tourists have been reported by the media amidst a backdrop of unpredictability as the virus continues to devastate the travel and tourism industry. As a result, tourists contemplating travel in the new normal marked by COVID-19 will inevitably have to balance such negative information about residents

with their overall views of the destination. Similarly, DMOs will have to manage views of negative host-guest relations by promoting other aspects of their destination.

In this light of this reality, the two parts of this study sought to examine the effects of negative information about residents on potential tourists' overall image of a destination. Part 1 showed that participants overcame the effects of negativity by forming more favorable impressions towards other aspects of the destination (e.g., environment), thereby highlighting the concept of compensatory efforts on judgements of destination image. Part 2 delved further and investigated whether these participants would make extra efforts to justify the favorable image of the destination that they would like to travel to. The results from 'impression estimators' suggested that participants who were exposed to negative information exerted higher levels of compensatory effort when they had to impress others about the destination.

Theoretical Implications

This study provides a number of relevant contributions. It contributes to the literature on host-guest relations and destination image by connecting them with the concept of compensatory efforts. More specifically, the study demonstrates how the (negative) dynamics of host-guest relations could affect potential tourists' evaluations of destination image. Host-guest relations have been under considerable stress; they have been previously affected by social concerns such as overtourism, and today, by the COVID-19 pandemic (Cheer, 2020). As a result, local residents may not always be hospitable – or they could even be unfriendly – to visitors, which could impact a potential tourists' view of the destination. The present study contributes by showing, however, that such negativity may not always spillover to other aspects of the destination. Instead, tourists who are motivated to visit a destination may be offsetting such negativity through the concept of compensatory efforts by providing more favorable judgements to other important elements of image, such as the general culture and environment of the destination.

Further to the above, this study contributes by showing that certain elements of destination image could be potentially viewed as 'timely' or 'timeless' by tourists. Elements related to host-guest relations such as 'interesting and friendly people' could be considered as 'timely'; that is, tourists' views are affected by current circumstantial contexts such as COVID-19. For example, residents who were once welcoming to tourists (e.g., Mainland Chinese) may not necessarily be as friendly anymore right now due to the pandemic. In other words, residents' views and friendliness may change drastically and quickly with current events. In comparison, elements such as 'cultural and historical attractions' as well as 'scenery and natural attractions' are relatively 'timeless'. Although COVID-19 may change the ways in which people leisure, work, and live, the overall history and culture of a destination remains comparatively stable. Similarly, the scenery and natural attractions may not be affected to the same extent by the pandemic; in fact, there have been reports of the betterment of 'unpolluted and unspoiled environment' in various destinations (e.g., India) as a result of reduced human activities and air pollution from COVID-19 (Picheta, 2020).

This study further contributes by showing how individuals may compensate for negativity through impression management by creating a favorable impression about the destination on

other individuals. The findings show that individuals altered their writing behaviours in order to justify the destination they would like to visit through impression management motives (White & Dahl 2007). Individuals displayed more effort to share their overall positive image of destination, thereby compensating for negativity stemming from negative host-guest relations. In doing so, this study contributes by demonstrating the malleability of destination image through impression management motives that could counteract negative information about residents.

Methodological Implications

This study provides a methodological contribution by demonstrating the use of a ‘double-blinded’ approach in destination image research. Existing studies in destination image and tourism experiences often rely on participants’ self-reported questionnaires which are prone to response bias. For instance, participants may be inclined or pressured to answer in ways that they feel are socially acceptable (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Holtgraves, 2004). Other studies may rely on in-depth interviews about participants’ experiences or image of a destination. Although in-depth interviews are widely used, an issue with this approach is that the interactions and dynamics between the participant and researcher could ultimately affect a participant’s overall evaluation of the destination and experience. Participants may opt to discuss and highlight areas that they feel are more favorable in the eyes of the researcher.

This study contributes by showing that a randomized, double-blind process with impression estimators could potentially address the above issues in future research. The use of impression estimators could negate participants’ self-reported bias; for instance, an independent sample of participants provided feedback on efforts of the writing task instead of participants simply rating their own efforts (which could elicit socially desirable responses). The randomization and double-blind process ensured that the authorship team was not involved with the impression estimators to reduce potential desirability effects.

Practical Implications

Recovery in travel and tourism from COVID-19 will likely be slow and difficult. As of time of writing, many borders have been closed to international tourists. Although tourism forecasting by United Nations World Tourism Organization predicts at least some recovery of international travel by 2021-2022, there are some suggestions that different strains of COVID-19 could still be circulating in the world for longer (UNWTO, 2020). As a result, it is perhaps more accurate to refrain from the term, ‘post’ COVID-19, because there is no scientific consensus when ‘post’ pandemic will be. Hence, the following discussion on the practical implications of this study should be interpreted within the circumstantial context of ‘when borders re-open’ amidst COVID-19, rather than the stance of ‘post’-COVID-19.

Against this backdrop, negative host-guest relations are unlikely to abate, and could potentially even deepen during the recovery phase as international travel recovers (O’Kane, 2020). Wealth disparities and inequalities amongst individuals may increase as income and discretionary spending tightens. Those who can travel internationally could be seen as ‘haves’ versus a large segment of the resident population of ‘have nots’. Consequently, tourism policymakers should

address both residents' negative sentiments as well as reports of negative information about residents that may continue to transpire in the media.

The findings in this study can provide at least some solace to DMOs as negativity about local people may not necessarily spillover as 'generalized' negativity about the destination. Participants also demonstrated compensatory efforts against such negativity through positivity for other aspects of destination image. In other words, there remains opportunities for destinations to actively promote other aspects of their destination to reinforce a positive view in the minds of potential tourists.

More specifically, what does this mean for DMOs? It means that they could potentially shift some of the attention away from negative host-guest relations as a result of COVID-19. The findings showed that in the face of damaging views against locals, participants who were motivated to travel provided higher ratings of items related to the environment and cultural attractions of the destination. There is potential for DMOs to focus on the natural aspects of their destinations, and promote experiences related to the environment, such as outdoor and adventure experiences. Destinations could also focus on their history and promote their historical attractions. In doing so, DMOs could refocus tourists' energy towards positive aspects of the destination.

DMOs could also address host-guest relations by fostering and encouraging tourists to interact with residents so that tourists can have firsthand experience of a destination's hospitality. As per contact theory, interpersonal interactions among members of social groups could potentially change one's attitude, as well as dispel stereotypes and misunderstanding (Allport, 1954). Face-to-face contacts between residents and tourists could instill learning and knowledge about each other, and reduce negativity between individuals.

Meanwhile, DMOs could also consider internal marketing and education to address potential negativity from residents' attitudes towards tourists. For instance, resident could be invited to meetings and opinion-sharing in order to uncovers reasons for negative attitudes, and at the same time, educate the residents about the positivity of tourism (Maruyama & Woosnam, 2015). This approach would not only benefit the restoration of host-guest relations, but also, to a certain extent, minimize the possible spillover effects of residents' negative attitude to other residents. In this regard, public policymakers can work with residents to address their concerns through strategic communication and consultation.

The findings in this study point to another positive sign for DMOs: individuals demonstrated compensatory efforts when they had to write and express why they would like to visit a destination despite negative host-guest relations. These individuals also placed a higher value on the destination overall. Individualized word-of-mouth will become ever more critical in the 'new normal' as tourists slowly readjust to traveling domestically and regionally again before moving internationally. Individuals who value a destination and demonstrated effort in sharing where they would like to travel with their friends and family represent invaluable sources of personal recommendations. These individuals could be potentially seen as 'tourist ambassadors'. Previous studies suggested that residents may serve as destination ambassadors, and influence tourists' experiences and their image of the destination (Styliadis, 2020). This study extends this line of

work and shows that tourists could potentially serve as ambassadors; that is, tourists who are motivated to visit a destination may put extra effort in re-constructing a favorable destination image in order to communicate positive aspects to fellow potential tourists. In this view, tourists may become temporary ambassadors to facilitate positive views of the destination to other tourists. Overall, DMOs are recommended to take note of motivated travelers not only as an important market segment, but also as potential ambassadors who may affect the future travel patterns of those around them when borders and travel generally re-opens again from COVID-19.

Limitations and future research

There are limitations and opportunities for future research. The quantitative approach used in this study did not provide a deep examination of tourists' perspectives that may have led to their views of destination image. Future research via a qualitative approach could explore, in more detail, how negative information about residents could harm the image of a destination. Furthermore, future qualitative research could also explore why some elements such as the history and culture of a destination may be considered 'timeless', whereas host-guest relations that are dependent on current events and reports from social media, for example, are considered more 'timely' with impact on evaluations of destination image.

Another limitation of this study is that participants have not been to the destinations considered, and as such, perceived image could be formed via agents of image construction before their visit. These agents could include word-of-mouth from other individuals who have visited the destination and/or information sources such as destination promotional content and video through social media (Gong & Tung, 2017; Tung, Cheung, & Law, 2018).

This study did not discern the influence of age on evaluations of destination image. Individuals from different age group will likely exhibit different behaviours related to information consumption via social media, for instance; hence, it is possible that the effects of negative information about residents may impact younger versus older tourists differently. Future research could examine how tourists from different age groups could be affected by negative information, and its subsequent relationship with destination image.

Furthermore, since study is limited to motivated first-time travelers, future studies could examine the views of destination image from repeat tourists, particularly within the context of COVID-19. For instance, a number of destinations (e.g., Thailand, Japan, and Hong Kong) are currently working towards the concept of a 'travel bubble', whereby destinations may reopen their borders to tourists from regions that have shown a certain degree of success in addressing the outbreak. This is a favorable development, and future research can examine the effects of travel bubbles in the context of positive information, host-guest relations, and destination image. Future research could also assess how participants' perceived destination image would change in the future if they experience irresponsible behaviours from residents when they travel again when borders re-open from COVID-19 (Kour et al., 2020).

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