

LOYALTY OF YOUNG RESIDENTS THROUGH VARIABLES THAT LINK THEM TO THEIR OWN TOURIST DESTINATION

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In the context of sustainable and responsible tourism development, this paper aims to study the loyalty of young residents to the destination in which they reside. Loyalty is understood to be the willingness to visit the destination again or recommend it to others. One of the main contributions of this paper is the population segment chosen for study. Few studies have tackled loyalty among young residents despite the importance of loyalty in general, young people's consumption potential and their relevance as residents in a destination. A second contribution is connected to the location of the study: the Canary Islands. Although there has been substantial attention paid to residents in consolidated and emerging tourist destinations, it is very difficult to find research on young residents in island destinations.

The literature shows that loyalty formation in the tourism sector depends on variables related to the firm (reputation, responsibility, market orientation), to the product (quality, perceived value, image) and to the consumer (satisfaction, age, sex). However, no studies have been found that analyze the formation of loyalty exclusively using variables that link residents to the tourist destinations in which they reside, variables such as place attachment, familiarity and place identity. This is another novel feature of this study and is the core of the proposed causal model.

From a methodological perspective, the geographical context of this study is the Canary Islands, a mature sun and sand destination that has gone through all the phases of its life cycle. The final sample was composed of 678 subjects, of which 98% were 18 or 19 years old. The sample was intentionally selected so that it was made up of young residents of the two provinces of Canary Island region (Tenerife and Gran Canaria), thus achieving greater geographical representation. To be able to compare subjects from both provinces and guarantee homogeneity of the two sub-samples, students were selected from the first and second year of the same degree at each of the two universities in the region.

An ad hoc designed questionnaire was used to collect the information, as commonly used in the literature regarding the variables evaluated in this study. On a Likert-type scale of 14 items, each with 5 responses, the following information was obtained regarding: place attachment (4 items), familiarity (2 items), place identity (4 items), satisfaction (2 items) and loyalty (2 items). Additionally, the questionnaire requested information on the sex of the individual, island of residence, and the amount of tourism carried out in the region.

In addition to the descriptive analysis, structural equations were used, which are an improvement on regression techniques: specifically, the PLS method was used. Causal analysis results showed that the measurement model had acceptable reliability and adequate convergent and discriminant validity. The structural model analysis revealed that, except in the case of attachment, the predictor variables contributed to explaining significantly the variance of loyalty. The relationships between place identity, satisfaction or place attachment and loyalty did not reach the minimum acceptable levels. Finally, analysis of the variables commonly used in the literature demonstrated the predictive nature of the proposed loyalty formation model.

Regarding the descriptive analysis, it was found that levels of all variables were high. Additionally, the discriminant analysis allowed us to conclude that there were no significant differences in the responses of young residents on grounds of sex, island of residence or number of trips made to the destination. The multi-group analysis with sex of young residents in the structural equations (PLS) reflected the existence of certain direct significant differences in some relationships (paths) among the latent variables in the model.

The results from this studied have produced some relevant conclusions. First, the economic sustainability of island tourism destination and enterprises in the sector is closely linked to the achievement of loyalty in general, and specifically to the loyalty of young residents. In general, loyalty is achieved by variables related to firms (market orientation, reputation, social responsibility), to product-destination (quality, perceived value, image) and to consumers (satisfaction, age, sex).

However, we conclude that the variables that link young residents to the tourist destination in which they reside are sufficient to explain the formation of satisfaction and loyalty. Attachment, familiarity and identity of place, together with satisfaction, sufficiently explain the formation of loyalty, without the intervention of the variables of the firm or the product.

Given that attachment, familiarity and identity variables are not specifically linked to the firm or product, the role of firms in influencing these variables is negligible. Tourism firms and institutions can achieve loyalty among young residents of tourist destinations but not by pursuing actions related to their firms or products rather by fostering place identity, attachment and familiarity.

But any actions tourism firms take to improve market orientation, reputation and trust in their firm as well as the quality, value and product-destination image and thus overall loyalty should be based on promoting attachment, familiarity and identity of the young resident with their destination. This would achieve synergies, as well as greater satisfaction and loyalty among young people residing in the destination, in addition to

being more socially responsible and promoting sustainability. In this respect, public and private tourism institutions could develop activities to foster the loyalty of young residents, especially, as shown in this paper; this segment already has high attachment, familiarity, identity, satisfaction and loyalty with a destination.

In this paper, it has been shown that familiarity, place attachment and place identity are different constructs, although they are related and influence purchasing behavior. It has also been found that place identity is characterized by incorporating particular cognitive elements, such as self-concept, whereas place attachment includes mainly affective components. Familiarity is related to the knowledge, learning and experience of young residents regarding the destination in which they reside. Knowing the differences between these constructs and the implications they have on the behavior of young resident allows links to be built between them and their tourist destinations, which are conceived as significant places. This could help form loyalty without the direct intervention of the variables of the firm or the product.

It can be concluded that place identity is the variable that begins the chain of direct and indirect effects that culminate in the satisfaction and loyalty of young residents. It has also been demonstrated that, in the case of young residents, satisfaction is the variable that most directly affects loyalty, as proposed by other authors for other population segments. This fact is in accordance with the idea that the development of a positive link with a place is a requirement for an individual to feel satisfaction.

Although some authors believe that age plays an important role in the formation of attachment, familiarity and identity, it seems that length of stay or residence, as well as the experiences associated with the stay also largely determine the formation of these constructs. These findings are in line with other researchers, who also believe that there are no significant differences based on sex, at least not in the case of young residents. In addition to the above, the absence of differences for reasons of island of residence and number of trips made to the destination follows the numerous sociological studies that show that generations have cognitive, emotional and behavioral patterns that are uniform, homogeneous and stable among its members, especially if they live in the same community and place.

Although the measurement and structural models of men and women were analyzed separately, they were statistically significant and similar to each other and to those obtained for the whole sample. However, significant differences were found between some direct links (paths) of the structural models of each group, men and women. These results suggest that a future line of research would be a more detailed study of other possible differences based on sex, which could be significant in certain indicators or relationships. This would enable specific actions to be performed by tourism firms to manage satisfaction and loyalty of young residents with the destination. These lines of research could also address other differentiating criteria used in this paper, such as the island of residence and the number of trips made to the destination.

Overall, the generational and socio-cultural approach of this paper indicates that tourism firms and institutions linked to the destination could carry out homogenous actions for the whole segment of young residents, thus concentrating their efforts and saving resources. It also suggests that the results and conclusions reached could be generalized

to the same segment of residents in other tourist destinations in Spain, or even in other countries given that globalization and development of communications have led to a global and universal character of generations, nowadays. This avenue could be pursued in future research.