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Consequences of Citizens' Quality of Life in Word of Mouth of Cities: The Mediating Effect of Destination Image

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Abstract

Cities have witnessed a growing number of tourists visiting their attractions, events and monuments. From this growth, tourism has become increasingly important over the last few years. For this evolution has influence the image of the cities themselves but also the influence of the word of mouth that tourists promote by their lived experiences in these cities. Scientific studies around tourism marketing have accentuated the analysis of studies of tourist profile and behavior, leaving aside the importance that the citizen, resident in the city, has in promoting the place as a tourism destination.

In this sense, due to the importance of tourism for the Portuguese economy and the small number of relevant citizen-centered studies in literature, our study deepened the contributions of citizens' quality of life to the word of mouth of cities. To achieve our goal, we tested a research model using partial least squares estimated structural equations (PLS-SEM) across a sample of 428 individuals. The results show that citizens will recommend their cities through word of mouth if their quality of life is high, with emphasis on the psychological well-being and enjoyment dimensions obtained by each citizen in the city. Thus, our study contributes to understand the importance of cities, have strategies oriented to their resident citizens that, in this way, will be able to recommend to tourists and consequently promote the dynamization of economic activities.

Keywords: Citizens, Quality of Life, Word of Mouth, Tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an industry involving many services, amenities, and other benefits and features such as tourist events, cultural activities, history and heritage (Uysal & Sirgy, 2019). It has become a major socioeconomic force and provides numerous national gains, employment, international exchanges and development of commercial activities (Allameh, et al., 2015) increasing competition between countries, cities or regions that want to attract the attention of tourists (Armenski, Dwyer, & Pavlukovic, 2017). Therefore, destination image includes traveller's interests, attitudes, and preferences (Han, Yu, & Kim, 2018) and acts as a differentiating factor between competitors (Tasci, Gartner, & Cavusgil, 2007). This destination image has a significant influence in the visit or revisit of a destination as well as in the willingness to recommend the destination to others (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011).

WOM also gains more importance in the choice of tourists, although in tourism research is still limited (Litvin et al., 2008).

However, there is still little research on residents' perceived impacts of tourism on the destination as well as the influence in recommending the destination (Lee & Xue, 2020). These authors emphasize the need for future exploration of the effects of residents' quality of life on tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. CITIZENS QUALITY OF LIFE

Quality of Life (QOL) research is an emerging field of study in the social, behavioral, environmental, and policy sciences over the last few decades (Uysal, Sirgy, Woo, & Kim, 2016). Quality of Life of citizens and tourism are associated concepts since tourism industry brings economic benefits and jobs for the place (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010) as well as could improve well-being of people of the destination community (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, & Vogt, 2005). Quality of life can be defined as a person's life satisfaction or dissatisfaction, happiness or unhappiness, or sense of psychological or subjective well-being (Croes, Ridderstaat, & van Niekerk, 2018). However, few studies analysed the relation between residents' place image and their support for tourism development (Ramkissoon & Nunkoo, 2011).

QOL has been conceptualized and operationalized in multiple ways. QOL is a multidimensional concept such as health, education, and income, as well as subjective assessment of those objective conditions revealed in a person's life experience (Croes et al., 2018). QOL is reflected in indicators such as the economic well-being (e.g., gross domestic product, household income, poverty rate), leisure well-being (e.g., number of recreational facilities per thousand inhabitants), environmental well-being (e.g., carbon dioxide emissions), and health well-being (e.g. average life expectancy) (Fu, Ridderstaat, & Jia, 2020).

Local resident's image is different from tourist's and could be stronger and with highest attachment due to their experiences in the place (Stylidis et al., 2016) and it could lead to the support for tourism development (Stylidis, Biran, Sit, & Szivas, 2014) as well as recommend their place for tourism (WOM), influencing tourists' perception of the destination (Gallarza et al., 2002).

2.2. DESTINATION IMAGE

Cities are considered multifaceted entities perceived from a range of perspectives (Priporas, Stylos, & Kamenidou, 2019). A destination image is formed by people in different ways. It results from previous experience or formed from news, advertising or social media or even conversations with friends, relatives or family (Beerli & Martin, 2004). The destination image corresponds to feelings, expectations, beliefs and impressions about a place built for individuals or groups (Priporas et al., 2019) and these impressions could change after tourists experienced the destination (Beerli & Martin, 2004). City residents or visitors can shape the city image through the association chains or networks that are built up over a period of time, as a result of the stimuli aggregated (Priporas et al., 2019).

Destination image was conceptualized for several authors in three components: cognitive, affective and conative (Ekinci, Sirakaya, & Preciado, 2013).

Cognitive dimension in tourism contains beliefs, evaluations and facts about destination's characteristics formed by the tourist (Qu et al., 2011) and it results from attributes that might include infrastructure, service quality, climate, shopping, environment and other (Gallarza et al., 2002).

On the other side, affective component is an emotional attachment (Pratminingsih, et al., 2014) and refers to individual's feelings and emotional responses from characteristics of destinations (Qu et al., 2011).

Finally, the conative component is considered as a behavioural outcome that results from the preceding components (cognitive and affective) (Prayag, 2009).

However, destination image could conduct to the success or failure of the destination and can change over time (Wang & Pizam, 2011).

The formation of the city's image can be generated bilaterally, both by people and the environment, and depends on current perceptions.

Then we tested the following hypothesis:

H1: Citizens' perceptions about their quality of life have positive effects on their image of the city.

2.3. WORD-OF-MOUTH IN CITIES

Earlier research from the 1960's studied Word of mouth (WOM) in the context of marketing (Chen, Dwyer, & Firth, 2018). WOM has been a core area of research in the marketing literature and recognizes interpersonal influence in decision-making (Strandberg, Styvén, & Hultman, 2019). WOM (word-of-mouth) corresponds to informal and personal forms of communication (Arndt, 1967), shared with others through recommendations, and opinions, positive or negative (Anderson, 1998), which influence people's attitudes (especially when it's negative) (Bailey, 2004).

In the field of tourism, WOM is the process for tourists to share opinions and information about a destination (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). Thus, it allows tourists to obtain information about destinations, transport, accommodation, itineraries and much more before traveling, thus influencing their choices (Arsal, Backman, & Baldwin, 2008). This makes the recommendation by previous visitors to make the destination even more attractive for those who plan to visit or (re) visit it (Bianchi & Pike, 2011). WOM is then a dimension in measuring tourist loyalty (Hapsari, Clemes, & Dean, 2017) and reducing risk and social reassurance as well as allows quality and convenience for tourists (Kim, Mattila & Baloglu, 2011).

However, WOM is influenced by factors such as cultural activities, motivations for travel or places of social interaction (Alves, Abrantes, Antunes, Seabra, & Herstein, 2016) as well as tourist satisfaction and perceived entertainment (San-Martín, Prodanova, and Jiménez, 2015).

However, WOM is also found not only in tourists but also in residents (Arsal et al., 2010) that influence travel choices (Leach, Liu & Winsor, 2008). There are intrinsic drivers motivating the generation of WOM, including concern for others (Chen et al., 2018). Cities with a brand distinctiveness aims a strong relationship between the city and citizens.

Cities with a strong brand have a strong relationship with their citizens and city image acts as a driver motivating the generation of WOM (Chen et al., 2018). Therefore, we tested the following research hypothesis:

H2: The city's image has positive effects on word of mouth generated by citizens.

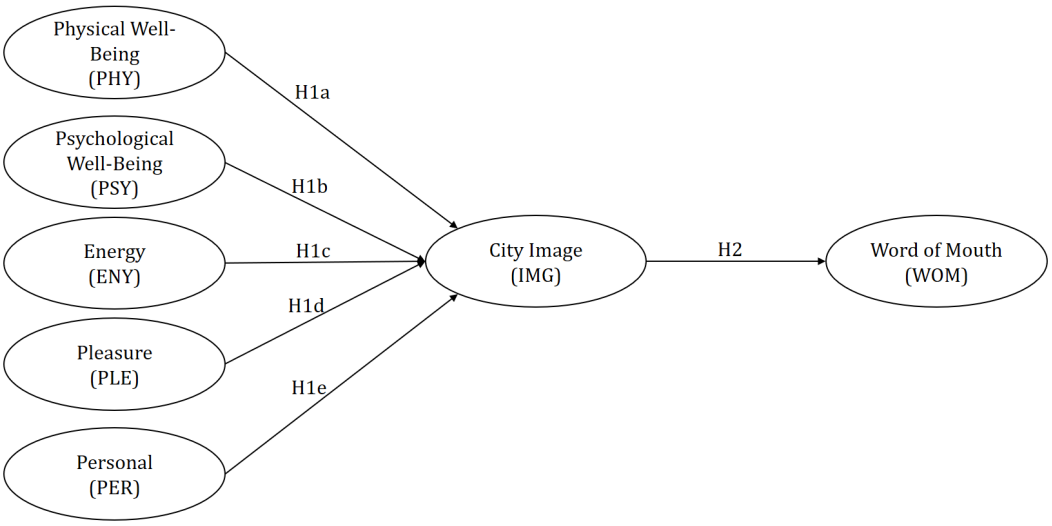

Figure 1 – Conceptual Model

3. METHODOLOGY

A realization of the work has a conclusive-causal nature and a unit of analysis centered in portuguese residents. Non-probabilistic sampling for convenience was chosen as the sampling technique for this investigation. To collect data from this cross-sectional study, a questionnaire was conducted whose items were constructed through the adaptation of 7-point Likert scales already tested in the literature as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 – Items

Construct	Code	Items	References
Quality of life: Physical well-being	PHY1	My goodness is greater for residing in this city.	(Macke, Casagrande, Sarate, & Silva, 2018)
	PHY 2	My health is improved by living in this city.	
	PHY 3	Living in this city allows me to face (in an easier way) any problem.	
Quality of life: Psychological well-being	PSY1	Living in this city allows me to be well mentally.	
	PSY2	This city allows me to have less negative emotions or destructive feelings.	
	PSY3	This city is a great contribution to facing the day with more energy and hope.	
Quality of life: Energy	ENY1	This city allows me to have more energy.	
	ENY2	This city allows me to achieve my goals.	
	ENY3	In this city I have the possibility to do what I want.	
Quality of life: Pleasure	PLE1	In this city I enjoy my free time much more.	
	PLE2	This city gives me activities that cause me pleasure.	
	PLE3	In this city I perform many useful activities.	
Quality of life: Personal	PER1	Residing in this city increases my knowledge.	
	PER2	By living in this city, I improve my skills.	
	PER3	This city is the best for me to reside.	
Word of mouth	WOM1	I disclose the positive aspects of my city.	(Ruiz-Mafe, Bigne-Alcañiz, Sanz-Blas, & Tronch, 2018)
	WOM2	I recommend my acquaintances and friends to visit this city.	
	WOM3	I encourage my acquaintances and friends to vacation in this city.	
Affective image	IMG1	The city is pleasant.	(Gómez, Lopez, & Molina, 2015)
	IMG2	The city is exciting.	
	IMG3	The city is life.	

Data collection was carried out during 2019 through the dissemination of the questionnaire through the online social networks of the authors of this study requesting its completion.

4. RESULTS

4.1. SAMPLE

The data collection that served as the basis for the treatment of data in this study has a total of 428 individuals whose characteristics are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 – Characterization of respondents

Variable	Category	N	%
Gender	Female	266	62,1
	Male	162	37,9
Age	< 20 years	57	13,3
	20 to 29 years	186	43,5
	30 to 39 years	44	10,3
	40 to 49 years	71	16,6
	50 a 59 years	36	8,4
	60 a 69 years	22	5,1
	> 70 years	12	2,8
Academic qualifications	Basic Education	56	13,1
	High School	163	38,1
	Graduation	138	32,2
	Master	71	16,6

The sample of this study is made up mostly of female (N= 266, 62,1%) aged between 18 and 76 years old, where 56.8% of individuals (N=234) are under the age of 30. Regarding academic qualifications, respondents have, in most cases, academic qualifications at the level of secondary education and higher education.

4.2. PLS-PM – MEASUREMENT MODEL

In a first phase, the data obtained were analyzed using SPSS v.26 software, where the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test was analyzed, from which information was obtained which allowed us to conclude that the data distribution is not assumed to be normal. However, there is support in the literature so that when asymmetry values are less than 3 (in absolute value) and when kurtosis values are less than 7 (in absolute value) the deviations from the normal distribution will not be severe, so it can be concluded that the statistical distribution, although not appearing as normal, does not deviate much from normality (Maroco, 2014).

In a second phase, in the realization of this study, the analysis was carried out through the method of structural equations by the method of partial least squares (PLS-PM - Partial Least Squares - Path Modeling), which is considered a statistical technique that can evaluate the causal relationships between the model variables (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2016).

The analysis through PLS-PM is divided into 2 steps: the analysis of the measurement model and the analysis of the structural model. The first step in the PLS-PM analysis is the analysis of the measurement model that seeks to assess the items' ability to measure constructs, namely in terms of reliability and validity.

In a previous analysis of the items, the analysis was made to the VIF coefficient (Variance Inflation Factor) to verify the existence of multicollinearity between the items, so that it was possible to obtain unbiased estimates of the results. By analyzing the VIF coefficient, we concluded that the VIF values for items BP2 and PE3 violated this assumption, so these items were removed from the analysis in our study. The remaining items had VIF values <5, which means that there will be no multicollinearity problems. (Maroco, 2014).

In the analysis of the measurement model, we sought to verify the reliability and validity of each concept since it allows us to obtain confirmatory information about the reliability of each construct, its convergent validity and discriminating validity. To perform this step, the "PLS algorithm" function available in the SMART PLS 3.2.8 software was executed.

Table 3 - Results of the measurement model

Construct	Item	Mean	Standard deviation	λ	*t* value	Cross Loadings	AVE	C.R.
Physical well-being	PHY1	4,89	1,420	0,866	51,264**	[0,426 .. 0,639]	0,884	0,717
	PHY2	4,51	1,466	0,831	31,806**	[0,301 .. 0,539]		
	PHY3	4,55	1,473	0,843	48,221**	[0,457 .. 0,619]		
Psychological well-being	PSY1	4,85	1,599	0,897	64,627**	[0,424 .. 0,623]	0,904	0,825
	PSY2	4,45	1,559	DELETED				
	PSY3	4,53	1,617	0,920	83,652**	[0,504 .. 0,674]		
Energy	ENY1	4,51	1,599	0,802	32,005**	[0,478 .. 0,734]	0,863	0,678
	ENY2	4,51	1,809	0,854	40,217**	[0,388 .. 0,603]		
	ENY3	4,56	1,728	0,813	31,596**	[0,367 .. 0,517]		
Affective image	IMG1	4,68	1,649	0,819	37,912**	[0,298 .. 0,567]	0,897	0,744
	IMG2	4,70	1,753	0,893	67,248**	[0,445 .. 0,553]		
	IMG3	4,55	1,718	0,874	61,482**	[0,415 .. 0,534]		
Pleasure	PLE1	5,06	1,368	0,864	44,674**	[0,408 .. 0,574]	0,923	0,800
	PLE2	4,92	1,404	0,917	89,623**	[0,487 .. 0,625]		
	PLE3	4,41	1,772	0,901	66,660**	[0,434 .. 0,618]		
Personal	PER1	5,33	1,421	0,940	84,596**	[0,365 .. 0,569]	0,943	0,893
	PER2	5,63	1,484	0,950	127,992**	[0,435 .. 0,632]		
	PER3	4,68	1,907	DELETED				
WOM	WOM1	5,21	1,365	0,866	37,229**	[0,416 .. 0,502]	0,910	0,771
	WOM2	5,59	1,259	0,906	70,751**	[0,373 .. 0,559]		
	WOM3	4,71	1,597	0,861	60,851**	[0,334 .. 0,548]		

λ - Standardized Loadings; AVE – Average Variance Extracted; CR – Composite Reliability
**** p<0,001**

Through the data presented in table 3, we verified that the standardized coefficients (λ) are greater than 0.7 (p> 0.001). The values obtained for the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) are greater than 0.5 (AVE> 0.5) and the composite reliability (CR> 0.7) is greater than 0.7 in all concepts, except for the energy dimension of the construct quality of life. Despite this, we chose to keep this concept in our analysis.

We consider that the constructs have reliability and convergent validity (Vinzi, Chin, Henseler, & Wang, 2010).

During this study, we tested the existence of discriminant validity between constructs. This discriminant validity, which verifies whether the constructs are distinct from each other, was tested by analyzing the cross loads present in the model and by analyzing the criteria of Fornell and Larcker (1981).

For the verification of the discriminant validity through the analysis of the cross loads, presented in table 3, we conclude that the cross loads are smaller than the standardized coefficients λ. We added a second analysis to the discriminant validity and tried to verify the criteria of Fornell and Larcker (1981). Table 4 shows the square root values of the extracted average variance (AVE) present on the main diagonal, which are, in all cases, higher than the square of the correlations between the constructs present in the model. Thus, we conclude that there is discriminant validity between the concepts.

Table 4 - Discriminating Validity

	PHY	PSY	ENY	IMG	PER	PLE	WOM
Physical well-being (PHY)	0,847						
Psychological well-being (PSY)	0,711	0,908					
Energy (ENY)	0,597	0,696	0,823				
Affective image (IMG)	0,525	0,599	0,579	0,863			
Personal (PER)	0,489	0,513	0,637	0,449	0,945		
Pleasure (PLE)	0,531	0,604	0,678	0,578	0,539	0,894	
WOM	0,486	0,527	0,504	0,612	0,425	0,561	0,878

4.3. PLS-PM – Structural Model

The second step in the PLS analysis aims to evaluate and test the structural model that aims to test the hypotheses under study by analyzing path coefficients and analyzing their significance (Hair et al., 2016; Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2018). For this purpose, we used the bootstrapping resampling technique with 5000 subsamples to be able to have stability in the results obtained and as suggested by SMARTPLS 3.2.8 software. Through this analysis it was possible to obtain the results that will be useful to analyze the corroboration of the hypotheses by analyzing the significance of each relationship through Student's t-value and p-value.

Table 5 - Hypothesis Test

Hypothesis	Relation	β	*t values*	*p* values	95% Confidence Interval	Confirmation
H1a	PHY → IMG	0,110	1,867	**0,062**	[-0,005 .. 0,227]	Not supported
H1b	PSY→ IMG	0,248	3,337	**0,001**	[0,099 .. 0,393]	Supported
H1c	ENY → IMG	0,146	1,985	**0,047**	[-0,004 .. 0,289]	Supported
H1d	PER→ IMG	0,041	0,678	**0,498**	[-0,079 .. 0,164]	Not supported
H1e	PLE →IMG	0,249	3,564	**0,000**	[0,109 .. 0,383]	Supported
H2	IMG → WOM	0,612	16,423	**0,000**	[0,538 .. 0,684]	Supported

The result of the structural model showed that quality of life has positive effects on the affective image (R^2= 0,446) and the affective image explains the word of mouth by the citizens (R^2= 0,373).

5. Discussion

In the analysis of the results of this investigation, it was evidenced that the quality of life influences the perception of the city image by the citizen and, consequently, the image of the city influences the WOM produced by the citizens.

In the analysis of the influence of quality of life on the affective image of the destination, we found that the dimension of physical well-being of the quality of life does not influence the affective image of the destination ($\beta_{PHY\rightarrow IMG}$ = 0,110; t = 1,867; p >0.05). This H1a hypothesis was not supported by this study. Thus, trying to analyze the reason why this hypothesis was not confirmed, we found that physical well-being in this study was measured using a scale that may not reflect what physical well-being is. Another justification may be related to the fact that physical well-being is a dimension of quality of life that is basic in people's lives, which can be taken for granted.

The investigation carried out confirmed the H1b hypothesis ($\beta_{PSY\rightarrow IMG}$ = 0,248; t = 3.337; p < 0.01). This relationship is in line with the authors Wang and Pizam (2011) who suggest that psychological well-being as a dimension of quality of life creates a positive perception of the image of the city by the emotions created and also by the way each individual lives daily.

The H1c hypothesis was confirmed by this study ($\beta_{ENY\rightarrow IMG}$ = 0,146; t = 1,985; p <0.05). This positive relationship between the energy dimension of quality of life and the affective image of each citizen. There is a positive relationship that suggests the possibility for each individual to carry out their intended activities influences their perception of the city and its image. In this study we found that it is not the improvement of personal abilities that has a determining influence on the perceived image of the city. The H1d hypothesis was

not supported by this study ($\beta_{PER \rightarrow IMG}$ = 0,041; t = 0.678; p > 0.05) and we found a possible justification. We understand that the individuals in the sample of this study are mostly individuals under the age of 30, which leads us to consider that the knowledge of these people is based on information disseminated through the internet. For this reason, we believe that this is the justification for the hypothesis not to be corroborated.

The possibility for each individual to enjoy free time and carry out useful activities are indicators of the pleasure that each person derives from the place where they live. The H1e hypothesis has been confirmed ($\beta_{PLE \rightarrow IMG}$ = 0,249; t = 3.564; p >0.05) and we understand that the pleasure dimension of quality of life acts as a determinant of the perceived image of the city.

The purpose of this study was to study the consequences of the brand image on WOM. This study confirms that the perception of the brand image influences the WOM produced by the citizen since the H2 hypothesis is confirmed by this research ($\beta_{IMG \rightarrow WOM}$ = 0,612; t = 16.423; p < 0.01).

6. CONCLUSIONS

Our study produced results that are important for academic practice and the reality of cities. Thus, as main conclusions for the academic reality, this study presents an analysis to the WOM produced by the citizens. This study shows that the perception of the affective image by each citizen influences the WOM that each citizen produces for their family and friends. This affective image has as determinants the quality of life, in particular the dimensions of the citizens' psychological well-being, the energy that each one has and the pleasure that citizens have in living in the city. Thus, for the practice of cities, it is important to understand that the superior quality of life improves the image perceived by citizens. It is suggested to city policy makers to promote activities that please citizens and that are useful. Therefore, with a positive perception of the image of cities by citizens, they better interpret the signs that the city gives them and consequently spread the city and territories to their networks of contacts as friends and family.

Although the contributions we found to be valuable, our study found some limitations. In this sense, the sample was very centered on young audiences, which may have been a limitation in the conclusions obtained. Our study did not analyze the income of each citizen, so the analysis of quality of life may have been biased by the income of each citizen. In our study, we chose to analyze causal relationships using the PLS-PM estimation method. This can be a limitation. Thus, in order to continue this investigation, it is suggested that further studies be carried out on this topic that include the analysis of income and its influence on the quality of life of citizens. It is also suggested that the effects of communication carried out by cities on their image be analyzed. In addition, it is suggested that citizen involvement with the territory should also be included as a variable influencing WOM.

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