

Imam Syafganti

University of Antwerp & State Polytechnic of Jakarta

Michel Walrave

University of Antwerp

Promoting a risky destination image: Assessing Indonesia's official tourism website

This study investigated the impact of the official tourism website of Indonesia (a risky destination), on image, risk, and intention to visit. Additionally, the impact of the persuasiveness of the website's design on attitude toward the website was also examined. A one-group pre-test/post-test design was applied and exposure towards the website considered as a treatment. Results showed that exposure to the website was only effective in enhancing the cognitive image of the destination, but not for other variables. Surprisingly, the perceived risk increased significantly after the treatment. Implications related to the persuasiveness and content of the tourism website are discussed.

Keywords: destination marketing, tourism website, cognitive image, affective image, Indonesia

Imam Syafganti

Department of Communication Studies, University of Antwerp Stadscampus, Sint-Jacobsstraat 2, 2000 Antwerpen, België Department of Business Administration, State Polytechnic of Jakarta

Phone: +62 811 877 6806

Email: imam_syafganti@yahoo.com;imam.syafganti@bisnis.pnj.ac.id

Michel Walrave

Department of Communication Studies

University of Antwerp

Stadscampus, Sint-Jacobsstraat 2, S.M. 487, 2000 Antwerpen, België

Phone: 032655681

Email: michel.walrave@uantwerpen.be

Imam Syafganti is a Ph.D. student at the Department of Communication Studies. He mainly studies e-marketing and marketing communication. His Ph.D. investigate online marketing communication within the context of Indonesia as a tourism destination.

Michel Walrave is a professor at the Department of Communication Studies of the University of Antwerp. He is responsible for the research group MIOS. He is also involved in several national and international research networks, amongst others, the Flemish Knowledge Center on Media Literacy, the Healthnar network, and the World Internet Project.



Introduction

Interest For most tourists, safety and security in a destination are the important factors that could affect their travel decision-making process (Liu, Pennington-Gray, & Schroeder, 2013). Consequently, a destination which is perceived as dangerous and unsafe will be more likely avoided by tourists (Yin, Chew, & Jahari, 2014) and will be considered as risky to visit and perceived to have a negative image (Yang, Sharif, & Khoo-Lattimore, 2015).

Besides safety and security, Lepp, Gibson, & Lane (2011), argued that the region of a destination is also a factor that could generate negative perceptions of the destination. In a study about the perception of places and health, Carter (1998), found that Asia is perceived as an exotic but risky destination at the same time. Consequently, as part of the Asia continent, Southeast Asia as a region is considered risky in terms of health and infectious disease (Baker, 2015), terrorism (Ahlfeldt, Franke, & Maennig, 2015), and natural disaster (Rucinska & Lechowicz, 2014). Situated in Southeast Asia, such negative perception may also apply to Indonesia.

Indonesia markets its destination and manages an official tourism website to promote and enhance its destination image (Richardson & Sumaco, 2012). Although destination marketing through an official website is perceived as important (Horng & Tsai, 2010), several previous studies have shown that this marketing activity is not performed very well by the Indonesia tourism office. A study about the effectiveness of Indonesia's marketing campaign in 2008 revealed that only 32% of the surveyed respondents had seen the campaign on the website and only 19% of respondents used the website to gain information about Indonesia (Richardson & Sumaco, 2012). A similar study about the evaluation of tourism websites of Southeast Asia countries concludes that Indonesia's official tourism website was not rated as a well-performing website (Scott & Baggio, 2009). Nilawati, R., Pratama,



Adlina, & Mukarrohmah (2012), revealed that design and functionality were the weaknesses of Indonesia's official tourism website.

The results of studies related to Indonesia's official tourism website are very unexpected. However, those studies were performed before the government of Indonesia launched a new official tourism website, namely www.indonesia.travel in December 2012. Consequently, the ability of this website to promote Indonesia as a tourist destination remains unknown. Moreover, the presented studies above also did not take into account risk as one important factor that could influence tourists' travel decision to visit Indonesia (as a destination that perceived as risky in terms of disease, terrorism, and natural disaster).

The present study aims to examine the impact of Indonesia's official tourism website on enhancing the image of Indonesia and reducing risks that are perceived by tourists. Moreover, it also inspects the website's impact on the intention to visit Indonesia, and it is expected to enrich the body of knowledge on the utilization of official tourism website as a promotional vehicle by taking into account image and risk as two important variables in promotional effort within the context of risky destination. In doing so, this paper might be able to provide a practical contribution to destination marketers in particular on how a risky destination's website should be managed in order to enhance the image of the destination and in turn, increase tourists' behavioral intention.

Literature Review

Destination image and official tourism websites

Image can be looked at from two different conceptual angles, namely cognitive and affective image. According to Stepchenkova & Mills (2010), cognitive image can be conceptualized as a set of destination attributes associated by tourists based on their knowledge, perceptions, and beliefs, while the affective image of a destination refers to



individual's emotional and feeling towards a destination (Lehto, Lee, & Ismail 2012). Furthermore, they also argued that cognitive image is the basis of affective image evaluation. Consequently, the connection between the concepts is undisputed.

Destination image can be formed directly through intended marketing communication channels which are created by destination marketers, and indirectly by other unintended sources (Hudson, Wang, & Gill, 2011). Currently, destination image becomes one of the important aspects that can determine the success of destination marketing (Rajesh, 2013). As internet and its applications are increasingly used as a way to communicate tourism destinations, an official tourism website has become one of the most common media that is used by destination marketing organizations to communicate and promote the image of a destination (Horng & Tsai, 2010). Lepp, Gibson, & Lane (2014), stated that official tourism websites are considered as a prevalent promotion vehicle for a destination. Moreover, from a customer's point of view, Draper (2016), found that websites are used by potential consumers as an important information source to collect information about a destination.

Perceived risk

From the perspective of consumer behavior study, perceived risk is a concept that views consumers' action when buying a product as a risky behavior (Fuchs, Uriely, Reichel, & Maoz, 2013). The risk is primarily caused by the uncertain and negative consequence (outcome) that they might face in a buying situation. Similarly, Pharino (2012) argued that perceived risk is an uncertain situation that arises as a consequence of consumers' action in considering to buy a certain product. In order to cope with such situation, consumers will try to find information related to the product from various available sources.

In tourism context, tourists are dealing with various specific aspects that might lead to risky situations, such as bad weather, unfriendly locals, striking airport personnel,



inedibility of local food, terror, crime, political unrest, disease, and natural disasters (Fuchs & Reichel, 2011). Furthermore, they also argued perceived risk is affected by previous visits of tourists, where the first-time visitors (less experienced tourists) will be more likely concerned with human-induced risk, socio-psychological risk, food safety, and weather risk, while the repeat-tourists (more experienced tourists) care more about financial aspects, service quality, natural disaster, and car accident.

Persuasiveness design of website and attitude toward the website

There are many factors that might influence the success of tourism destination websites in attracting visitors (Li & Wang, 2011). One significant factor is the design of the destination website (Y.-S. Lin, 2011). Successful and effective website design can attract a visitor's attention and distinguish the website from others (Luna-Nevarez & Hyman, 2012). As a persuasion factor, the design of a destination website can stimulate consumers' confidence and help consumers in establishing an attitude toward a destination (W. Lee & Gretzel, 2012).

Moreover, in their study about the persuasiveness design of websites, persuasion was operationalized by Kim & Fesenmaier (2008), as a website's ability to arouse a positive image towards the website. As a form of persuasion, the design of a destination website is also created to influence their visitors' attitude. Therefore, a positive attitude towards a destination website is becoming an essential aspect when a destination is trying to attract more visits from tourists.

Attitude towards the website can be defined as a positive or negative assessment that appears as an evaluation of several website elements (Vila & Kuster, 2011). Within this context, attitude towards the website can be seen as a measurement about the effectiveness of the website based on the experience of the web site visitors. Singh, Dalal, Mishra, & Patil



(2005) proposed a comprehensive model about how the attitude toward the website mediates the feelings and evaluations on behavioral intentions after web page exposure. They developed the model on a foundation that web page exposure plays a similar role as a persuasive message that is designed to modify attitudes and behaviors of individuals.

Behavioral intention

According to Fishbein & Ajzen (1975), behavioral intention is a tendency of an individual to perform a certain behavior. Moreover, behavioral intention is also perceived as an important variable that is related to actual behavior (Phillips, Asperin, & Wolfe, 2013). Intentional behavior variable that will be examined in this study is the intention to visit a destination. In this study, the variable reflects a tendency of an individual to perform a particular action, namely, visiting a certain destination. The intention to visit the destination primarily arises from a person's exposure to the official tourism website of Indonesia.

Hypotheses

The use of official tourism website as a medium to communicate the image of a destination is a common activity that is practiced by destination marketers (Horng & Tsai, 2010). Generally, various studies in this field have found that promoting activities are reasonably effective in improving the image of a destination (Jeong, Holland, Jun, & Gibson, 2012). However, the success of the official tourism website in enhancing the image of a perceived risky destination like Indonesia remains unknown. Considering the previously mentioned findings, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1: There will be a significant increase in respondents' cognitive image after being exposed to Indonesia's official tourism website.



H2: There will be a significant increase in respondents' affective image after being exposed to Indonesia's official tourism website.

In addition to the image of a destination, perceived risk is also considered as an important variable that can be influenced by the exposure to a destination website (Pennington-Gray, Schroeder, & Kaplanidou, 2011). Within the African context, Lepp et al. (2011) found that exposure to an official tourism website is effective in reducing the perceived risk of a destination.

Nevertheless, the ability of such website to reduce the perceived risk of a destination like Indonesia is still unknown. Based on the arguments above, the proposed hypothesis is:

H3: There will be a significant decrease in respondents' perceived risk after being exposed to Indonesia's official tourism website.

In their study about an official tourism website, Chung, Lee, Lee, & Koo (2015), found that the intention to travel was significantly influenced by the respondents use of the official tourism website. On the contrary, Kao, Louvieris, Powell-Perry, & Buhalis (2005), found that intention to visit Singapore as a destination is not correlated with the National Tourism Office's website satisfaction. Nonetheless, the impact of the official tourism website of Indonesia as a risky destination on an individual's intention to visit remains unknown. We, therefore, hypothesize the following:

H4: There will be a significant increase in respondents' intention to visit Indonesia after being exposed to Indonesia's official tourism website.

The persuasiveness of a website's design was found to have a significant impact on visitors' first impression towards the website (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2008). The initial impression that the visitors get from a website will determine their action in surfing on the website, in which they will exit the website if they find the site unpleasant (Luna-Nevarez & Hyman, 2012). On the contrary, they will tend to ignore some negative aspects of the web



when their overall appreciation of the website is favourable (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2008). Furthermore, Singh et al. (2005) argued that a website is a form of persuasive communication that is purposely developed to modify human's attitudes. Based on these arguments, we propose:

H5: The persuasiveness design of Indonesia's official tourism website has a positive and significant impact on attitude towards the website.

Methodology

Applying the schematic model of user experience of a web page proposed by Singh, Dalal, Mishra, & Patil (2005), the current study used a quasi-experimental method to assess the impact of Indonesia's official tourism website in influencing cognitive and affective images and behavioral response of its visitors. A one-group pre-test and post-test design was applied to a group of respondents that were recruited through a university blackboard system. The respondents responded to the pre-test, intervention, and post-test. In total, 37 respondents participated in both stages of the study. Concerning the sample size, de Winter (2013) argued that small sample size could apply statistical t-test.

For the pre-test, respondents were asked to fill in an online questionnaire (Qualtrics) in English about the previous visit to Indonesia, the image of Indonesia, perceived risk, and intention to visit. Around three weeks later, an invitation e-mail to participate in the post-test of the study was sent to them. Before they started the post-test, they had to visit the official website of Indonesia's tourism (www.indonesia.travel) and visit a specific section namely, "Activities & Things to do in Indonesia" (see figure 1). After that, they were asked to fill in the same questionnaire again. In this second stage, two additional variables were added to the questionnaire, namely persuasiveness of the website design and attitude toward the website. In order to ensure that the respondents visited the website before filling in the post-test



questionnaire, they were asked to answer three questions about some tourist destinations in Indonesia. All data collected in this study were analysed using SPSS software.

Figure 1



Measurement

The first variable measured in the questionnaire was the respondents' familiarity with Indonesia. Considering the importance of such variable on the risk perception that the tourists face in a destination (Lin, Lee, & Wang, 2012), the variable is also taken into account in this study. The concept was measured by one item from Jalilvand, Samiei, Dini, & Manzari (2012). Cognitive image was measured by items adopted from Lee & Lockshin (2011) and Gibson, Qi, & Zhang (2008). The affective image was measured by combining four semantic differentials from Beerli & Martín (2004) and Russell & Pratt (Lehto et al., 2012). Perceived risk was measured by incorporating a total of 23 items from Lepp et al. (2011), Kozak, Crotts, & Law (2007), and Lepp & Gibson (2003). The study also took into account the intention to visit that was measured by integrating three items from Pourabedin & Nourizadeh (2013), and Jalilvand et al. (2012). Furthermore, two variables were added in the post-test of study, namely persuasiveness of the web site's design and attitude toward the



website. The measurement of the variables was adopted from Kim & Fesenmaier (2008), and Chen & Wells (1999), respectively.

The alpha scores for the scales used in the study (cognitive image, affective image, perceived risk, and intention to visit) were .89, .85, .87, .88, respectively. All these scales tended to have relatively high internal consistency. According to George & Mallery (2009), .50 is the minimum acceptable score in a reliability analysis.

Findings

The characteristics of the respondents are presented in table 1, where 59.45% of respondents (22) are female, and 40.54% of respondents (15) are male. In terms of age, the age of the respondents ranged from 19 to 59 years old, with most respondents are come from 24-29 years old group (17 respondents) that represent 45.94% of total respondents. Concerning their previous travel experience, most respondents were found not to be familiar with Indonesia as a tourist destination. Only three respondents had visited Indonesia (≥ 3 times) before.

Table 1 Characteristics of respondents

| | Frequency | Percent (%) | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------|-------------|--|--|
| Age | | | | |
| Under 24 | 11 | 29.72 | | |
| 24-29 | 17 | 45.94 | | |
| 30-35 | 4 | 10.81 | | |
| Above 35 | 5 | 13.51 | | |
| Gender | | | | |
| Female | 22 | 59.45 | | |
| Male | 15 | 40.54 | | |
| Previous Travel Experience to | | | | |
| Indonesia | | | | |
| Never | 26 | 70.27 | | |
| 1 time | 7 | 18.91 | | |
| 2 times | 1 | 2.70 | | |
| \geq 3 times | 3 | 8.10 | | |
| Nationality | | | | |
| Belgium | 13 | 35.13 | | |
| French | 3 | 8.11 | | |
| India | 3 | 8.11 | | |
| China | 2 | 5.40 | | |

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|-----------------------------------|--|-------|--|--|
| United Kingdom | 2 | 5.40 | | |
| Brazil | 1 | 2.70 | | |
| Bulgaria | 1 | 2.70 | | |
| Cambodia | 1 | 2.70 | | |
| Ethiopia | 1 | 2.70 | | |
| Guatemala | 1 | 2.70 | | |
| Malaysia | 1 | 2.70 | | |
| Netherland | 1 | 2.70 | | |
| Pakistan | 1 | 2.70 | | |
| Portuguese | 1 | 2.70 | | |
| Singapore | 1 | 2.70 | | |
| South Africa | 1 | 2.70 | | |
| South Korea | 1 | 2.70 | | |
| Ukraine | 1 | 2.70 | | |
| USA | 1 | 2.70 | | |
| Occupation | | | | |
| Students | 26 | 70.27 | | |
| Workers | 11 | 29.73 | | |

In order to reveal whether there are significant differences between the scores before and after the intervention, paired-sample T-tests were performed (table 2). Within the cognitive image, there was a significant difference in respondents cognitive image before and after exposure toward Indonesia's official tourism website. The result indicates that exposure towards Indonesia's official tourism website had succeeded in enhancing the image of Indonesia as a tourist destination.

Table 2. Differences among variables before and after the exposure toward the website

| Items | Means | | Mean | t- | р- |
|--------------------|--------|-------|------------|-------|-------|
| | Before | After | difference | value | value |
| Cognitive image | 5.08 | 5.32 | .23 | 2.215 | .033* |
| Affective image | 5.62 | 5.64 | .02 | .138 | .819 |
| Risk | 4.09 | 4.35 | .25 | .3003 | .005* |
| Intention to visit | 5.12 | 5.26 | .13 | .678 | .502 |

^{*}p < 0.05

The increase of cognitive image in the post-test shows that the official tourism website of Indonesia can change the cognitive image the respondents hold about Indonesia. Such result confirms that textual and non-text content, such as photos, images, and videos can stimulate website visitors to have a real feel of the destination (Romanazzi, Petruzzellis, &



Iannuzzi, 2011). The results concerning possible changes of the cognitive image also confirm the impact of the official tourism website in enhancing some facets of the destination's cognitive image (Jeong et al., 2012) also indicating that the official tourism website has succeeded in leveraging the cognitive image of Indonesia. Therefore, H1 can be accepted.

Unlike cognitive image, there was no significant difference found when T-test on the affective image was conducted. Within this affective context, Indonesia's official tourism website has not succeeded in enhancing the image of Indonesia held by most respondents. The study also found that there was no significant difference in affective image score in the pre-test and the post-test. Consequently, H2 has to be rejected.

A paired sample T-test was also performed on the perceived risk variable. Surprisingly, it showed a significant difference in pre-test and post-test mean scores, where the score of the post-test was greater than the pre-test score. One possible reason for this unexpected result is that most respondents obtained a lot of negative information about Indonesia from other different sources during the break between the pre-test and post-test (about three weeks).

This result indicates that the official tourism website is not very helpful in reducing the risks that respondents perceived in Indonesia. Such a situation can impact respondents' intention to visit Indonesia as a tourist destination. The H3 of this study is rejected. In addition, a paired sample T-test was also conducted in order to disclose whether any difference existed on risk variable among the respondents from different continents (table 3). Results of the test discovered that the significant increase in the value of risk variables mainly occurred in respondents from the continent of Europe and Others (America & Africa). While for respondents from Asia, an insignificant result was found.



Table 3. Differences in risk based on the continent of origin of the respondents

| Items | Mean | | Mean | t- | <i>p</i> - |
|---------------------------|--------|-------|------------|-------|------------|
| | Before | After | difference | value | value |
| Europe | 4.17 | 4.40 | .23 | 2.493 | .021* |
| Asia | 3.74 | 4.01 | .27 | 1.123 | .290 |
| Others (America & Africa) | 4.52 | 4.80 | .28 | 7.571 | .002* |

^{*}p < 0.05

Results of paired sample T-tests on the intention to visit did not find a significant difference in the mean score of the variable before and after exposure to the official tourism website. This condition, in general, describes that the official tourism website of Indonesia is not supportive in enhancing intention behavior of most respondents to visit Indonesia. Therefore, H4 in this study is rejected.

Ultimately, the result of a simple linear regression on variables involved showed that the persuasiveness design of the website is a significant predictor of attitude toward the website where β =. 830, p = .000. Furthermore, a model that was formed in the regression generates an R-value of .830 and R square .689. The R square value confirms that attitude towards the website can be explained for 68.9% by the persuasiveness of the website's design. Therefore, the H5 is accepted.

Discussion and conclusion

The results of the study indicate that in the context of Indonesia, official tourism website seems effective in enhancing cognitive image of the respondents. Meanwhile, another aspect of the destination's image, namely the affective image, was found not to be increased significantly by the exposure to the official tourism website. This result contrasts with the result from Jeong et al. (2012), who found that the affective image of South Korea significantly increased after the exposure to the official tourism website. Such a different result might be caused by the familiarity and the image of the destination. South Korea is



relatively well-known country because of its image (Phillips et al., 2013) and because they hosted a mega sports event like football world cup (C.-K. Lee, Taylor, Lee, & Lee, 2005).

A surprising result revealed that instead of declining, perceived risk was found to increase significantly in the post-test. Importantly, a similar result was also found in terms of intention to visit Indonesia, where exposure to the official tourism website did not increase respondents' intention significantly. This result confirms the link between a destination that is considered as risky with the intention to visit. In sum, a destination that is perceived as risky will be more likely avoided by tourists (Gstaettner, Lee, & Rodger, 2016).

Another possible explanation for these findings can be sought in the low familiarity level and prior experience of most respondents with Indonesia as a tourist destination. In a study about DMO online platform and intention to visit, Indonesia was considered a destination that is perceived as unfamiliar (Molinillo, Liébana-Cabanillas, Anaya-Sánchez, & Buhalis, 2018). In this study, such factors, put most respondents into a hesitate situation that certainly cannot be resolved by very brief exposure to the official tourism website. Moreover, such low familiarity also can be explained by the fact that most respondents in this study are not from the countries that contribute a significant number of tourists for Indonesia, as for the five main countries contributing a significant number of tourists to Indonesia during the year of 2017 were Malaysia, China, Singapore, Australia and Japan (BPS-Statistics Indonesia, 2017).

Furthermore, the low level of familiarity might also stimulate respondents to find more information about Indonesia from other different sources that cannot be fully controlled by destination marketer. Consequently, tourists become vulnerable to the exposure of negative information from less credible sources. The less credible the sources are, the higher the misunderstanding and misperception that the respondents might have about Indonesia.



Finally, the result of simple linear regression showed that the persuasiveness design of Indonesia's official tourism website is a significant predictor of attitude towards the website. This result also indicates that the respondents considered the website as a well-designed website, and they held positive emotions towards this website.

Ultimately, this study revealed that in the context of a risky destination, the official tourism website of Indonesia was found to be only useful in enhancing the cognitive image but not the affective image of the destination. Moreover, special attention should be given to the perceived risk that unexpectedly increased significantly in the post-test. The website should provide content (modern infrastructure, nightlife, or shopping facilities) that aim to reduce the perceived risk of Indonesia as a destination, for international travelers. Moreover, although the website was considered a relatively well-designed website, it cannot directly improve the intention to visit Indonesia as a tourist destination. It takes more than just a well-designed official website to increase the whole image of a risky destination like Indonesia, reduce tourists' perceived risks, and stimulate their intention to visit.

Limitations of the study

The future research in this field of study should consider studying the amount of time visitors spent on the website, using larger number of respondents, and applying randomization on a specific population that represents the main market of tourists in Indonesia. Moreover, examining the different types of design (user experience and user interface design) might help to strengthen the result of this study, particularly in addressing the issue related to the types of design of risky destination that suit its visitors. Furthermore, comparing and determining the exact content types between the new and the old website that can give more influence on respondents' perception also might be useful for this field of study.



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