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Exploring the relationship between EU Political Opinion, Euroscepticism, and populist attitudes with destination image perception

This study is a preliminary exploration of the relationship between populist attitudes and destination image perception. The study focused on the relationship between European political opinion and populist attitudes with destination image perception of international destinations. A European context was the focus given recent political landscape in the European Union (EU) due to 'Brexit,' issues surrounding European integration, the unresolved Eurozone and refugee crisis, and the rise right-wing populist parties. The findings suggest that individuals' political opinion about the EU is related to the destination image perception. Confidence in the EU results in a more positive perception of less popular destinations, whereas Euroscepticism results in a more negative perception of less popular destinations.

Keywords: populism; destination image; European politics; Euroscepticism; psychographics;

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Introduction

This study explores the relationship between political ideology and tourism by investigating the relation between populist attitudes in Europe and destination image perceptions across ten destination countries. The rise of political 'populist' parties has increased in recent years, highlighted by the rise of populist right-wing parties, including AfD in Germany, Rassemblement National in France, the UK Brexit Party, and UK Independence Party (Rooduijn, 2015; Archik, 2017). Fears about immigration due to extensive migrant and refugee flows, fears about globalization, the Eurozone crisis, and loss of European identity are key factors facilitating the growth of populist right parties (Archik, 2017).

The aim of this study was to explore the relationships between European political opinion and populist attitudes with destination image perception of international destinations. To address the research aim, a European context was used due to the upheaval within the European Union (EU) facing challenges such as the 'Brexit,' issues surrounding European integration, the unresolved Eurozone and refugee crisis as well as the rise in populist parties (Archik, 2017).

Literature review

Right-wing populism has become a central part of the European political system by introducing another party type, threatening mainstream parties, and entering ruling coalition governments (Rooduijn, 2015). The convergence of mainstream parties through grand coalitions containing centre-left and centre-right parties compromises core political issues. This leaves an ideological space, representing more reactionary fringe-right ideologies to enter mainstream political discourse (Rooduijn, 2015).

To mention several examples, firstly, the 'Alternative for Germany' (AfD) is a strong example of a right-wing populist party. Only founded in 2012, within four years, the AfD achieved an unexpectedly strong performance in the federal elections in 2017. After finishing

third, trailing only large long-established parties CDU/CSU and SPD, AfD had an immediate impact on government formation and added difficulty and complexity to coalition building as the AfD was perceived as an unacceptable coalition partner for the CDU/CSU as well as SPD, due to their political standpoint (Lees, 2018). Secondly, the French 'Rassemblement National' (RN) populist right party is considered the prime example and prototype of modern right-wing populism in Europe. Established in 1972, it gained increasing popularity under Marine Le Pen. (Stavrakakis, Katsambekis, Nikisianis, Kioupiolis, Siomos, 2017; Baker, 2019). Marine Le Pen renamed the party before the European elections, previously known as 'Front National,' to appeal to a border range of voters, signifying a new openness and facilitating alliances with other parties, which the word 'rally' intends (Irish, 2018). This tends to stem from Marine Le Pen's efforts to soften their rightist standpoint, compared to the initial aim of the party under her father's lead to unite the French extreme right (Stavrakakis et al., 2017; Irish, 2018). Thirdly, when looking at the UK, a slightly different picture of populist right-wing parties presents itself. The UK Independence Party (UKIP), founded in 1993, is a single-issue party with one main aim and party agenda, which aimed at the withdrawal of Britain from the European Union (UKIP; 2020; Usherwood, 2019). Due to this single-issue discourse, the party could not gain a significant amount of votes and hence changed their political agenda, including anti-establishment ideas and anti-immigration policies, resulting in increased success of the party in the general elections in 2004. UKIP started as a single-issue Euroskeptic party with only one clear policy objective to exit the EU (Usherwood, 2019). However, the 2016 referendum on UK membership of the EU led to a split of the UKIP part, with many of the 'Brexiters' leaving to join the newly established Brexit Party (Usherwood, 2019). This party aimed at a clear-cut BREXIT and accusing the main-stream government of betraying the concept of exiting the EU due to potential deal agreements (Brexit Party1, 2020). The party is

currently under reform to change its name to ‘Reform UK’ to have a potential future (Brexit Party 2, 2020).

Nonetheless, the difference between the European and British populist right-wing parties is their popularity. Right-wing populist parties have not had the same electorally success in the UK, as the mainstream Conservative Party under Boris Johnson adopted Eurosceptic, anti-immigration rhetoric and policy characteristic of right-wing populism. With this tactic, the Tories managed to stop the electoral threat from the populist right-wing parties exploiting the fractures in the political party system and changing them to their advantage (Morison, 2020).

Populist political attitudes are formed through underlying psychological traits, values, personality, and social networks (Legg, Tang, Slevitch, 2012; Ahn, Ekinci, Li, 2010; Thorisdottir, Jost, Liviatan, Shrouf, 2007). Personal values help individuals ground their choices or actions and influence political beliefs (Capara, Barbaranelli, Zimbardo, 1999). However, political ideology and political attitudes influence political behaviours, such as voting, and impact areas outside politics, such as reinforcing social and personal preferences (Jost, Federico, Napier, 2009) and consumer behaviour. Psychographics, including personal values, have been used to predict consumer attitudes (Gunter and Furnham, 2015). Hence, extending this to this study's context, the association between an individual's psychographics and the destination image can influence intention to visit and positive attitudes towards the destination (Legg et al., 2012; Ahn, Ekinci, Li, 2010). Paris, Nyaupane, and Teye (2014) concluded that the formation of attitudes toward a destination is affected by out-oriented values. Attitudes towards a destination are also influenced, particularly for those that an individual does not have personal experience traveling to, by an external frame of reference and sources of knowledge (such as media, social networks, etc.) (Nyaupane, Paris, Teye, 2011). The more the destination image aligns with an individual's self-image, formed by psychographic factors, the more likely the individual will have a positive attitude towards the

destination and vice versa (Hosany and Martin, 2012). Therefore, for this study, it is suggested that psychographic factors can influence destination image and that populist attitudes, as a proxy of psychographic factors, there may be a relationship between populist attitudes and destination image.

Previous research by Legg et al. (2012) investigated the influence of political ideology on destination choice, testing the effect of political ideology on leisure domestic US destination choice. With recent shifts in the political landscape in Europe, this study seeks to understand the relationship between destination image perception and political ideology, with a specific focus on populist attitudes and international destinations.

Methodology

The population for this study includes German, French, and British passport holders above 18 years of age as they are eligible to vote. The total sample included 305 individuals made up of which 101 French passport holders, 102 German passport holders, and 102 British passport holders. Individuals from these three countries were chosen due to these countries' role in the current European political landscape and EU integration. Additionally, French and German leadership was essential in establishing the common currency, and France and the UK were essential in designing foreign and security policies (Archik, 2017). Moreover, France and Germany were among the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) founders, the first treaty towards European integration. With the UK being added as a member in 1973, the three countries are great economic and political contributors to the European Union (Archik, 2017). Additionally, all three countries have seen right-wing populist parties' rise into their mainstream political process (Archik, 2017).

A stratified random sampling of respondents from SmartSurvey's live consumer audience services (database of 20 million respondents) was selected based on their nationality

(UK, France, Germany) and age group (18 years +). The sample of 305 respondents (Table 1) consisted of 51.8% male and 47.6% female participants. Almost half of the sample was between 26 to 45 years of age (49.5%).

Table 1 Profile of Respondents

Category		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	male	159	51.8
	Female	146	47.6
Age	18-25	48	15.6
	26-35	84	27.4
	36-45	68	22.1
	46-55	57	18.6
	56-65	35	11.4
	66+	13	4.2
Marital Status	single	115	37.5
	married	165	53.7
	divorced	25	8.1
Number of adults in household	1-2	237	77.2
	3-5	63	20.5
	6+	5	1.6
Number of Children in household	0	148	48.2
	1	79	25.7
	2	54	17.6
	>3	24	7.8
Highest level of completed education	High School	89	29.0
	Apprentice	62	20.2
	Bachelor	93	30.3
	Master	51	16.6
	Doctoral Degree	10	3.3
Current employment status	Employed	233	75.9
	Homemaker	16	5.2
	Student	21	6.8
	not employed	11	3.6
	Retired	24	7.8

The questionnaire was distributed and left open until the required volume of responses was achieved (Morgan, 2018). The online questionnaire was administered in three different languages: German, French, and English to avoid ambiguity (Veal, 2011; Rea and Parker, 2014, p. 3; Creswell, 2014a; Saunders et al., 2012). The survey included the measurement of demographics, self-reported political opinions. Previously developed scales and literature were utilized to develop 6-point Likert-type scales for the measurement of European Political Opinion (Legg, Tang, and Slevitch, 2012; Archik, 2017; Bassot, 2018), Populist Attitudes (Schulz, Müller, Schemer, Wirz, Wettstein, and Wirth, 2017), and Destination Image (Sahin and Baloglu, 2011; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999). Destination image was measured for ten destinations (Turkey, Russia, China, South Africa, South Africa, Thailand, Egypt, Australia, Iran, Maldives, and the USA).

Results and Discussion

Self-reported political opinions indicate a moderate leaning, with 75% of the sample identifying as moderate, somewhat liberal, or somewhat conservative. Slight differences occurred between the three countries investigated, Germany, France, and the UK, with France being the most conservative and Germany being the least conservative in their political opinion (Table 2).

Table 2 Self-reported political opinion

	Total	UK	Germany	France
Liberal	13.4%	13.46%	15.84%	11%
somewhat liberal	15.6%	21.15%	11.88%	14%
Moderate	45.9%	34.61%	57.42%	47%
somewhat conservative	15.3%	19.23%	11.88%	15%
conservative	9.1%	11.54%	2.97%	13%

An exploratory factor analysis of the 10-item European Political Opinion scale revealed two sub-dimensions, *EU Confidence*, understood as the belief in the EU and European integration, and *EU Uncertainty*, understood as a lack of confidence in European leadership and European unification (Table 3). The EU's current internal and external challenges have resulted in two main viewpoints, with one group supporting further economic and political integration, and the other, Eurosceptics, pushing for less integration and lacks confidence in the EU (Archick, 2017). Considering the self-assessment of respondents was generally moderate, populist attitudes reflect the current political space with populist parties becoming more mainstreamed and gaining supporters from historically major central parties (Rooduijn, 2015)

Given the exploratory nature of the study, the reliability of each scale was found to be sufficient. A composite means scale was computed for the ten-item European Political Opinion scale ($\alpha=0.692$, $M=4.53$, $SD=0.66$), the two sub-dimensions, EU Confidence ($\alpha=0.673$, $M=4.31$, $SD=.92$) and EU Uncertainty ($\alpha=0.641$, $M=4.74$, $SD=0.76$), and seven-item Populist Attitudes scale ($\alpha=0.769$, $M=4.70$, $SD=0.79$) composite mean scales were computed for each.

Table 3 Exploratory Factor Analysis of European Political Opinion

	Loading	M	SD	Eigen value	Var. Expld	Alpha
Factor 1: EU confidence		4.31	.92	2.69	26.89	0.673
Populist parties being anti-EU are a threat to the EU and Eurozone.	.757	4.41	1.325			
Counter-terrorism operations should be established by the EU and not be dealt with by individual member states.	.659	4.36	1.415			
The debt relief measures and an additional cash injection for Greece are fair to make Greek debt sustainable in the future.	.643	3.91	1.394			
Russia is a threat to the EU as they want to destabilise the EU by funding populist parties, using pro-Russian fake news, and conducting cyber attacks.	.600	4.31	1.371			
Asylum-seekers and refugees should be redistributed among all EU member states accepting a certain number of them.	.562	4.58	1.449			
Factor 2: EU uncertainty		4.74	.76	1.74	17.40	.641
EU initiatives to manage the migrant and refugee crisis in 2015 failed.	.818	4.83	1.168			
The EU lacks a strong leadership	.764	4.66	1.226			
ISIS foreign fighters returning to Europe is a prime security concern.	.596	4.98	1.41			
In my country, inequality of income, education, health, and social mobility is a problem.	.531	4.72	1.222			
Anti-EU parties gaining more support can stop European unification.	.398	4.50	1.130			
KMO	0.708					
Barlett's Test of Sphericity	507.28,	df=45	$P<0.001$			

The overall destination image perception for each of the ten countries included in this study are presented in table 4. A quick review indicates no real surprises, as traditionally popular tourist destinations, generally and specifically for the EU market, had the most favourable overall means (Australia, Maldives, USA, and Thailand). On the other hand, several countries that are less popular destinations overall scored lower. Further, several countries that have often received large amounts of negative press or could be considered as geopolitical adversaries scored the lowest, including Iran, Russia, Turkey, and Egypt (Table 4). Given recent events, often covered extensively in popular news media and politicalized/securitized by politicians in all three sample countries, the overall low destination image perception for these four countries is no surprise. These four countries are often associated with political instability, lack of safety, insecurity, terror threats, and other geopolitical tensions and could be perceived as 'riskier' destinations to visit (Reza Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012; Global Terrorism Index, 2017; Arslanova, Agapito, and Pinto, 2017; Archick, 2017; Feldbauer and Paris, 2020).

Table 4 Destination Image perception per country

	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Alpha
Turkey	-.0885	1.64692	.009	-.465	.916
Russia	-.1016	1.53508	-.135	-.436	.919
China	.2866	1.50518	-.178	-.367	.930
South Africa	.3711	1.49062	-.237	-.394	.933
Thailand	.6439	1.50882	-.420	-.499	.946
Egypt	.0754	1.58829	-.011	-.536	.921
Australia	1.0577	1.50873	-.672	-.362	.949
Iran	-.7613	1.62483	.458	-.655	.940
Maldives	1.0328	1.72435	-.632	-.361	.943
USA	.6885	1.65200	-.501	-.476	.940

Scales were measured on a -3 to +3

To further examine the relationship between European political opinion and populist attitudes and destination image, Pearson Correlations were calculated. Table 5 includes all of the significant correlations (with blank cells representing non-significant relationships). All of the significant correlations were weak, as would be expected, given the complexity of the destination image formation process. However, the findings do indicate that there are some clear relationships between populist ideology and destination image.

Table 5: Correlations between country destination image and EU Political Opinion, EU Confidence, EU Uncertainty, and Populist Attitudes

Country Destination Image	European Political Opinion	EU Confidence	EU Uncertainty	Populist attitudes
Turkey			-.114*	
Russia				
China		.115*		
South Africa				.162**
Thailand	.171**	.114*	.126*	.146*
Egypt				
Australia	.243**	.154**	.240**	.234**
Iran		.149**		
Maldives	.203**	.128*	.202**	.225**
USA	.123**			.150**

** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; blank cells indicate no significant relationship.

A positive correlation was found between overall European Political Opinion and destination image perception of the four most popular destinations Australia, the Maldives, Thailand, and the USA (Table 5). By examining the relationship between the two sub-dimensions (EU Confidence and EU Uncertainty), further insights and associations are uncovered. Preliminary indications from the correlation analysis suggest that individuals with

a higher populist European Political Opinion have a slightly stronger positive destination image of popular more 'traditional' tourist destination countries for Europeans (Maldives, Australia, Thailand). Further, preliminary results indicate that individuals with lower populist attitudes indicated through the Confidence in the EU correspond with a weak positive destination image for China and Iran. The results suggest that the more positive the respondent attitudes towards the EU and European integration, the more positive their perceived destination image is for China and Iran. Stronger views towards EU Uncertainty corresponded with a weak negative relationship with the perceived destination image of Turkey (Table 5). In Turkey's case, this is likely uniquely influenced by the wider discourse around Turkey's admission into the EU.

A significant positive relationship between European Political Opinion and Populist Attitudes ($r=.520$, $p<.001$) indicates that the relationship between populist attitudes and destination image of the ten selected countries would likely be similar to those between European Political Opinion and destination image. All four more traditional tourist destinations (USA, Maldives, Thailand, and Australia), which were positively correlated with EU Political Opinion, are positively correlated with populist attitudes (Table 5). The strength of these positive correlations mirrors those with overall European Political Opinion and the EU Uncertainty sub-dimension. There was one exception, South Africa, which also had a weak positive relationship with Populist attitudes.

Conclusion and Implications

This study's preliminary correlation analysis indicated, generally, there is a weak positive relationship between political ideology, including European political opinion and populist attitudes, and perceived destination image of popular/more traditional destinations. However, regarding destination perception of less popular destinations, the results provide some preliminary indication that the strength of populist and Eurosceptic political ideology does

affect the perceived destination image. Confidence in the EU was associated with a more positive perception of less ‘popular’ destinations. In contrast, stronger Eurosceptic views were associated with a slightly stronger, but still weak, relationship with destination image of traditionally popular destinations and also indicated the potential negative relationship with countries at odds with a Eurosceptic perspective, such as Turkey.

It is important to note that this research note presents a very preliminary correlational analysis of survey data. Further research into the existing data will seek to uncover further insights on the relationships between political ideology, specifically Euroscepticism and populist attitudes, and destination image, explore differences between respondents from the three sample countries (Germany, UK, and France), and examine the relationships through more robust methods. Given the prevalence and centrality of political ideology and discourse in many of the largest source tourist countries and the rise of populist political attitudes, parties, and policies, understanding the relationship and impact of political values on consumer behaviour and specifically travel tendencies is an important area for further research.

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