Tourists' emotional solidarity with residents: A segmentation analysis and its links to destination image and loyalty

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ABSTRACT:

It is nearly impossible to consider a destination without also acknowledging its people and the relationships visitors have with such residents. Extant research on emotional solidarity has treated visitors as a homogenous group, failing to identify differences in the way people develop solidarity and perceive a destination. This study addresses this gap by clustering tourists based on their emotional solidarity with residents; and identifying whether tourist subgroups share different perceptions of the destination and levels of loyalty. Analysis was based on a sample of 400 Serbian visitors who had visited Greece. Three groups were identified with different levels of emotional solidarity, termed Appreciators, Lovers, and Emotionally Distants. All groups exhibited dissimilar cognitive and affective images and diverse levels of loyalty.

1. Introduction

A vast volume of tourist destinations throughout the globe are engaging in marketing activities targeted at prior and potential visitors in efforts to foster a favourable image, increase visitation to the destination and build loyalty (Zeugner-Roth & Žabkar, 2015). Local residents have a central role to play in this process, as it is difficult to divorce a place from its people when constructing an image of the destination (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Trauer & Ryan, 2005). This is widely acknowledged nowadays, as many destinations worldwide are focusing their tourism marketing strategies on local residents (Stylidis, 2019). Some destinations have relied considerably on residents in branding their locale through word-of-mouth (Jeuring & Haartsen, 2017) and tourism advocacy behaviours (Palmer, Koenig-Lewis, & Jones, 2013), however, such research has stopped shy of considering the role of the relationship residents experience with tourists in promoting destinations.

The relationships developed between local residents and tourists are complex and intricate in nature, quite often paving the way for visitors to be pulled to a destination with hopes of interacting with locals, and ultimately learning more about customs and traditions (Babb, 2011). One means through which such relationship between visitors to a destination and its residents can be surmised is emotional solidarity.

Drawing on the prominent work of Durkheim (1915/1995), Hammar-strom (2005) contends that emotional solidarity is the affective bonds individuals experience with one another, often characterised by degree of closeness. An understanding of tourists' emotional solidarity with local residents is known to be pivotal for effective planning, development and marketing of a destination (Joo & Woosnam, 2019). However, extant research surrounding emotional solidarity among tourists is short-sighted, treating visitors as a homogenous group and neglecting differences in value systems, culture and social interactions that often underpin the way in which people develop solidarity and perceive a destination and its image.

Segmenting visitors based on their perceptions of the relationship they have with residents (i.e. emotional solidarity) has strong implications for tourism theory and practice. In the way of theory, no study (to the best of our knowledge) has been undertaken whereby tourists are segmented based on their emotional solidarity. The work to date that has examined emotional solidarity casts residents' relationships with tourists as largely positive (Woosnam, 2011; Woosnam & Aleshinloye, 2013). Identification of tourist subgroups will shed more light on the different level of bonds individuals experience with one another, and the way in which feelings of closeness influence tourist destination image and loyalty, which is missing from the literature. Such in-depth consideration of human relationships can assist planning attempts in

alleviating disparities between residents and tourists, all the while, minimising phenomena such as anti-tourism, by focusing on visitors who feel emotionally close to hosting communities.

By way of contributing to practice, this work has the potential to reveal visitor segments that exhibit sympathy and understanding for the host population and who appreciate its destination image (Ribeiro, Woosnam, Pinto, & Silva, 2018). From a marketing perspective, such a segmentation exercise provides prudent knowledge for achieving an economy of scale and generating customised promotional activities targeted at existing and potential guests, based on the characteristics and preferences of the identified cluster members (Wang & Chen, 2015). In essence, this work affords managers and marketers of destination marketing organisations (DMOs) the potential to identify visitors along a continuum of how they perceive residents to assist in future decision making and planning for tourism, better equipping them to achieve the aim of sustainable tourism development (Woosnam & Aleshinloye, 2013).

In knowing that perceived image of a destination and emotional solidarity experienced with residents can vary considerably, this study aims to consider how visitors' perceived image of a destination and their level of loyalty may differ with respect to the clusters or segments of visitors based on the degree of emotional solidarity they possess with residents. To achieve its aim, this study seeks to address the following three objectives: (1) to establish the applicability of emotional solidarity as a segmentation base capable of identifying heterogeneous tourist segments; (2) to explore whether those emotional solidarity-based visitor groups exhibit different cognitive and affective images of the destination; and (3) to investigate whether those segments exhibit different levels of loyalty to the destination. Data were collected based on a sample of 400 Serbian visitors who had visited Greece in the past. Given that Serbia and Greece have a long-lasting relationship, and Greece is the most visited international tourist destination for Serbians who demonstrate strong levels of loyalty, Greece was thus deemed a suitable research setting to explore the existence of tourist clusters with various levels of emotional solidarity exhibiting different degrees of destination loyalty. This research contributes to tourism theory by establishing the presence of segments of visitors with dissimilar levels of emotional solidarity with local residents. Further identifying differences among such visitor segments in terms of their destination image and loyalty, this study enlightens the relationship of emotional solidarity and destination in the context of sustainable tourism marketing.

2. Literature review

2.1. Market segmentation research in tourism

Market segmentation has strong roots in marketing theory and practice (Dolnicar, 2019), as it facilitates the division of a larger market into smaller homogeneous segments that feature distinct characteristics, enabling an organisation to efficiently serve its targeted segments (Li, Meng, Uysal, & Mihalik, 2013). The two types of market segmentation widely available are the (1) a priori; and (2) a posteriori (Dolnicar, 2004). First, a priori market segmentation serves to cluster individuals/organizations according to some profile descriptors that are sensible and insightful to marketers (Mazanec, 2000). Such descriptors used in tourism are visitors' demographic or geographic (country-of-origin) characteristics (Dolnicar, 2008; Kim, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007) or number of previous visits to the destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). This type of segmentation allows destination authorities to design customised marketing strategies per segment/country (Dolnicar, 2008; Zeugner-Roth & Žabkar, 2015).

In contrast, a posteriori segmentation assists in clustering people based on their distinct response patterns (Dolnicar, 2004), such as their perceptions/images of a tourist destination (Stylidis, 2018). Studies on a posteriori segmentation of tourists are often based on their travel motivations (Alén, Losada, & de Carlos, 2017; Bieger & Lässer, 2002; de

Guzman, Leones, Tapia, Wong, & de Castro, 2006; Ramires, Brandao, & Sousa, 2017), activities participated while at the destination (Derek, Wozniak, & Kulczyk, 2019), benefits sought from the trip (Frochot, 2005; Molera & Albaladejo, 2007; Prayag, 2010), recreation experiences (Lee, Jan, Tseng, & Lin, 2018), consumption emotions (Bigne & Andreu, 2004) and destination image (Dolnicar & Huybers, 2007; Leisen, 2001). Yet, there is a lack of research on tourist segmentation based on perceived emotional solidarity with destination residents, despite its aforementioned significance for sustainable planning and marketing of tourism (see Joo, Tasci, Woosnam, Maruyama, Hollas, & Aleshinloye, 2018). Additionally, emotional solidarity clearly taps into differences in values, offering better insights into tourists' destination image and future behavioural intentions (Ribeiro et al., 2018). In line with what Patwardhan et al. (2020) suggested, the nature and strength of the relationship between emotional solidarity, destination image and loyalty can serve as critical precursors of a successful symbiosis between local residents, tourists and the tourism industry.

Additionally, most of the previous tourism studies have clustered: (i) a mixture of international and domestic visitors, including a large proportion of first-time visitors, who expressed their loyalty while still present at the destination; and (ii) those tourists were (most often than not) participating in special forms of tourism such as nature-based (Derek et al., 2019), wine tourism (Gu & Huang, 2019), spa and wellness (Dimitrovski & Todorović, 2015), heritage (Ramires, Brandao, & Sousa, 2017), or sports (Albayrak & Caber, 2018), thereby often paying less attention to the more 'generic/mainstream' market which encapsulates the vast majority of tourists. As a result, a number of differences reported (in previous studies) among the identified clusters could be attributed to respondents' socio-cultural characteristics rather than their attitudinal or behavioural patterns (Iordanova & Stylidis, 2017). Next, due to the sampling approaches used, respondents might not be representative of loyal customers such as individuals who repeatedly visit a destination.

To avoid such conceptual and methodological drawbacks, and aiming to minimise the impacts of culture, this study focuses on Serbian tourists studied in their place of residence, who have visited Greece in the past, as Serbians were the fifth largest tourist market of Greece over the summer months in 2019 (SETE, 2020). In so doing, the study responds to Woosnam (2011) call for greater examination of emotional solidarity between individuals from different, but coherent backgrounds, such as Serbians and Greeks in the current context. The next parts of the paper further highlight the importance of segmenting the tourist market using emotional solidarity with residents, by linking it with cognitive and affective image, and destination loyalty.

2.2. Emotional solidarity and destination (cognitive, affective) image

To date, much of the research surrounding emotional solidarity in a tourism context has focused on the construct from the perspective of residents (see Joo & Woosnam, 2019 for a review). Few works have considered emotional solidarity from the vantage point of tourists (Joo, Woosnam, Shafer, Scott, & An, 2017; Patwardhan et al., 2020; Simpson & Simpson, 2017; Suess, Woosnam, & Erul, 2020; Woosnam & Aleshinloye, 2013). Such work is limited in a couple of areas. First, the research treats visitors as a homogenous group. As such, no work has explicitly segmented visitors based on the degree of solidarity they possess with residents of a destination. Second, rarely have researchers considered how other variables are explained through emotional solidarity (Ribeiro et al., 2018; Woosnam et al., 2015a, 2015b), especially not considering visitors' perceptions of a destination's image.

Though much work has treated emotional solidarity as a precursor to some outcomes, research explicitly connecting emotional solidarity to destination image is still in its infancy. Some research has implied the connection between resident/tourist relationships and destination image development. As Baloglu and McCleary (1999) and Echtner and Ritchie (1991) suggest, the overall image one develops of a destination

comprises a holistic impression of the place. That said, it is difficult to conceive of a place and the overall image that results without acknowledging residents within the destination; few places are islands without inhabitants. Additionally, Baloglu (2001) found that the more familiar one is with a destination, the more positive a person's image of the destination will be. Implicit in such familiarity are the connections a visitor may have with destination residents and the relationships that develop with these individuals (Stylidis, Shani, & Belhassen, 2017).

It is rare for the image of a destination to be considered without taking into account its local residents. In fact, many times, individuals will select a destination to visit based on the afforded opportunities to potentially interact with residents and learn more about customs, traditions, heritage, and culture overall (Babb, 2011; Wearing, Stevenson, & Young, 2010). As such, some research has tangentially linked tourists' motivations for interacting with locals and the image individuals have of the destination. Phillips and Jang (2007) found that both affective and cognitive destination image were explained by motivations for novelty and excitement (comprised of social interaction items such as 'meeting new and different people' and 'experiencing new and different lifestyles'). Similarly, Li, Cai, Lehto, and Huang (2010) found that motivations for gaining intellect (through items concerning experiencing others and their culture) and experiencing a sense of belonging (through items involving interaction with destination residents) each uniquely explained tourists' cognitive destination image. Tang (2014) also found that tourists' motivations involving the desire to meet and interact with local residents significantly explained positive cognitive destination image among visitors. Though interaction does not always equate to a deeper relationship forged with locals (Aramberri, 2010; Weaver, 2014), the aforementioned work begs the question of how visitors' perceived image of a destination may differ with respect to visitor segments based on the degree of emotional solidarity they possess with residents.

2.3. Emotional solidarity and destination loyalty

Loyalty is commonly defined in marketing as consumers' repetition of purchase of products or services from a single firm over a period of time (Petrick, 2004). Loyalty has been approached in tourism as an extension of customer loyalty to destinations (Baloglu, 2001). Loyalty is arguably one of the most-widely researched topics within the travel and tourism literature (Stylos & Bellou, 2019), owing to the popularity within the general marketing literature and implications for retaining previous, and attracting new, visitors to a destination. As a marketing principle, the retention of existing customers costs less than the acquisition of new patrons (Shoemaker & Lewis, 1999). Two primary means by which destination loyalty has been conceived of concern visitors' perceptions of a place as recommendable (Chen & Gursoy, 2001) and degree of intention to revisit a destination (Oppermann, 2000). Such conceptualisations highlight the inconsistencies running throughout the literature on destination loyalty. Agapito, Valle, and Mendes (2013) and Zhang, Fu, Cai, and Lu (2014) argued that researchers in the tourism literature have largely related the conative component of image (the action element, analogous to behaviour) to loyalty (see Chi & Qu, 2008; Kim, 2018; Li et al., 2010). This is further echoed by the way in which loyalty tends to be measured: behaviourally; attitudinally; and as a composite of both behaviours and attitudes (Almeida-Santana & Moreno-Gil, 2018; Gursoy, Kim, & Uysal, 2004; Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Zhang et al., 2014). In acknowledging these points, the current paper adopts the conceptualisation of destination loyalty as a place that is recommendable and one where individuals would express a likelihood of returning, measured as a composite (i.e. through multiple behavioural intention items), providing a more holistic approach to the construct.

Despite the prevalence of research surrounding destination loyalty and emotional solidarity within the travel and tourism literature, few have sought to connect the two constructs. This is somewhat surprising given that Lee, Kyle, and Scott (2012) found one of the key determinants of returning to a destination is the connection (i.e. social bonding)

visitors have with local inhabitants. Woosnam and Aleshinloye (2013) echoed this sentiment in claiming that tourists' perspective of the relationship they have with residents has great potential implications for destination loyalty. Two works have explicitly connected emotional solidarity and destination loyalty. Considering tourists to the island-nation of Cape Verde, Ribeiro et al. (2018) found that two unique dimensions (i.e. feeling welcoming and sympathetic understanding) of the *Emotional Solidarity Scale* (ESS) significantly explained a substantial degree (along with satisfaction) of variance (i.e. 62%) in visitors' destination loyalty. More recently, Patwardhan et al. (2020) considered attendees at a religious festival in India, whereby they found each of the three ESS dimensions explained 82% of the variance in individuals' loyalty to the festival. Though these works examine the role that emotional solidarity plays in predicting tourists' degree of loyalty, they do not account for the nuanced distinctions (i.e. clusters or segments) of emotional solidarity visitors have with residents. That said, the extant work calls into question how visitors' loyalty to a destination may differ with respect to visitor segments based on the level of emotional solidarity they possess with local inhabitants of the tourist place.

3. Methods

3.1. Study site

The Republic of Serbia, with an estimated population of 7,020,858 inhabitants in 2017 (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2017), is a country situated at the crossroads of central and south-eastern Europe, sharing borders with Hungary, Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania. Serbia co-founded Yugoslavia with other Slavic populations, which ceased to exist after the Yugoslav Wars in 1990s (Judah, 2002). Serbia declared its independence in 1992 forming a union with Montenegro that was dissolved in 2006. Located nearby in south-eastern Europe, Greece has an estimated population of 10,816,286 inhabitants according to the 2016 data (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014). Greece is a country that has traditionally depended on tourism, with the tourism industry sustaining 1 million jobs and contributing 20% of the country's GDP in 2017 (WTTC, 2018). In that same year, Greece ranked fourteenth in the world in terms of tourist numbers, with 27.2 million tourists visiting the country. Despite this, Greece has also suffered from a severe economic crisis reflected in a 25% decrease in GDP between 2008 and 2016 and an unemployment rate of 25%.

The two countries share some similarities including religion (e.g. Eastern Orthodox Christians: 98% of the population in Greece, 85% of the population in Serbia), culture, history and lifestyle. Strong bilateral relations have always been in place between the two countries as documented in historical events such as the revolutions against the Ottoman Empire, the Balkan Wars (1912–13), and the World Wars (1914-18 and 1939–1945). Nowadays, plenty of Greek-Serbian bilateral agreements exist in areas such as judicial relations, scientific and educational cooperation, tourism development, air transport, and economy. More than 13 sister cities, for example, exist between the two countries, with notable ones including Belgrade –Athens and Nis–Sparta. Roughly 850,000 Serbians visited Greece in 2017, making Greece the most preferred destination among Serbians, with the majority of individuals visiting Northern Greece and the Greek islands on holiday (SETE, 2017). Altogether, given that: (i) Greece is the most visited international tourist destination for Serbians who accordingly showcase strong levels of loyalty; (ii) Serbians are a key tourist market of Greece; and (iii) the two countries have strong cultural and historical ties; Serbians visiting Greece were thus deemed a suitable research context to study the existence of tourist clusters among visitors who have well-established levels of emotional bonds with the destination country and its residents; and to further unpack a key driver of loyalty.

3.2. Sample and data collection

This research was undertaken in Novi Sad, the second largest city in Serbia, with a population of slightly over a third of a million inhabitants. Serbian residents (18 years and older) who permanently reside in Novi Sad, and who have visited Greece at least once in the past, comprised the population of study participants. A filtering question was included in the survey whereby respondents were invited to state the number of times they had been to Greece. Print copies of the questionnaire in Serbian were distributed in the city centre of Novi Sad by two experienced researchers from July of 2017 to May of 2018. The researchers randomly approached every fifth person passing by and asked them to participate in the study. Respondents were assured that the survey was anonymous and their responses would be treated with confidence at all times. Simultaneously, the same survey was distributed online to all faculties at the University of Novi Sad via email (with accompanying instructions and a statement of the study's purpose). The questionnaire was available to all academic staff, employees, and students. A web link to the survey was also posted in many Novi Sad University and community Facebook groups and webpages. About 60% of the surveys were collected online and the remaining were completed in the city centre, with a response rate of 69%. Of these, 27 questionnaires were discarded (due to incomplete responses), leading to a completion rate of 94%. Overall, 400 completed questionnaires were utilised in the data analysis.

3.3. Questionnaire design

The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first captured Serbians' cognitive and affective image of Greece along with their degree of loyalty to Greece. The scale developed by Prayag & Ryan (2012), with a few modifications based on previous studies (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008), was used to capture respondents' cognitive image of Greece as a tourist destination. These items represented the core image of Greece as a tourist destination as also confirmed in the pilot study discussed later. In line with past research, participants were asked to provide their responses on a seven-point Likert scale, from 1 strongly disagree to 7 strongly agree, with 4 serving as a mid-point (Chi & Qu, 2008; Lee, 2009). Affective image was evaluated using four affective image attributes on a seven-point semantic differential scale, based on previous studies (see Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Martin & del Bosque, 2008; Wang & Hsu, 2010). The four attributes were: distressing-relaxing, unpleasant-pleasant, boring-exciting, and sleepy-lively. Following previous studies (Agapito et al., 2013; Kim, Choe, & Petrick, 2018), loyalty was captured using three items: planned intention to revisit ("How likely are you to visit Greece in the next two years?"), open intention ("How likely are you to visit Greece in the next five years?") and intention to recommend ("How likely are you to recommend Greece to your friends and relatives?"). Respondents were invited to answer using a seven-point scale, ranging from 1 very unlikely to 7 very likely.

The second section aimed to measure emotional solidarity, following the studies of Woosnam and colleagues (see Woosnam & Aleshinloye, 2013; Woosnam, Shafer, Scott, & Timothy, 2015). The construct was measured using the nine-item, Emotional Solidarity Scale, which includes: emotional closeness (e.g. "I feel close to Greek people"; "I feel Greeks are my friends"; "I feel affection towards Greeks"), sympathetic understanding (e.g. "I 'understand' Greek people"; "I identify with Greek people"; "I have a lot in common with Greek people"), and feeling welcomed (e.g. "I feel people in Greece welcome visitors"; "I would be proud to visit Greece"; "I feel Greeks would appreciate the benefits associated with me coming to visit them"). Items were presented to respondents on a seven-point Likert scale (where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree). The last section of the survey included questions about visitors' demographic attributes (e.g. gender, etc). The questionnaire was originally designed in English and translated into Serbian by one of the researchers who is a native speaker and resident of Novi Sad.

Prior to the main data collection, a pilot test was conducted with 50 international tourists who had visited Greece in the past. The participants in this pilot were conveniently selected using one of the researcher's wider network including social media acquaintances, current and former international students at a UK university and colleagues located worldwide. The main criterion in the selection of the respondents in this piloting phase was to have prior experience with Greece as a result of direct visitation. Aside from a few minor wording issues that were identified and corrected, no other substantial changes were required. The piloting as such confirmed the suitability of the research instrument in capturing the image of Greece as a tourist destination and established the soundness of the measurement items included in the various scales (i.e. cognitive image, affective image, destination loyalty, emotional solidarity, attachment).

4. Findings

Although other methods like regression analysis or structural equation modelling might have been useful in testing for relationships between the study's constructs, segmentation analysis was deemed the most suitable tool to address the objectives of this study, capable of identifying the presence of different groups or segments of tourists based on their levels of emotional solidarity with residents, before exploring for potential differences between the identified clusters in terms of image perceptions or destination loyalty. Following Dolnicar (2008) and Hosany and Prayag (2013), the two-stage segmentation process was used to segment Serbian tourists according to their responses on the nine-item emotional solidarity scale, followed by a discriminant analysis which confirmed the proposed solution. Prior to the analysis, the reliability of the nine-item emotional solidarity scale was assessed, with the Cronbach's α value of 0.95 confirming the strong internal consistency of the scale. In the first stage of the segmentation process, a hierarchical analysis (Ward's method with squared Euclidean distances) was used to identify a set of solutions. After inspecting the agglomeration coefficient, the largest increase was observed in between the third and second stage, with the three-cluster option offering the most meaningful and interpretable results. In the second stage, a non-hierarchical clustering (using K-mean algorithm) was conducted and confirmed the initial three-cluster solution as the most meaningful one.

The first cluster comprises about one third of the participants ($n = 154$, 37.5%) who hold neutral to positive feelings/affection towards Greeks (Table 1). This group includes tourists finding that Greek people are welcoming, those feeling proud to be a welcomed visitor, as well as those feeling their socio-economic contributions are appreciated by locals, thus termed 'Appreciators' due to the level of appreciation they exhibit towards the hosts for the warm welcome they are receiving. However, they appear to hold a rather neutral stance when asked whether they identify with Greeks or feel affection towards them. The second cluster, which accounts for about a half of the total sample ($n =$

Table 1
Mean responses of clusters to the nine emotional solidarity items.

	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3
	n = 154	n = 186	n = 70
I feel close to Greek people	4.77	6.59	3.23
I feel Greeks are my friends	4.88	6.54	2.93
I identify with Greek people	4.31	6.02	2.33
I feel affection towards Greeks	4.34	6.23	2.60
I 'understand' Greek people	4.62	6.08	2.43
I have a lot in common with Greek people	4.38	6.11	2.19
I would be proud to visit Greece	5.16	6.51	3.56
I feel people in Greece welcome visitors	5.66	6.59	3.66
I feel Greeks would appreciate the benefits associated with me coming to visit them	4.82	6.23	2.80

Scale: 1 'strongly disagree' - 7 'strongly agree'.

186, 45.4%), is termed 'Lovers', as they exhibit the warmest feelings among the three clusters identified, and feel emotionally attached to the local population; they seem to be in love (feeling affection) with the host population and develop strong connection and feelings towards their hosts. This group's members strongly agree that they feel close to Greek people, and consider them to be their friends; feel very welcomed whenever they visit Greece; they feel affection and identify with the local population. The third cluster, labelled 'Emotionally Distants', represents about one fifth (n = 70, 17.1%) of the total number of respondents and exhibits the least favourable feelings towards the local hosts. This group feel principally different from Greeks; disagree that they have a lot in common with Greek people; that they can identify with Greek people; that understand Greek people; and that Greeks are their friends.

Next, discriminant analysis was used to evaluate the accuracy of the previously identified solution. In line with Table 2, the two canonical discriminant functions extracted were significant (<0.001). For both functions the canonical correlation is strong, demonstrating that the model explains a significant relationship between the functions and the dependent variable (Hosany & Prayag, 2013). The results further suggest that the hit ratio is very high (98.5%), that is, 98.5% (n = 394) out of the 400 respondents were accurately classified in their predicted cluster by the discriminant functions (Hair et al., 2014).

To further establish the validity of the three-cluster solution, its relationship with a theoretically related concept such as place attachment was tested (Hair et al., 2014; Hosany & Prayag, 2013). Previous studies support the presence of a positive link between emotional solidarity and place attachment (Woosnam, Aleshinloye, Strzelecka, & Erul, 2018). One-way ANOVA with Tukey's post-hoc test was used with tourists' level of place attachment (dependent variable) and cluster membership (independent variable). The results (F = 192.400, p < 0.001) confirm previous research and reinforced the external validity of the three-cluster solution, as the Lovers feel most attached to Greece (M = 5.90) while the Emotionally Distant exhibit the lowest level of attachment (M = 2.06).

4.1. Cluster profiling by visitors' personal characteristics

To profile the three segments, these were cross-tabulated with socio-demographic attributes such as gender, age, marital status and the number of previous visits to Greece. About 42% had visited Greece one to four times, 39% between five and nine times, and the rest (i.e. 19%) had visited Greece 10 or more times. In line with Table 3, the three groups differed with regards to gender; marital status; and number of previous visits, while they were independent of age.

Table 3
Cluster profiling based on tourists' demographic characteristics.

Demographic	Clusters (%)			Chi-square	Sig.
	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3		
Gender				6.737	.034
Male	39%	26%	33%		
Female	61%	74%	67%		
Age				3.632	.458
18-35	66%	63%	70%		
36-50	27%	33%	27%		
51+	7%	4%	3%		
Marital Status				12.084	.017
Single	45%	54%	44%		
Married	38%	34%	27%		
Other	17%	12%	29%		
Visits in Greece				6.325	.042
1–4 times	31%	24%	40%		
5 or more years	69%	76%	60%		

4.2. Cluster membership and destination image

ANOVA with Games-Howell post-hoc testing (preferred when clusters' size is not equal- Field, 2017) was conducted to explore for potential differences between the tourist groups with regards to: (1) cognitive image of Greece as (Table 4), (2) affective image of Greece (Table 5) and (3) destination loyalty (Table 6). The findings of the test suggest that significant differences exist between all the groups in all cognitive image items studied, with the Emotionally Distants group holding less favourable perceptions in contrast to Lovers, who hold the most positive cognitive images of Greece (Table 4).

Table 5 indicates that significant differences also exist between the clusters in terms of the affective image of Greece, with Appreciators and the Lovers being more favourable than those who are Emotionally Distants, who appeared to hold the least favourable affective image of Greece. Tourists, for example, belonging in Appreciators and Lovers agreed more fervently that Greece is more relaxing, pleasant, exciting and lively.

Lastly, all the groups demonstrated different degrees of loyalty to Greece (Table 6). Lovers, in particular, reported having stronger intentions to return to Greece and to spread positive word-of-mouth (WOM) to others, in contrast to members of the Emotionally Distants group, who exhibited the lowest intentions among the three groups. The next section discusses these findings in the light of previous and subsequent research.

5. Discussion

This study clustered visitors of a destination based on their emotional solidarity with the local residents, and explored whether the identified

Table 2
Discriminant analysis of image clusters.

Discriminant Functions Results					
Discriminant Functions	Eigenvalue	Cannonical correlation	Wilk's lambda	Chi-square	Significance
1	5.897	.925	.129	825.48	.000
2	.124	.333	.889	47.27	.000
Classification results					
Actual group	No of cases	Predicted group membership			
		1	2	3	
Cluster 1	154	149 (97%)	4 (2.5%)	1 (0.5%)	
Cluster 2	186	0 (0%)	186 (100%)	0 (0%)	
Cluster 3	70	1 (1.5%)	0 (0%)	69 98.5%)	

Hit-ratio: 98.5%.

Table 4
Differences in the cognitive image of Greece by cluster.

Items	Clusters			ANOVA	Post Hoc
	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	F Ratio*	
Scenic Beauty	6.16	6.42	5.23	30.846	All
Pleasant Weather	6.19	6.46	5.27	40.965	All
Quality Hotels	5.17	5.52	4.27	20.376	All
Appealing Cuisine/ Food	5.58	6.17	4.43	56.633	All
Excellent Quality of Service	4.85	5.33	3.66	41.505	All
Good Nightlife	5.25	5.96	4.14	58.184	All
Interesting Festivals	4.51	5.27	3.47	60.442	All
Easily Accessible	5.32	5.78	4.13	47.084	All
Convenient Transport	5.06	5.55	3.66	64.995	All

Scale: 1 'strongly disagree' - 7 'strongly agree', *F-value is significant at 0.001.

Table 5
Differences in the affective image of Greece by cluster.

Items	Clusters			ANOVA	Post Hoc
	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	F Ratio*	
Relaxing	6.25	6.55	5.04	72.826	All
Pleasant	6.07	6.56	5.27	49.232	All
Exciting	5.60	6.23	4.63	64.820	All
Lively	5.27	6.10	4.34	68.055	All

Scale: 1 'strongly disagree' - 7 'strongly agree', *All reported F-values are significant at 0.001.

Table 6
Differences in loyalty to Greece by cluster.

Items	Clusters			ANOVA	Post Hoc
	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	F Ratio*	
Return to Greece in 2 years	5.86	6.59	4.73	51.113	All
Return to Greece in 5 years	6.19	6.71	5.14	48.670	All
Recommend Greece to friends and relatives	6.34	6.82	5.20	68.758	All

Scale: 1 'very unlikely' - 7 'very likely', *All reported F-values are significant at 0.001.

tourist clusters shared similar/different cognitive and affective images, along with diverse degrees of loyalty to the destination. As the results suggest, there are three distinct tourist groups that exhibit dissimilar levels of emotional solidarity with residents in Greece, thereby supporting the notion that emotional solidarity can be used as a meaningful base for segmenting international tourists. The first cluster, *Appreciators,* contains tourists who express rather positive feelings towards Greeks, appreciating their hospitality. On the one hand, tourists agree that they feel proud to visit Greece; find that people in Greece welcome visitors and consider Greeks to be their friends; Greeks also acknowledge the benefits associated with Serbians visiting them. On the other hand, tourists in this cluster appear neutral when asked: (i) if they identify with Greeks, (ii) whether they have a lot in common with Greek people, and (iii) whether they feel affections towards them. Altogether, they hold average to positive opinions and feelings towards Greeks, but less extreme than the *Lover* cluster discussed next.

The second tourist cluster, *Lovers*, includes tourists who identify with and feel very close to Greeks, and understand them very well. There are proportionately more people in this cluster who are female, single, falling between the ages of 36 and 50, and who have visited Greece five times or more in the past. Tourists in this cluster scored the highest ratings to a series of statements, including: feel close to Greek people, Greek people are my friends; feel very welcomed and proud to visit Greece; and feel proud to visit Greece. *Lovers* is the only group who fully agrees that they identify with Greek people; they are alone in agreeing they feel affection towards Greeks; and only they believe that they have a lot in common with Greek people. When compared to previous studies on emotional solidarity, *Lovers* indicate a higher degree of emotional solidarity with residents, with the means for all nine emotional solidarity items being higher in this study than in previous works (see Woosnam, 2011; Woosnam et al., 2015a). A tenable explanation might be that all participants of this study have visited Greece at least once, whereas in the study of Woosnam et al. (2015a) about 75% of the sample had visited the destination before. This might also be due to the strong relationships established between Serbians and Greeks in the past, as explained before.

The third tourist cluster, *Emotionally Distants*, is the smallest group, and contains tourists who hold the least favourable feelings towards the local population in Greece. Members of this cluster tend to be primarily

young (18–35 years old), in a relationship, and have visited Greece between one and four times in the past. They are the only cluster which disagrees that people in Greece welcome visitors; and only they disagree that they feel proud to visit Greece. The members of this cluster feel principally different from Greeks; and disagree that Greeks are their friends.

The findings further indicate that significant differences exist between the perceptions of the three tourist groups in all nine cognitive image items studied, with *Lovers* exhibiting the most favourable perceptions and members of the *Emotionally Distants* group the least favourable cognitive images of Greece. More precisely, both *Appreciators* and *Lovers* appear to appreciate the natural environment (i.e. scenic beauty, pleasant weather) of Greece the most. This image dimension has been constantly reported by previous studies to be valued by international tourists (e.g. Chi & Qu, 2008), as an aesthetically attractive environment enhances the destination experience. For example, Lin, Morais, Kerstetter, and Hou (2007) disclosed that natural environment can positively affect people's selection of a destination. These two tourist clusters also favourably perceive the amenities offered in Greece such as quality hotels, appealing cuisine, quality of service, etc. Amenities are commonly defined as the support facilities and services (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert, & Wanhill, 2008), and have consistently been identified as a core element of destination image and a key factor shaping travel decision making (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Tasci & Holecek, 2007). In contrast, the *Emotionally Distants* group express a rather poor image in terms of quality of service provided and quality of hotels. *Lovers* also assessed the entertainment opportunities available in Greece (e.g. interesting festivals and good nightlife) more positively. On the other hand, members of the *Emotionally Distants* group disagree that Greece provides a variety of entertainment opportunities such as nightlife. Past research has underlined the decisive role availability of entertainment plays in tourists' destination choice (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Lin et al., 2007). With regards to accessibility, both *Appreciators* and *Lovers* agree that Greece provides convenient transportation and is easily accessible, while individuals in the *Emotionally Distants* group disagree with these statements.

The study further compared the affective image of Greece among the three tourist clusters, with the findings indicating significant differences in all four affective attributes studied. *Lovers* and *Appreciators* fervently agree that Greece is relaxing and pleasant, while only *Lovers* strongly agree that it is also exciting and lively. *Appreciators* seem to agree with the last two affective attributes, but to a lesser extent, while individuals in the *Emotionally Distants* group hold a neutral stance. These results suggest that tourists' cognitive and affective images of a tourist destination are shaped by the way they emotionally relate to the local people living at the destination, helping to establish a much-needed link between tourists' emotional solidarity with residents and their perceptions of the destination. It appears that socio-cultural interactions between tourists and residents aid in providing unique tourist experiences and favourable destination images (Yu & Lee, 2014).

Another finding of the study is that both the *Appreciator* and the *Lover* exhibit greater levels of loyalty to Greece, including intentions to return to Greece in the next two and five years, and intentions to recommend Greece to their friends and relatives. In contrast, members of the *Emotionally Distants* group appear less likely to do so. Although, Ribeiro et al. (2018), reported that tourists with stronger emotional solidarity exhibited greater degrees of loyalty, they did not test for the existence of various subgroups with various levels of emotional solidarity, nor did they explore its linkages to the cognitive and affective components of image. There is a possibility that cognitive and affective image mediate the relationship between emotional solidarity and loyalty, as past research has verified that tourists with more favourable destination images tend to be more loyal to the destination (Zhang et al., 2014). Stylidis et al. (2017), for example, reported that tourists with a more positive cognitive and affective image of Eilat are more likely to return in the future and keener to recommend it as a place to visit, in

contradistinction to those holding less-favourable images. Results here reinforce the notion that local residents and the bonds that tourists develop with them are critical not only in shaping the latter's' perceptions of the destination, being also in the decision to return to the destination and to spread positive WOM (destination loyalty). The interaction visitors have with locals can impact whether such tourists intend to return (Wearing et al., 2010), as experiences in a destination can have a lasting impact on deciding to return (McGehee & Santos, 2005).

Given that no segmentation study exists on tourists' emotional solidarity with local residents, the results can mainly be discussed in relation to former segmentation studies on tourists in the context of destination marketing. Prayag (2010) segmented tourists based on benefits sought from visiting a destination and identified four distinct tourist groups, named: novelty seekers, traditional shoppers, multifarious, and activity and culture seekers. Weaver, McCleary, Han, and Blosser (2009) used cluster analysis based on novelty seeking and revealed the presence of three tourist groups termed: thrill seekers, change seekers, and homebodies. Bigne and Andreu (2004) who used consumption emotions evoked by leisure and tourism services to segment tourists concluded that there are two distinguishable segments, one exhibiting greater emotions and a second one with lower emotions evoked by the enjoyment of leisure. They also noted that the cluster with the higher emotions shows greater loyalty when compared to the cluster with the lower emotions. Derek et al. (2019) also observed five cluster profiles with differing social, spatial and economic implications for the destination visited. Such previous studies although concluded that the tourist segments identified often have different demographic characteristics and exhibit different behavioural intentions towards tourism, they failed to consider emotional solidarity as a segmentation base.

5.1. Implications

5.1.1. Theoretical

The theoretical contribution of this research is four-fold. First, the study extends previous research as it verifies that besides tourists' motivation, destination image or novelty seeking, emotional solidarity can be used as a practical base for segmenting tourists. Second, to date, the work surrounding emotional solidarity has focused on the construct as though perceptions of either residents or tourists are both homogenous and positive in considering relationships with others. This work casts the construct and the *Emotional Solidarity Scale* in a light that may more accurately reflect the relationship between tourists and residents—from individuals conceiving of the relationship with others as extremely negative (i.e. *Emotionally Distants*) through those who consider the relationship to be extremely positive (i.e. *Lovers*). To date, work surrounding emotional solidarity has cast the relationship as primarily positive (Woosnam, 2011; Woosnam & Aleshinloye, 2013), though it is known that this can be far from the truth in some destinations (Cheung & Li, 2019; Seraphin, Sheeran, & Pilato, 2018).

This research also extends knowledge on destination image formation by incorporating another key antecedent of image that has been largely overlooked thus far, that of tourists' emotional solidarity with residents. By establishing a much-needed link between tourists' emotional solidarity with residents and their perceptions of the destination the study offers empirical support to previous works (i.e. Stylidis et al., 2017), highlighting the central role local residents play in tourists' cognitive and affective destination image formation. Last but not least, although recent work (i.e. Patwardhan et al., 2020; Ribeiro et al., 2018) has confirmed the relationship between tourists' emotional solidarity and destination loyalty, it did not control for the existence of various tourist groups with dissimilar levels of emotional solidarity. This work confirms that visitors' loyalty to a destination differ with respect to visitor segments based on the degree of emotional solidarity they possess with local inhabitants of the destination.

5.1.2. Practical

Overall, the findings suggest that the three tourist clusters identified based on their levels of emotional solidarity exhibit dissimilar levels of cognitive image, affective image and loyalty to Greece. *Lovers* hold the most favourable cognitive and affective images and the highest levels of loyalty, whereas members of the *Emotionally Distant* group are positioned on the other extreme being the least positive and loyal. As such, practical implications are abounding for industry professionals applying findings from this study. Destination marketing organizations and other relevant stakeholders and decision makers should seek to encourage greater positive interactions between residents and tourists (through means such as festivals and special events, but also in various local shops and hospitality establishments) where solidarity may potentially be fostered (Chang, Gibson, & Sisson, 2014). In other words, policy makers should identify ways to encourage host communities to participate in the process of destination development (Eusébio, Vieira, & Lima, 2018). In this way, the awareness among locals about tourists will be greater and they will better understand how to interact with particular segments of visitors in order to positively affect their experience and increase their satisfaction, which further leads to their willingness to return, and promotion of the destination.

As demonstrated in the findings, those individuals falling within the *Lover* cluster not only held more positive images of the destination, but were also keener to revisit Greece in the near future and recommend it to others. Showcasing such positive relationships between residents and tourists on DMO websites and social media platforms may also improve e-WOM and encourage others to visit (Jeuring & Haartsen, 2017). Additionally, this study touches upon the notion of employee management and training, especially those who are in direct contact with tourists. Hence, hospitality managers can play a significant role in employees' education on how to positively interact with visitors and therefore further enhance emotional solidarity between locals and tourists (Kaminakis, Karantinou, Koritos, & Gounaris, 2019).

5.2. Limitations and future research

This study is vulnerable to several limitations. First, the research utilised a sample focused on repeat visitors. Perceptions and loyalty development of such individuals can potentially be different from those of first-time or non-visitors. A future study needs to incorporate and compare the various types of visitors when studying the interactions between emotional solidarity and destination loyalty. Second, the sample was taken exclusively in only one of the most populous cities in Serbia. Results may have been slightly different had other large cities within the country be considered (e.g. Belgrade). Future work may utilise a sample from numerous comparable cities within countries or even draw a national sample to examine the model. Researchers should also continue to measure the extent of solidarity between residents and tourists in various locations: in contexts spanning destinations where tourists perceive they are not always welcome (e.g. Amsterdam, Mallorca, Venice, Barcelona, etc) (Conde Nast Traveler, 2018) to destinations seeking greater tourist attention (e.g. Verona, Seville, Ljubljana, Turin, etc). Such work could serve to capture a wide variance in individuals' perceptions of the construct.

Additionally, though it was the intention to select Serbian residents who had previously visited Greece for reasons mentioned (i.e. Greece is top destination among Serbians, historical relationship between countries, and economic considerations), it is unclear if similar relationships would result from model testing among residents of other countries, especially those countries sending the highest percentage of outbound tourists to Greece or by focusing on specific locations/destinations in Greece. For instance, it would be interesting to determine how comparable the results would be utilising samples of residents from Germany and the United Kingdom (two countries sending the highest percentages of tourists to Greece per the (Hellenic Statistical, 2016). It would stand to reason that those countries with a weaker historical relationship with

Greece may impact the effect residents' emotional solidarity may have on cognitive image, affective image and destination loyalty. Similarly, differences might be revealed by focusing on various locations and their populations, as some local communities such as those in Crete are known to be more hospitable than others.

Lastly, future research should consider renaming the Emotional Solidarity Scale to one that more accurately reflects the construct. For instance, 'emotional discord-solidarity' would speak to both extremes along the relationship continuum. At any rate, findings from this work have not only demonstrated how visitors may be segmented based on the perceptions of the relationships they possess with residents but also how such relationships factor into the formation of perceived destination image and loyalty, providing excellent opportunities for continued research concerning the dynamic and complex nature of the relationships between residents and tourists.

Author statement

Dimitrios Stylidis: Conceptualization; Project administration; Methodology; Data curation; Formal analysis; Writing - original draft; Writing - review & editing. Kyle Woosnam: Conceptualization; Methodology; Data curation; Formal analysis; Writing - original draft; Writing - review & editing. Milan Ivkov: Conceptualization; Project administration; Methodology; Data curation; Investigation; Writing - original draft.

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