

Destination Word of Mouth

The Role of Traveler Type, Residents, and Identity Salience

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Recent research has identified identity salience and satisfaction as important variables affecting word-of-mouth communications in several contexts, such as university giving, retail environments, and leisure activities. Given these findings, these same variables may also be important in a tourism context, depending on the type of tourist. This study explores the effects of satisfaction and identity salience on word-of-mouth promotion and differences in these variables based on five different destination market segments, including tourists and local residents. The data indicate that satisfaction and identity salience are significant in predicting word-of-mouth promotions and that level of satisfaction and identity salience vary significantly depending on tourist type and resident type.

Keywords: *place identity; word of mouth; place satisfaction; winter tourists; Mexican tourists*

Customers who identify with an organization are more likely to advocate or promote the organization or cause to others through word-of-mouth (WOM) communication (e.g., Baloglu 2002; Petrick 2004). Also known as buzz, these WOM communications are far more credible than marketer-sourced promotions (e.g., Gremler, Gwinner, and Brown 2001; Herr, Kardes, and Kim 1991). WOM is also likely to significantly affect travelers' destination choices (e.g., Gitleson and Crompton 1984; Nolan 1976). Nevertheless, WOM has yet to receive much attention in the tourism literature, as Murphy (2001, p. 51) notes: "Indeed, while word-of-mouth promotion is consistently identified in tourism research as an important source of information used in decision making, there has been little or no research done to investigate this phenomenon in detail."

WOM is defined as product- or service-related verbal, person-to-person communication (Arndt 1967; Wangenheim 2005). Although a number of factors likely drive the tendency to promote a place by WOM, satisfaction with the destination and identity salience represent the two most likely prospects for a number of reasons. First, satisfaction is defined as an overall postpurchase evaluative judgment concerning a specific choice or relationship (e.g., Homburg and Giering 2001), and considerable prior research has found that satisfaction affects WOM in the context of products (for a brief review, see Anderson 1998). Anderson (1998, p. 6) specifically cites research

to say, "It is widely held that loyal, satisfied customers will engage in word of mouth favorable to the firm" but notes that "the antecedents of word of mouth have seldom received direct attention" (p. 5). Anderson also provides theoretical bases for the satisfaction to WOM linkage in prior research as ranging from altruism to instrumentalism to reduction in cognitive dissonance. These theoretical justifications for the satisfaction to WOM linkage would also apply in a travel context: satisfied travelers might promote a destination because of their desire to help others (altruism), to appear travel wise (instrumentalism), or to reassure themselves and others about destination selection (cognitive dissonance reduction).

With identity salience defined as a temporary state involving mental representations that becomes a salient part of self-concept (Forehand, Deshpandé, and Reed 2002), the construct may also affect WOM as indicated by both prior research and theory. First, the Ahearne, Bhattacharya, and Gruen (2005) and Arnett, German, and Hunt (2003) research tested and substantiated the linkage in non-tourism-related fields. Second, Dick and Basu (1994) theoretically modeled WOM as an outcome of customer loyalty, which is affected by relative attitudes—cognitive, conative, and affective—social norms, and situational influences. Variables such as emotions, mood, and satisfaction are conceptualized as components of the

affective attitudinal antecedent, and prior research has found variables such as place attachment or place bonding to be an important part of the self and to evoke strong emotions (e.g., Bloemer and de Ruyter 1999; Gitleson and Crompton 1984; Hammitt, Backlund, and Bixler 2006; Kyle et al. 2004; Williams 2002). Because the identity salience of a place is conceptually similar to the place attachment or bonding variables in that both constructs focus on a place as an important part of self-concept but place becomes more emotionally salient in the identity salience construct, identity salience should also evoke emotions and affect WOM in accordance with the Dick and Basu theory.

Though the identity salience to WOM linkage has not been tested specifically in the tourism context, Lee (2001) cites other research that indicates “that the psychological attachment is important in understanding tourist behavior, including repeat visitation. As a consequence, the latter helps, for example, increase tourist numbers to a destination through referrals and positive word-of-mouth” (p. 230). Similarly, Ekinci and Hosany (2006) found that perceived affective and cognitive image and conviviality—a destination personality dimension—affect intention to recommend. The findings from the limited tourism-related WOM research coupled with studies from other contexts strongly suggest a linkage between likelihood of place promotion and the places perceived as most identity salient.

According to these probable linkages, the purpose of this study, then, is to extend prior research by testing the conjecture that identity salience and satisfaction with a place will significantly affect tourists’ and residents’ WOM promotions of the destination and to test the moderating effect of tourist or resident type on WOM communications. Drawing on social psychology, behavioral sciences, and marketing theories, the study looks at the identity salience of three different tourist segments and compares them with the identity salience of two distinct groups of local residents to determine which market segment is most likely to be satisfied with the region, to define itself as a part of the region (identity salience), and to promote the region to others. By understanding which variables for each market segment of a given region are important in generating WOM, tourism officials may be able to more effectively and efficiently target appropriate segments to elicit positive destination-related WOM. For example, if local residents tout the benefits of a region to outsiders through friend, family, or business ties or through social networking Web site postings, tourism officials should focus considerable efforts on the local market to encourage that WOM behavior. On the other hand, if specific types of tourists, such as long-stay travelers, have greater identification with the unique

qualities extant to the area and would be more likely to communicate the destination’s attributes to outsiders, tourism officials should focus their limited resources on encouraging WOM among these market segments.

The region of study is uniquely positioned to address the study goals because of the variety of tourists and residents in the area—the Rio Grande Valley of southernmost Texas of the United States. The proximity of the region as a tourist destination to Mexico, the Gulf of Mexico as a seaside resort, and the mild tropical winter climate give rise to three travel market segments: winter tourists, transient tourists, and Mexican nationals.

The winter tourists are defined as those who migrate to the region from cold Northern regions for 3 weeks to 9 months during the fall and winter seasons. These travelers are sometimes referred to as “permanent tourists” in the literature and reportedly exist in a constant state of travel excitement (Casado-Diaz 1999, p. 225; Jaakson 1986, p. 388). These “semi-permanent” or place-loyal tourists frequently have second homes in the tourist destination, are a distinct segment of the community, and are often differentiated by their above average income, higher educational background, and older age (50 years or older; Jaakson 1986). Transient tourists in this study are defined as those who visit the region for 2 days to 2 weeks, and Mexican nationals tend to travel to the region routinely, even daily, for shopping, to visit family and friends, or to work.

In addition to the aforementioned tourist segments, permanent residents are also included in this study. While a rich history of examining resident perceptions of tourism factors such as tourists, tourism, tourist attractions, and the destination life cycle exists (an excellent review of this type of research is provided by Easterling 2004, but also see Lankford 1994; Lankford and Howard 1994; Perdue, Long, and Kang 1999, to name a few), the role of local residents in tourism has received limited attention, in spite of their likely impact in attracting tourists. In one destination-residents-related research stream, area residents often act as “hosts” to visiting friends and relatives (VFRs) and thus serve as a critical market segment in tourism, as explained by Young, Corsun, and Baloglu (2006) in their taxonomy of hosts research. Their study of Las Vegas residents and VFRs found that hosts’ WOM behavior significantly influences VFRs’ tourism activities and economic impact. This finding is in accordance with research by Seaton and Palmer (1997).

In addition, the perceived image of a state by its residents has been found to affect the likelihood of recommending the state to others (Schroeder 1996), and “word-of-mouth recommendations from friends and relatives was the most important source in forming touristic images,” as found by Baloglu and McCleary (1999,

p. 892). In fact, some communities, such as Vancouver, British Columbia, actively encourage residents to promote the city through its "Be a Host" program.

Understanding the different segments and their WOM behavior may be especially important because some market segments are stronger destination advocates than others and some travel segments are more influenced by WOM than others. Research has shown that gay consumers are strong influencers of others (Pritchard et al. 1998), Australian backpackers are highly likely to recommend Australia (TNT Magazine and Student Uni Travel 2003), foreign festival-attendees are more influenced by friends than are domestic attendees (Lee, Lee, and Wicks 2004), nature tourists are strongly influenced by WOM (Meriç and Hunt 1998), and ethnicity affects place attachment (Hou, Lin, and Morais 2005). In addition, some individual traits affect future consumer behavior, such as repeat visits (Mittal and Kamakura 2001). For example, consumers with a high need for variety are less likely to revisit a destination despite a high satisfaction level and willingness to offer positive WOM (e.g., Castro, Armario, and Ruiz 2007).

Finally, because the region of study borders on Mexico, residents tend to speak predominantly either Spanish or English. Consequently, local residents are segmented by language to potentially isolate differences in locals who are more or less acculturated to the area, with language as the indicator of acculturation or country affiliation.

Results of this research contribute to the tourism literature in three significant ways. First, the research compares the place identity salience and place satisfaction of multiple tourist segments with resident segments of a location. This provides a better understanding of the factors that may affect destination WOM communications and explains how these factors can vary by critical tourist and residential segments. Second, this research tests the effect of place identity and place satisfaction on destination WOM within a tourism context. The results offer insight regarding the under-researched domain of drivers of the highly credible and inexpensive WOM promotion (Brown et al. 2005) in a tourism context and suggest methods for better strategic management of this promotional form. Third, this study assists in filling the void in the literature regarding permanent resident place identity and place satisfaction with tourist destinations.

Identity Salience, Place Satisfaction, and Place Promotion

Tourist destinations would greatly benefit if tourists and residents served as goodwill ambassadors, advocating the destination to their friends and families, thereby

saving the destination's promotional dollars while enhancing perceived message credibility (e.g., Ahearne, Bhattacharya, and Gruen 2005; Gremler, Gwinner, and Brown 2001). Authors such as Silverman (2001) tout the power and credibility of WOM. He succinctly states, "We will become increasingly dependent upon word of mouth to cut through the clutter, to tell us what is most important, what to pay attention to, to bring us the benefit of experience and to bring us filtered information, particularly from experts." Silverman further explains that "e-mail, electronic group collaboration, chat rooms, forums, Web sites and teleconferences . . . will bring us the word of mouth that will actually save us time and make us money" (p. 10). Witness the Internet sites such as Amazon and Netflix that not only solicit testimonials for others to read but also provide a "customers who bought (rented) this item also bought (rented)" sections.

Other authors recognize, as did Wangenheim and Bayón (2004), that WOM is a behavioral outcome construct as opposed to an attitudinal one such as satisfaction and loyalty. As such, these authors advocate using the value derived from customer referrals in the customer lifetime value models (e.g., Helm 2003; Stahl, Matzler, and Hinterhuber 2003). The value of WOM to a firm is emphasized by Dye (2000, p. 140), who reported that "slightly more than two-thirds of the U.S. economy has been influenced by buzz," and by Hogan, Lemon, and Libai (2004), who found in their research that WOM from advertisements alone accounted for between 49.4% and 68.2% of the total 3-year customer lifetime value for the two specific products tested. Reichheld (2006, p. 73) advocates a "net promoter" metric, noting that consumer "promoters" account for the highest repurchase rates, more than 80% of referrals, and the majority of the "company's positive word-of-mouth." Although this conclusion has sparked some debate, a large number of executives from major companies, such as American Express, Intuit, and General Electric, have implemented the WOM or recommendation likelihood score (Reichheld 2003) as a measure of customer loyalty (Keiningham et al. 2007). As a consequence of the power of WOM, some academics suggest that consumer recommendations or promotions of an organization are a better metric for assessing future customer behavior than are other measures of satisfaction or loyalty (Reichheld 2003).

The importance of WOM as an outcome has been considered in the tourism industry. Petrick (2004) found a positive and significant relationship between affective loyalty and WOM, and a recent report by the U.S. Travel and Tourism Advisory Board (2006, p. 24) advocates using WOM to "create millions of grassroots ambassadors" since "whether tied to a company or a country,

positive word-of-mouth is the most powerful form of marketing.” Also, a cruise industry report found that WOM was the dominant influencer of the most recent vacation choice, accounting for 41% of responses (Cruise Lines International Association 2006). The capability of encouraging the WOM promotional tactic among tourists and residents, however, requires that tourism boards and hospitality organizations understand what factors affect destination WOM communications so they may better manage the process. Two factors identified in prior research as especially likely to significantly affect destination WOM are place satisfaction and place identity, as previously discussed.

Satisfaction

The relevance of satisfaction is explained by Oliver (1980) through the confirmation–disconfirmation paradigm, whereby satisfaction levels arise by comparing actual experience with previous experiences and expectations. Satisfaction has been the subject of extensive study in the psychology, tourism, and marketing literatures during the past three decades and has been recognized as a key outcome measure and behavioral determinant of tourists (e.g., Laverie and Arnett 2000). Thus, place satisfaction is a likely determinant of WOM tendencies, especially according to the type of tourist segment as discussed next.

Place satisfaction and tourist type. Satisfaction may not always serve as a differentiator between tourist segments. Alegre and Cladera (2006a, p. 686) state, “It can be assumed that one motivated by relaxation, comfort, and rest, a familiar or well-known setting, certainty and assurance, and a reduction in non-monetary travel costs would tend to revisit if their experience there had been satisfactory.” Hence, long-stay travelers who routinely return to a destination each year for extended periods would likely express satisfaction with the place or they would have switched to another destination location (e.g., Alegre and Cladera 2006a). Similarly, foreign tourists who routinely travel to a destination to shop or visit friends may have high satisfaction levels with the area or they too would defect in favor of other destinations. Nevertheless, high switching costs may cause some tourists to frequent a destination despite a certain degree of dissatisfaction. However, Oliva, Oliver, and MacMillan (1992) note that while loyalty does not vary between critical satisfaction levels, should the satisfaction level fall below a certain threshold exit will occur. Furthermore, in their study of services, Panther and Farquhar (2004) indicate that dissatisfaction will be a

temporary state for the consumer with either a remedy or an exit eventually implemented.

Transient tourists may also be satisfied with a place because they are in the area seeking enjoyment and will have favorable associations with the place if the visit proceeds smoothly. In addition, transient tourists with only a short-term awareness of the area will likely have little opportunity to encounter the negatives of a destination, so that satisfaction with the place may be relatively high. Thus, transient tourists may well be satisfied with a place but routinely “switch” to other destinations for variety; consequently, revisiting a place is not likely (Alegre and Cladera 2006b). This logic is supported by work involving switchers (e.g., transient tourists) and stayers (e.g., loyal tourists) in a variety of service industries—banking, hospitality, and energy—which found no difference between the two groups in levels of satisfaction (Ganesh, Arnold, and Reynolds 2000; Skogland and Sigauw 2004; Wangenheim and Bayón 2004).

Studies have shown that satisfaction evaluations may be influenced by a number of factors including attitude (e.g., Chiou 2003), states of mind (e.g., Liljander and Mattsson 2002), expectations (e.g., Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman 1993), and experience or familiarity (e.g., Chiou 2003). Research has also shown that different groups, segmented geographically (e.g., Hui, Wan, and Ho 2007), demographically (e.g., Spinks, Lawley, and Richins 2005), or psychographically (Castro, Armario, and Ruiz 2007), may have different satisfaction levels with various components of a tourism destination. However, some research has found no support for differences in satisfaction based on demographic characteristics or length of stay (Huh and Uysal 2003). Although the preceding discussion depicts mixed results for the variance of satisfaction levels across groups, most evidence indicates that differences in satisfaction are likely to occur across tourists segments. Hence:

Hypothesis 1a (H1a): There will be significant differences in satisfaction with a destination area based on tourist segments: (1) Mexicans national tourists, (2) winter tourists, and (3) transient tourists.

Place satisfaction and residents. Residents have a vested interest in the place they live and may live in an area solely because of family or work considerations, which is a prime predictor of place satisfaction (e.g., Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers 1976; Fried 1982), and place satisfaction is a key determinant of resident mobility (e.g., Speare 1974). Even though residents may love their town, in-depth and prolonged exposure to the negative aspects of an area may actually lead to lower place satisfaction rates for residents of destination areas

than for either loyal tourist or transient tourists. Specifically, residents of destination areas are more likely to identify traffic, alcoholism, and criminal activity as issues of concern (Milman and Pizam 1988). In addition, permanent residents of tourist destinations may be both positively and negatively affected by tourists who visit the destination, resulting in mixed residential support for the area (Bramwell 1998).

Indirect support for greater dissatisfaction of a place among residents is also provided by Richins and Bloch (1991), who found that satisfaction with durable goods declined over time as the initial purchase involvement, which heightened satisfaction, waned. Soderlund (2002) suggests high-familiarity breeds heightened levels of satisfaction when performance is high and enhanced levels of dissatisfaction when performance is low in comparison to those with less familiarity. Consequently, residents of a place may differ substantially from tourists in their levels of satisfaction:

Hypothesis 1b (H1b): There will be a significant difference in levels of satisfaction with an area between local residents and tourist segments: (1) Mexican national tourists, (2) winter tourists, and (3) transient tourists.

WOM Promotions

WOM communication is based on attribution theory (Kelley 1967), where communication is a means by which an individual can establish the validity of impressions of an object and “is the most powerful way to accelerate decisions” (Silverman 2001, p. 12). WOM about a destination is likely to vary by travel or resident segment for a number of reasons, as discussed in the following sections.

WOM and local versus tourist segments. Not all tourist segments will contribute equivalent destination WOM promotions. For example, Kau and Lim (2005) found that various Chinese tourist segments visiting Singapore differed substantially in their WOM recommendations for the destination, while Petrick (2004) found that loyal cruise line tourists are more likely to promote the lines through WOM. Similar differences regarding market segments and the degree of WOM recommendations have been found for gamblers and nongamblers (Shinnar, Young, and Corsun 2004), utility switchers and stayers (Wangenheim and Bayón 2004), and high versus low deal-prone customers (Wirtz and Chew 2002). Given this evidence:

Hypothesis 2a (H2a): There will be a significant difference in levels of WOM promotion of a place between

local residents and tourist types: (1) Mexican national tourists, (2) winter tourists, and (3) transient tourists.

Hypothesis 2b (H2b): There will be a significant difference in levels of WOM promotion of a place based on tourist type: (1) Mexicans national tourists, (2) winter tourists, and (3) transient tourists.

WOM and satisfaction. The positive messages expressed by friends and family about a product, service, or destination may be more powerful in affecting others’ feelings and behavior than any other type of marketing communication. For example, Goldenberg, Libai, and Muller (2001, p. 211) state, “A long list of academic scholarship, industry market research and anecdotal evidence points to the significant effect of w-o-m on consumer behavior, and consequently, on sales . . . [and on] consumers’ decision making.” Surprisingly, however, few studies have examined antecedents of WOM promotion (Anderson 1998; Brown et al. 2005), except for satisfaction.

The relationship between satisfaction and WOM has received considerable coverage in the marketing discipline for many years (e.g., Brown et al. 2005; Nyer 1997) as well as limited attention in the tourism (e.g., Li and Carr 2004) and hospitality literatures (e.g., Matzler and Pechlaner 2001). All research areas considered, the findings regarding this relationship are equivocal. Some researchers have proclaimed a positive relationship (e.g., Babin et al. 2005; Ranaweera and Prabhu 2003; Reichheld 2006), and others have noted a significant association between dissatisfaction and negative WOM (e.g., Reichheld 2006; Weun, Beatty, and Jones 2004). Still other researchers have reported a weak or negative relationship between satisfaction and WOM, largely because of the interaction of satisfaction with other variables such as affect and commitment (e.g., Brown et al. 2005; Nyer 1997). These latter results suggest, as Wirtz and Chew (2002) conclude, that satisfaction is a necessary but insufficient condition for encouraging WOM. In total, the WOM literature supports the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2c (H2c): The satisfaction level with a destination area will significantly affect the tendency to promote the area through WOM.

Identity Salience

Social identity is “that *part* of the individuals’ self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance of that membership” (Tajfel 1981, p. 255). According to this theory, individuals routinely define themselves in terms of interactions with others

and the roles they adopt, such as teacher, parent, child, and spouse, which may be an important part of self-concept (e.g., Stryker 1980; Tajfel 1981). Empirical tests of the theory have found “that an increase in the salience of group membership leads, through intergroup comparisons, to more marked group favoritism” (Tajfel 1982, p. 25) or a “positively valued distinctiveness [that] can lead to biases in behavior, evaluations and perception” (Turner, Brown, and Tajfel 1979, p. 190).

Similar to social identity, identity salience is also underpinned by self-categorization theory (SCT; Turner et al. 1987; Turner et al. 1994). SCT postulates that identity salience is key to explaining behavior because important identities are associated with values and attributes that influence evaluation and action. Furthermore, SCT theorists advance the view that people may relate to different identities at different times as contexts change, and this relationship can occur at different levels ranging from individual to group to global identification. In accordance with SCT, the work of Cuba and Hummon (1993) yielded a sociospatial continuum (community, regional, national, supranational) along which people can hold various loyalties and perceived commonalities. All this suggests that people may self-identify with an area through membership in the community and that place identity may affect behaviors, such as destination WOM communications. This conjecture is supported by Bonaiuto, Breakwell, and Cano (1996), who found that respondents with strong national or local attachments were more likely to defend the reputations of national or local beaches.

Identity salience and destination. A place may evoke strong emotional and cognitive attachments to a destination known as place identity, attachment, or bonding, which is similar to social identity in that a place may become a part of self-concept (e.g., Bloemer and de Ruyter 1999; Gitleson and Crompton 1984; Hammitt, Backlund, and Bixler 2006; Kyle et al. 2004; Williams 2002). As Hammitt, Backlund, and Bixler (2006, p. 23) state, “Places may be viewed as an essential part of one’s self resulting in strong psychological bonds to places,” while Williams and Vaske (2003, p. 831) similarly remark that a place may serve “as a repository for emotions and relationships that give purpose . . . to life.” In general, the place identity research in the leisure literature has focused on dimensions of the construct (Hammitt, Backlund, and Bixler 2006), the relationship of place attachment and involvement (Kyle and Mowen 2005), antecedents of place attachment (Hou, Lin, and Morais 2005), and place attachment effects on demand (Hailu, Boxall, and McFarlane 2005).

While the terminology used in these studies varies slightly, the conceptualizations all emphasize the inclusion of a place within the self-concept. The identity salience conceptualization is used in this study to focus on both the importance of place in self-concept and the salience of the place portion of the self-concept, as explained below. In general, though, the place identity research has shown that a key determinant of place identity, especially for recreational areas, is years of use (Moore and Graefe 1994; Williams et al. 1992). Thus, this research stream substantiates the importance of “place attachment” or place bonding (Moore and Graefe 1994; Williams et al. 1992), especially with regard to leisure or recreational activities but less so for tourism (Gross and Brown 2006).

Nevertheless, these findings suggest that tourists who visit a place only one or two times for a very short time are not likely to form a long-term bond with the place. Travelers who repeatedly return to an area and for relatively long periods, however, may show evidence of destination salient-identification. Salient identities are those self-identities that become most important and are therefore likely to influence behaviors, according to identity theory (Arnett, German, and Hunt 2003; Burke 1980; Laverie and Arnett 2000).

In total, this prior research suggests tourists may develop *salient* identities with a region where the group most likely to have self-identified with a place should be local, permanent residents. Conversely, one-time travelers to an area should have virtually no self-identification with the place. This notion is substantiated by prior work finding that almost 72% of adult residents in two different cities had strong place identity (Pretty, Chipuer, and Bramston 2003). Hence, the longer the time spent in the location, ranging from resident to loyal traveler to transient traveler, the more salient identified with the place is the individual. Based on this discussion, the following is offered:

Hypothesis 3a (H3a): There will be a significant difference between local residents’ identity salience with an area and traveler types’ identity salience.

Hypothesis 3b (H3b): There will be a significant difference in identity salience with a destination area based on tourist types: (1) Mexican national tourists, (2) winter tourists, and (3) transient tourists.

Identity salience and WOM. Self-identity, especially salient identity roles, likely affects behavior (e.g., Reed 2002; Tajfel 1981) including location preference

(Stringer, Cornish, and Finlay 1991) and leisure activity (Laverie 1998), continued participation and time spent in leisure activities (Shamir 1992), and fan attendance at sporting events (Laverie and Arnett 2000). In addition, identity salience has been found to affect WOM or promotional activities of individuals in some nontourism situations (Ahearne, Bhattacharya, and Gruen 2005; Arnett, German, and Hunt 2003; Babin et al. 2005; Brown et al. 2005). These findings generally indicate that encouraging the development of salient identities with an organization results in supportive behaviors and identity-salient individuals should be more likely than less place-identified people to promote the area. In a travel context as noted previously, authors such as Young, Corsun, and Baloglu (2006) and Lee (2001) specifically state that WOM should be affected by psychological attachment to a place or identity salience. Accordingly,

Hypothesis 3c (H3c): The identity salience of a tourist with a destination area will significantly affect the tendency to promote the area through WOM.

Study Method

The data for this study were collected in conjunction with a community economic impact study whereby 203 students from two regional universities were recruited in classes and trained to administer questionnaires to respondents in regional malls during the study period. Prior research has found that mall-intercept samples, such as this one, tend to be representative of the population surveyed and may even provide higher-quality data than some other data-collection methodology, such as telephone surveys (Bush and Hair 1985). As reported by Bush and Hair (1985) when comparing the two methods, data quality, in-depth responses, and item omission rates were found to be equivalent, although response distortion occurred more frequently with the telephone survey. Hence, the mall intercept method is viewed as an acceptable data-collection method.

Students who volunteered to participate in the research in return for extra course credit signed up for one 3-hour block of time over a 10-day spring break period at any one of three malls located in the 70-mile region. They were trained about the questionnaire, about its administration, and about interview techniques by their classroom instructor or by one of the authors and were given a set of detailed instructions about the data-collection process to ensure consistency in questionnaire sampling and administration.

When approaching respondents, students were instructed to first ask for study participation, then to determine the market segment type of participating respondents to administer the appropriate questionnaire and to assist with questions if needed, although the majority of respondents completed the questionnaire without any aid, thus reducing the likelihood of interviewer influence. The market segment types were long-stay visitors (hereafter called winter visitors), transient travelers, visitors from Mexico (Mexican nationals), and residents, predominately Spanish speakers and predominantly English speakers. The distinctive differences among these five segments market, such as language, required the development of five separate, but very similar, versions of the questionnaire. While the basic questions, such as demographics and scale items, were the same for all versions, adjustments were made for language and for tourist type. The Spanish language questionnaire items were translated into Spanish from the English version by a Spanish-speaking student who works as a translation expert and then were back translated by a doctoral student from Mexico. Each questionnaire was color coded according to tourist type, and respondents were asked to self-select their market type. The names of participants were entered into a drawing for a chance at a weekend stay at a local beach resort as an incentive to participate in the study.

Scale Measures

To examine the differences among market segments on the constructs of interest, three scale measures for WOM promotion, identity salience, and satisfaction were used in this study. All scales were assessed on a 7-point Likert-type scale, where 1 equals *strongly disagree* and 7 equals *strongly agree*. The WOM promotion scale originated in the Arnett, German, and Hunt (2003) work, and the Cronbach's alpha for the averaged scale items of the combined markets is .82, and the scale mean is 5.1, as seen in Table 1. These statistics provide evidence of scale reliability and indicate that respondents, on average, are likely to promote the region to others.

The satisfaction measure used was adapted from a scale first developed by Westbrook and Oliver (1981) but also adapted by Arnett, German, and Hunt (2003). The reliability coefficient of the measure is satisfactory at .86, and the scale mean is 5.2, suggesting that respondents are satisfied with the area, on average.

The final measure used was the identity salience measure originated by Callero (1985) and adapted in Arnett, German, and Hunt (2003). The scale mean is 4.8, but the

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Scale Measures

Variable	Market	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>
Identity salience	Local English	1,388	5.136	1.615	0.043
	Winter tourists	107	4.832	1.528	0.148
	Transient tourists	109	4.023	1.687	0.162
	Mexican	238	4.204	1.785	0.116
	Local Spanish	286	5.339	1.643	0.097
	Total	2,128	4.987	1.681	0.036
Satisfaction	Local English	1,375	4.037	1.108	0.030
	Winter tourists	103	4.734	0.888	0.087
	Transient tourists	108	4.085	1.130	0.109
	Mexican	245	4.403	1.071	0.068
	Local Spanish	282	4.404	1.089	0.065
	Total	2,113	4.165	1.110	0.024
Promotion	Local English	1,374	4.981	1.521	0.041
	Winter tourists	108	6.151	1.020	0.098
	Transient tourists	108	4.701	1.722	0.166
	Mexican	238	4.892	1.518	0.098
	Local Spanish	285	5.247	1.406	0.083
	Total	2,113	5.052	1.520	0.033

coefficient alpha is .62, providing insufficient evidence of scale item interreliability. The somewhat low alpha coefficient may be an artifact of measurement using reverse coding, as found in some research, especially in cross-cultural research (Wong, Rindfleisch, and Burroughs 2003). To avoid the measurement problem, the reverse-coded items were deleted from subsequent analysis. The interitem correlation of the resulting two items is satisfactory at .59, and the measure mean is 4.99.

Results

A total of 2,575 questionnaires were obtained from the data-collection process, and 253 were discarded because the respondent was younger than 18 years of age, because the questionnaire was incomplete, or because of incorrect questionnaire-market segment match. This yielded a total of 2,322 useable questionnaires representing 280 Mexicans, 121 transient tourists, 120 winter tourists, and 1,801 residents composed of 1,485 English-speaking and 316 Spanish-speaking locals. The demographic breakdown by market segment is provided in Table 2 and shows that the winter visitor segment is much older than the other segments (they are generally retired), has a higher average income, is predominantly Caucasian, and has come to the region in the past for an average of 10 years. The Mexican national participants in the study tend to have the highest education level of all the segments examined. Anecdotally, transient tourists reported being in the area to visit friends

or family, or on a vacation to visit the beaches, Mexico, or some of the area's nature preserves. The table also shows that the Spanish-speaking residents are generally less well educated and more likely than their English-speaking counterparts to claim a Mexican rather than Hispanic ethnicity. The table also provides available demographic data of the overall area population which appears comparable to the demographic data of the respondents.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the effects of tourist type on regional satisfaction, identity salience, and promotion of the area and to compare and contrast market segment attitudes regarding these variables. The results (see Table 3) show that tourist segment responses are significantly different for all scale measures used, providing some support for all hypotheses. Consequently, a more detailed response by tourist segment was computed by generating ANOVA post hoc tables, shown in Tables 4a, 4b, and 4c.

Tables 4a, 4b, and 4c indicate that the winter tourists—respondents who stayed in the area an average of 3.7 months—were more likely than any other tourist segment, even local residents, to be satisfied with the place and to promote it via positive destination-related WOM. The table also indicates that these longer-stay tourists are more likely than either of the other travel groups to feel identity salience with the area, even more so than Mexicans, who may come into the area throughout the year.

In accordance with H1a, significant differences were found between frequent winter tourists' and transient tourists' satisfaction with the area. Moreover, marginally significant differences were found between both Mexicans and winter tourists (both frequent area tourists) for satisfaction with the region, with winter tourists more satisfied. In general, the significant differences in satisfaction among the travel segments is contrary to the switcher-stayer research findings of insignificant differences between groups (e.g., Ganesh, Arnold, and Reynolds 2000) for services such as banking and communications; thus, satisfaction with a tourist destination may vary by tourist segment.

As expected and stated in H1b, the post hoc Table 4b shows partial support for a significant difference in place satisfaction of residents versus tourist types. The winter tourist segment was the most satisfied with the place, whereas the local English speakers and transient tourists were the least satisfied with the area. The satisfaction ratings of both Spanish-speaking locals and Mexicans were virtually the same. This finding suggests that winter tourists and tourists from a poorer country (i.e., Mexicans) and those who have Mexican roots, as suggested by the preferential use of the Spanish language, are the most satisfied with the place.

Table 2
Demographic Characteristics and Length of Stay of Each Relevant Market Type

Characteristic	Winter Tourists	Transient Tourists	Mexican Nationals	Local English	Local Spanish	Area Census ^a
No. of respondents	120	121	280	1,485	316	
Average age in years	68	34	41	31	41	40
Average years of education ^b	13.9	14.1	14.7	13.7	11.2	
Gender (% males)	60.0	9.5	49.6	42.2	36.5	48.2
Predominant ethnicity (%)	Caucasian 87.6	Hispanic 52.1	Mexican 100.0	Hispanic 90.8	Hispanic 53.6, Mexican 38.2	Hispanic 88.2
Average income (\$)	47,800	44,950	34,900 ^c	41,000	28,900	37,131
Trips to the area	10 years	4.1 trips	55 trips per year			
Average days in the area	110.0	13.6	1.97			
Percentage distribution of stay by days						
0 to 30 days (%)	6.1	93.1	99.2			
31 to 60 days (%)	13.9	3.9	0.8			
61 to 90 days (%)	29.6	1.0				
91 to 120 days (%)	20.0	0.0				
121 to 150 days (%)	12.3	0.0				
151 to 180 days (%)	16.5	2.0				
181 or more days (%)	1.8	0.0				

a. Calculated from the 2003 American Community Survey of the U.S. Census Bureau for the two predominant area metropolitan statistical areas.

b. Both the U.S. Census data and the survey data indicate that 60% of the population had a high school or higher educational attainment.

c. Pesos per month.

Table 3
ANOVA Results

Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Significance
Satisfaction	2161.95	4	540.488	18.106	.000
Promotion	1509.17	4	377.292	18.747	.000
Identity salience	316.24	4	79.059	29.464	.000

By far, the market segment most likely to promote the region is winter tourists. The difference between the destination WOM promotion of the area by winter tourists and all other groups is statistically significant. Surprisingly enough, local Spanish speakers were the next most likely segment to promote the region to others, with differences between them and all other groups statistically significant. The group least likely to promote the area was the transient tourists. These results provide partial support for H2a and H2b.

In support of H3a and H3b, Table 4a indicates that local residents, both English and Spanish speakers, as well as winter tourists, are the most place-identity salient

of all the markets examined, suggesting that winter tourists have come to view the region as their home away from home. Transient tourists are least likely to have a salient identity with the region, although their identity salience is not significantly different from that of Mexicans. Although Mexicans come to the region frequently, perhaps their affinity for their home country lessens their potential for a stronger identity salience with the visited place.

Next, regression analysis was used to determine the effects of market segment satisfaction and the identity salience with an area on tendency to promote the area. The simple linear regression model contained the satisfaction and the identity salience variables as independent measures and promotion as the dependent variables. As shown in Table 5, the adjusted R^2 of .434 and the statistical significance of both variables in the model show that both satisfaction and identity salience with the area are important predictors of WOM promotion tendencies for all market segments, except for transient tourists, as indicated in H3c.

Table 4a
Post Hoc ANOVA Results for Identity Saliency

Dependent Variable	Respondent Type	Respondent Type	<i>M</i> Difference	<i>SE</i>	Sig.
Identity saliency	Local English	Winter visitors	0.304	0.164	.344
		Transient tourists	1.113	0.163	.000
		Mexicans	0.932	0.115	.000
		Local Spanish	-0.203	0.106	.313
	Winter tourists	Local English	-0.304	0.164	.344
		Transient tourists	0.809	0.224	.003
		Mexicans	0.628	0.191	.009
		Local Spanish	-0.507	0.186	.050
	Transient tourists	Local English	-1.113	0.164	.000
		Winter Visitors	-0.809	0.223	.003
		Mexicans	-0.181	0.189	.875
		Local Spanish	-1.316	0.184	.000
	Mexicans	Local English	-0.932	0.115	.000
		Winter visitors	-0.628	0.191	.009
		Transient tourists	0.181	0.189	.875
		Local Spanish	-1.14	0.144	.000
	Local Spanish	Local English	0.203	0.106	.313
		Winter visitors	0.507	0.186	.050
		Transient tourists	1.316	0.184	.000
		Mexican	1.135	0.144	.000

Table 4b
Post Hoc ANOVA Results for Place Satisfaction

Dependent Variable	Respondent Type	Respondent Type	<i>M</i> Difference	<i>SE</i>	Sig.
Satisfaction	Local English	Winter visitors	-3.483	0.558	.000
		Transient tourists	-0.239	0.546	.992
		Mexicans	-1.83	0.379	.000
		Local Spanish	-1.83	0.357	.000
	Winter tourists	Local English	3.483	0.558	.000
		Transient tourists	3.244	0.752	.000
		Mexicans	1.654	0.642	.075
		Local Spanish	1.649	0.629	.067
	Transient tourists	Local English	0.239	0.546	.992
		Winter visitors	-3.24398	0.752	.000
		Mexicans	-1.590	0.631	.087
		Local Spanish	-1.595	0.618	.074
	Mexicans	Local English	1.829	0.379	.000
		Winter visitors	-1.654	0.642	.075
		Transient tourists	1.590	0.631	.087
		Local Spanish	-0.005	0.477	1.000
	Local Spanish	Local English	1.834	0.357	.000
		Winter visitors	-1.649	0.629	.067
		Transient tourists	1.595	0.618	.074
		Mexicans	0.005	0.477	1.000

Conclusions

This study extends the recent research stream on the relationship of identity saliency, satisfaction, and WOM promotions (Ahearne, Bhattacharya, and Gruen 2005; Arnett, German, and Hunt 2003; Brown et al. 2005) into

the context of tourism. The findings from this research significantly add to the literature in three key ways. First, the results substantiate the important impact of satisfaction and identity saliency on WOM promotion. Second, the research identifies significant differences in place satisfaction, place-identity saliency, and destination WOM promotion

Table 4c
Post Hoc ANOVA Results for Place Promotion

Dependent Variable	Respondent Type	Respondent Type	<i>M</i> Difference	<i>SE</i>	Sig.
Promotion	Local English	Winter visitors	-3.511	0.448	.000
		Transient tourists	0.841	0.448	.331
		Mexicans	0.266	0.315	.917
		Local Spanish	-0.798	0.292	.050
	Winter tourists	Local English	3.511	0.448	.000
		Transient tourists	4.352	0.610	.000
		Mexicans	3.777	0.520	.000
		Local Spanish	2.713	0.507	.000
	Transient tourists	Local English	-0.841	0.448	.331
		Winter visitors	-4.352	0.610	.000
		Mexicans	-0.575	0.520	.805
		Local Spanish	-1.639	0.507	.011
	Mexicans	Local English	-0.266	0.315	.917
		Winter visitors	-3.778	0.520	.000
		Transient tourists	0.575	0.520	.805
		Local Spanish	-1.064	0.394	.054
	Local Spanish	Local English	0.798	0.292	.050
		Winter visitors	-2.713	0.507	.000
		Transient tourists	1.639	0.507	.011
		Mexican Nationals	1.064	0.394	.054

Table 5
Effects of Satisfaction and Identity Salience on Promotion: Regression Results

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Winter visitors	3.143	0.469	6.695	.000
Satisfaction	0.349	0.083	4.193	.000
Identity salience	0.196	0.061	3.244	.000
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.309			
Other tourists	0.494	0.495	0.999	.320
Satisfaction	0.358	0.086	8.116	.000
Identity salience	0.589	0.073	4.176	.000
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.484			
Mexican nationals	1.133	0.348	3.254	.001
Satisfaction	0.513	0.065	7.850	.000
Identity salience	0.230	0.048	4.777	.000
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.365			
English-speaking residents	1.029	0.123	8.347	.000
Satisfaction	0.403	0.027	14.812	.000
Identity salience	0.369	0.023	15.760	.000
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.457			
Spanish-speaking residents	1.493	0.288	5.185	.000
Satisfaction	0.428	0.057	7.524	.000
Identity salience	0.260	0.048	5.422	.000
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.397			
All respondent travel types	1.121	0.104	10.776	.000
Satisfaction	0.445	0.021	21.311	.000
Identity salience	0.321	0.017	18.662	.000
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.434			

for each of five different market segments examined: three traveler segments—winter tourists, transient tourists, and Mexican nationals—and two different local resident markets—predominately English speakers and Spanish speakers. Hence, this research reinforces the need for tourism boards and hospitality businesses to have a sophisticated understanding of their market segments and which variables will facilitate WOM for each market segment to better focus their limited resources. Third, this study adds to the underdeveloped research stream involving the residents of tourist destinations and emphasizes the need to bifurcate the permanent resident market rather than viewing it as a single market segment.

Specifically, the study findings suggest to tourism managers the importance of encouraging longer-term stays for tourists for area-promotion reasons as well as the generally accepted area economic-impact reasons. In addition, although not tested, long-term stayers' identity with a place may be similar to that of destination repeaters. If so, the strong linkage between place identity salience and WOM promotion found for long-term stayers in this study may also apply to destination repeaters or other similar constructs examined in other research such as loyalty (Kyle et al. 2004), place rootedness (Hammit, Backlund, and Bixler 2006), or commitment (e.g., Kyle et al. 2006). This relationship is likely considering that "the place attachment

construct (i.e., place identity and place dependence) shares conceptual similarity with attitudinal loyalty,” according to Kyle et al. (2004, p. 100), and because of findings linking place attachment with past experience with the destination (e.g., Lee 2001).

This research finds that the most loyal traveler group, winter tourists, has embraced the region as an important part of their self-concept. This finding has several possible explanations. First, other research demonstrates a strong positive correlation between age and place satisfaction (e.g., Speare 1974). As Table 2 illustrates, the winter tourists are, on average, more than two decades older than the other segments under study. Hence, the older age of the winter tourists may, in part, account for the heightened satisfaction with the destination area. Second, the strong affiliation with the region may stem from a match between the market segment and the social and recreational activities available in the region. Third, the winter visitors’ strong destination identity salience may be generated, in part, by the way in which these tourists are treated and referenced. Typically, these winter tourists, retirees from Canada and the Midwestern or Northern regions of the United States who live in the Southern United States during the winter months, are commonly known as “snowbirds.” In the region of study, however, the tourism community made a concerted effort to rename these winter tourists “Winter Texans” to build a stronger affiliation with the area. Billboards and other signs that welcome “Winter Texans” pervade the region and area businesses routinely offer “Winter Texan” specials and activities.

Regardless of the reason, the winter tourists are the most likely of all the market segments examined to actively provide positive WOM about the region to others. This greater likelihood to promote the area may be especially important for this tourist segment because of their ability to spread positive feedback about the region to others in a broad geographic region when the winter tourists return to their hometowns. This fact suggests that community and tourism leaders should continue to strengthen the place-identity salience and place satisfaction among the winter tourists to the area. In fact, several studies have previously identified permanent resident attitudes as critical to the long-term success of destination areas (e.g., Ap 1992; Harrill and Potts 2003); therefore, local emotional and psychological attachments to an area are of important consideration in tourism studies.

As opposed to English speakers, Spanish-speaking local residents in this study were more likely to be place identified, to be satisfied, and to promote the region to others. The differences between the two groups may be attributable to a number of factors such as culture, time

in country, and origins in other countries. Satisfaction is largely a function of past experiences and current expectations (Oliver 1997). Because many Spanish-speaking locals or their family members may have had poor experiences in their home countries, they may have lower expectations and standards as predicted by comparison level theory and some research (e.g., Mazursky, LaBarbera, and Aielly 1987), resulting in greater satisfaction levels for the “switchers.” Because switchers “are far more likely to make referrals” (Wangenheim and Bayón 2004, p. 218) and heightened satisfaction levels encourage greater positive WOM promotion of the area, supporting previous findings by Swan and Oliver (1989) and Wirtz and Chew (2002), local community leaders should consider efforts to harness the goodwill of these Spanish speakers to promote the region to friends and families they may have in foreign countries.

On the other hand, English-speaking local residents may not have any other basis for comparison regarding their place of residence, and so their expectations have not been previously reduced via negative experiences (e.g., Wangenheim and Bayón 2004). Because of higher expectations, these locals are more likely to have a neutral or dissatisfied level of satisfaction. Moreover, “stayers” (i.e., English-speaking residents) are less likely to provide positive WOM, as substantiated by Wangenheim and Bayón (2004).

Research by Wirtz and Chew (2002, p. 155) indicates that incentives may increase “the likelihood of generating WOM, the valence of the WOM generated, and the likelihood of making a purchase recommendation.” The area’s tourism officials have created those incentives for Winter Texans by specially welcoming them and targeting them with retail promotions. These efforts should be extended to other key market segments within the region remembering that WOM is temporally limited (Wangenheim and Bayón 2004). Although opinions of any market segment should not be ignored by tourism agencies, expending resources to target English-speaking locals may be a waste if they provide little positive WOM promotion for the area, have few friends and family outside the area, and have a low propensity to travel elsewhere anyway.

Study Limitations

As with all research, this study suffers from limitations. The questionnaire used to collect data was fairly lengthy, which may have affected the response rate and the quality of data gathered. A large number of students was used to collect the data, which may have affected the

consistency or types of respondents selected for inclusion in the study. In addition, this study was conducted in one geographic region of the United States, and results are not generalizable to any other area. Nevertheless, the research findings are important in identifying differences among tourist types and between tourists and residents and in identifying variables that will affect tourist and local resident promotion of a place.

The results also point to several avenues for future research. For example, reasons why longer-staying visitors exhibit a stronger identity salience should be explored in an effort to better understand and manage place affiliation among other tourist segments. Other variables not used in this study may also contribute to tourists' WOM efforts as well and should be explored. Likely drivers of tourist WOM include the match of available activities to tourist interest, destination uniqueness, and perceived hospitality. Once identified and understood, tourism destination managers may use those factors to better affect the tendency of a tourist to promote a region to friends and families.

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