

THE SOURCES OF THE COGNITIVE DISSONANCE IN THE RELIGIOUS TOURISM

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One of the concepts that were studied on a large scale since 1957 is Festinger's cognitive dissonance. This concept consists on a discomfort or pain experienced by the individual when there is a contradiction between some of his beliefs, his values or his behavior. The generated discomfort might push the pilgrims to avoid the discomforting situation, by avoiding the being in the same situation.

This concept has been widely studied in the marketing field as it causes the customers to change their perception about the product or even to quit it. In the field of religious tourism the question of cognitive dissonance seems to be of interest. In fact, combining both a spiritual dimension and a touristic one the religious tourism comes with different expectations and criteria's of judgment and face contradictious experiences and values resulting in the generation of the discomfort of the cognitive dissonance.

Therefore, this research interviews twenty pilgrims in order to discover the main sources of cognitive dissonances. That way, we find which measures can be taken by the hosts to face the cognitive dissonances or reinforce the mechanisms aiming to recreate consonance..

Key words: *Cognitive dissonance, consumer motivation, consumer behavior, religious tourism, touristic management.*

JEL Classification: *L83.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Despite its special status, the religious tourism is and will remain, by fact, an important type of tourism, it will require attention and involvement from its stakeholders. Furthermore, the clients of this kind of tourism have different expectations and needs, they live this experience on a spiritual level. As the perception of the client is different, his expectations can be by avoiding any dissonance between them and the offered "experience". Through interviews with pilgrims, we get to have a better understanding of the main reasons behind an eventual discomfort due to a cognitive dissonance, then understand what measures taken by the individual of the hosts (in our case the church) to recreate a consonance and reduce the discomfort.

II. THE COGNITIVE DISSONANCE THEORY

In 1957, Festinger brings a concept that became one of the most widely studied in the field of psychology. The term cognitive dissonance refers to the psychological issue consisting in a conflict of beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that generate a form of discomfort or even a pain (Festinger, 1957). People get confronted very often to the cognitive dissonance about many fields of their life (Elliot & Devine, 1994), this inconsistency is a major source of motivation in a sense that in order to get rid of the generated pain, they are

willing to put efforts to find or build consistency. This phenomenon has implications on many aspects of psychology like attitudes (e.g., Leippe & Eisenstadt, 1994), morals (e.g., Tsang, 2002), decision making processes (e.g., Akerlof & Dickens, 1982), psychology of happiness (e.g., Lyubomirsky & Ross, 1999) as well as in Marketing and other management fields.

According to Festinger (1957) the cognitive dissonance can occur due to four possible reasons: when there is a logical inconsistency (two opposite beliefs); when there is an inconsistency with cultural morals (adopting a behavior the subjects knows is unacceptable by the society), when there is inconsistency with a more general cognition, when there is inconsistency with past experiences (when according to the past experiences things should work in a specific way but they actually don't);

Dissonance Following a Decision

Brehm (1956) led an experiment where he put individuals in a situation of choice between two appliances. Then he found out that later, when reevaluating their choice, the individuals experienced dissonance which made them lowered their judgment of the appliances they didn't choose. The conclusion was that after making a difficult choice a dissonance occurs.

That can be explained by the fact the positive attributes of the unchosen objects will be dissonant with

the fact of not choosing it, as well as the negative aspect of the chosen one are dissonant with the fact of choosing it.

To minimize the dissonance, people idealize the positive aspects and deemphasize the negative aspects of the chosen objects.

Dissonance Resulting from Effort

Aronson and Mills (1959) demonstrated the same concept by the following case, if some people put a great effort to join a team, then it turns out that team was unworthy, they change their perception about the group or about the effort they put in order to reduce the dissonance. In the Aronson-Mills experiment, college women went through an initiation to join a group discussion about the psychology of sex. They were split into two groups one with embarrassing difficult questions and another one with a simpler initiation. As a result, the girls in the Severe Initiation condition rated the discussion much more favorably than did those with the easy initiation [see also Aronson (1961); Zimbardo (1965); Lewis (1964); Gerard and Mathewson (1966)]

Insufficient justification

Aronson and Carlsmith (1963) found that when an individual is pressured to leave what he likes, he experiences dissonance. One way to reduce dissonance is by derogating the activity-in that way he can justify the fact that he is not performing it. But the pressure or the threat intensity give a justification to the fact of abandoning. In that case, if the threat is not very strong, the danger is consonant with the abandonment, otherwise the subject experiences a dissonance.

The applicability of CDT to management issues has not been lost on managerial scholars who have applied CDT to understand important workplace issues related to organizational behavior (e.g., Bhava & Glomb, 2016), human resource management (e.g., Shipp, FurstHolloway, Harris, & Rosen, 2014), strategy (e.g., Westphal & Bednar, 2008), and entrepreneurship (e.g., Ambos & Birkinshaw, 2010). Indeed, the profound impact and sustained popularity of CDT is apparent from Figure 1, which indicates that, since 2000, there has been a steady increase in articles published in top tier management journals that explicitly cite Festinger (1957), as well as a dramatic rise in the total number of citations across disciplines. Clearly, the relevance and utility of CDT, both within the field of management and beyond, remains strong.

III. REDUCING THE DISSONANCE:

Festinger (1957) stated that people alter the dissonance equation to reduce the strength of the experienced dissonance. In the following part, we introduce the discrepancy reductions used to face the cognitive dissonance:

Attitude. In a qualitative study of employees with stigmatized jobs, Ashforth et al. (2007) showed that employees adjusted their attitude towards their job to make it more acceptable. They found the employees questioned the public opinion attitude to put more value to the most positive aspects of their job. Moreover, Casciaro and Lobo (2015) found that the attitude people have towards the organization affects their perception of instrumental value.

Behavior. Besides of the bet on discrepancy reduction through the change of attitude, an approach linked to the behavior was a center of attention to some researchers. Westphal and Deephouse (2011) found that when a journalist receives graces from someone it's harder for them to write negative articles about them. Fong, Misangyi, and Tosi (2010) found that CEOs adjust their behavior to the payment they receive, in other terms an overpayment leads to an increase of performance, and underpayment leads to a careless behavior.

Trivialization. Dineen, Ash, and Noe (2002) found evidence that individuals face a dissonance when the feedback they receive about their work contradicts their self-rating, they tend then to trivialize the feedback with which they disagree. Zhu, Shen, and Hillman (2014) showed that boards are more likely to trivialize the demographic differences among new members if they have other similarities to face the dissonance due to the inclusion of the seemingly dissimilar board members.

Selective information processing. Huang and Pearce (2015) found that investors gave a selective attention to data that confirmed their "intuition" about investment decisions. In contrast, they trivialized viability data that contradicted their decision. However, Jonas & Frey, (2003) found evidences that decision makers' tendencies to make selective information processing can be countered by having advisors they have stronger accuracy motivations and are not facing this dissonance.

IV. THE RELIGIOUS TOURISM AS A SPECIFIC TYPE OF TOURISM.

The conceptualization of the term "religious tourism" mixes both tourism and Religion, which have different signification and connotations themselves, that mix brings a whole complexity to the concept (Parellada, 2009).

Religious tourism and pilgrimage have very often been confused, assimilated to one another and in many researches they have been compared (MacCanell,

1973; Graburn, 1992; Cohen, 1998; Turner, 1989). But overall both terms sound like substitutes to one another (Parellada, 2009).

According to MacCannell (1973) and Collins-Kreiner (2009) religious tourism is the way pilgrimage is expressed in the modern time.

V. OBJECTIVE & METHODOLOGY

This research aims to take into consideration the specificities of the religious tourism in order to analyze the sources of the cognitive dissonance that the tourists experience. Being a source of discomfort, the cognitive dissonance might result on a devaluation of the chosen destination. Preventing that devaluation is a must that definitely goes through the reduction of the gap between the expectation and the reality and the protection of the religious side of the whole touristic process.

In a constructivist approach, we decided to choose a qualitative research. Our main concern was the homogeneity of the answers instead of the numbers. For reporting the answers we integrate quotations in the text that gives more insight about the collected information. To keep consistency in the answers we standardized the answers (Smith 1998). The choice of the survey size is based on the criteria of empirical saturation, in that sense we interview managers about the cultural change in their organizations until the given answers become repetitive. In that framework, we interview twenty pilgrims from multiple regions of Romania. The research is led in the most famous religious sites of Bucovina region, and includes religious tourists from several region, and different ages. The interviews are led in Romanian language along with the English language and aim three main parts:

- The beliefs: what the subject believes about the religious trip, what notions is he associating with it and what the ideal religious trip will be like.
- The values: what values are attached or conditioning the trip, how those values can be crystalized in a specific behavior, environment and attitude.
- The reality: what the trip is actually like, how the environment is, what behavior is the tourist adopting and how the reality can be consonant or dissonant with the beliefs and values.

VI. RESULTS

The questions involved many aspects to which we gathered information regarding the perception of the pilgrimage, the values they associate to it and their gaps with reality in order to detect the cognitive dissonances that might be faced by the pilgrims and to understand by what ideas they find a consonance between them.

The spirituality:

The blessing of the place/event/saint is the main reason of the orthodox pilgrimage. However, the blessing is not the deepest driving power to the pilgrimage as a “strong feeling of closeness, security and divine connection” seem to be sake through the religious tourism in general and through the pilgrimage specifically.

The idea behind the pilgrimage is a travel to “meet God”, the connotations of “forgiving the sins”, “showing God the will” and another connotation that comes with it “is the renewal of the links with Religion”. In that sense the journey finds all its spiritual meaning. Meanwhile, the activities that might be considered as “non-spiritual” as eating, sleeping, joking with other pilgrims, etc. seem to represent no dissonance to most of the interviewed pilgrims as they consider the amusement to be totally acceptable as long as it is with no sin.

However some interviewed people faced a dissonance due to the loss of concentration or even boredom during the religious ceremonies. A dissonance that is faced with two ways:

- Changing the activity by another spiritual activity: “I can go inside the church and pray to the God, or I can repeat a few prayers I already know in a place a bit away”.
- Trying harder to follow to become more involved in the ceremony but “it doesn’t always work” resulting in a continuous discomfort until the end of the ceremony.

The feeling of spirituality, “the proximity to God” are the main motors to the religious tourism, however, many pilgrims affirm that “this feeling is not always reachable”. According to some interviewed pilgrims “the reason behind the lack of strong spiritual experience is not always understandable”. Facing this situation goes through a certain number of thoughts as:

- Linking it with previous behavior: “I tell myself it’s probably due to my sins”.
- Others try the acceptance as a reaction: “the spiritual experience has lows and highs” and some confirm “that this idea itself makes you feel better when you experience a low strength spirituality”
- Otherwise, another solution mentioned is to make a confession to get the blessing and “the peace with it”.

The comfort:

All the tourism specialists insist on the importance of the comfort in the touristic service. However, in the case of religious tourism, another notion is much more important, it’s the hospitality. Although both concepts seem to be close, the difference consists in the effectiveness, the free dishes offered to the pilgrims might not be fancy or served in a “client oriented way” but the smile of the one who serves and

the behavior of the organization team gives all its sense to the pilgrimage experience.

As the religious institution is not meant to be a hosting institution, the rating of the service quality was low by all the interviewed people. However, none of them felt a lasting dissonance. The reason is the fact that the criteria is different “we are not on a vacation, we know we come to the place of god and not to a touristic destination”. The comfort dimension is of little importance because of the low expectations level. However the hospitality is a must “The most important is how much hospitality I receive, all what counts is the treatment.” But when the treatment is unsatisfying it generates a dissonance.

The experience:

Every touristic trip seeks an experience to live and remember. This goes for the religious tourism as well. But what experience is sake by the pilgrims. “The spiritual experience” is one of the most common responses. Another set of answers were grouped under the title “the social experience”, by this term we mean the fact of meeting other people and families, initiating the kids to the religious world, making them participate in the organization of the event.

Having good social experiences increase the level of satisfaction while conflicts or unsatisfying social experiences create a cognitive dissonance due to the perceived gap between the values associated to the pilgrimage and the actual conflictual situation.

VII. CONCLUSION

The cognitive dissonance being a consequence of the gap between beliefs values and behaviors, it can be avoided by creating a cohesion between those elements. In the case of the pilgrimage, three main groups of reasons cause a dissonance and three action can be taken to keep avoiding them.

The dissonance related to the spirituality can be caused by several reasons as the distraction or a non-intense spiritual experience, this dissonance is faced by a change of behavior. Either they get involved in a spiritual task as praying, having a paper with lyrics to sing with the priests seems to be effective in that case or they can go for trivialization thinking that the lack of intensity in the spiritual experience is a normal thing that everybody experience.

The comfort question, is interesting as it seems that the pilgrims are not necessarily looking for comfort but hospitality and that looks like well offered. A lack of hospitality creates a dissonance that they face using trivialization of the comfort for more importance to the hospitality, however, when the hospitality is challenged a selective processing of the information is often followed to ignore this fact.

The third main source of cognitive dissonance in the case of pilgrimage is the social experience, a negative interaction with people has an important impact on the dissonance. However, a more involving experience seems to be useful in the sense that it optimizes positive social interactions as well as the spiritual experience.

In fine, the religious tourism needs a special attention to avoid several sources of cognitive dissonance by giving priority to more involving activities during the ceremonies and giving importance to acts showing a high level of hospitality as well as giving more space to human interaction.

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