

# **APPLYING EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING IN SELLING TOURISM DREAMS**

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# **APPLYING EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING IN SELLING TOURISM DREAMS**

**ABSTRACT** Experiential marketing is effective in influencing tourist behaviour because pleasure tourists travel in pursuit of fantasies and positive emotions. The influences of experiential marketing on tourist behaviour depends on tourist imagery processing (i.e. the mental system involved in processing experiential stimuli). This theme has recently attracted the attention of tourism academics, but it lacks guidance for researchers to navigate the dense, complex literature. Hence, this paper aims to provide a theoretically based review of imagery processing research in tourism. The systematic quantitative literature review method is applied to select and analyse seventy relevant papers published in the period from 1997 to 2017. In doing so, this review reconciles imagery-related concepts such as mental simulation, consumption vision, narrative transportation, telepresence, imagination, fantasy and memory recall. Moreover, a general framework of tourist behaviour is developed to explain how experiential marketing influences tourist behaviour by means of mental processes. This paper insists further applications of experiential marketing for tourist experience management and highlights the necessity of customising marketing stimuli to target different tourist segments.

Keywords: imagery processing, experiential marketing, systematic review, tourist experiences, imagination

## **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism research is shifting from a traditional view of “tourists-as-rational-decision-makers” to a more comprehensive understanding of both experiential and rational determinants of tourist decisions. Traditional theories such as utility theories (Lancaster, 1966) and the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977) are problematic in explaining tourist behaviour because they neglect the experiential aspects of tourism consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Moreover, rational theories operate as input-output (i.e. stimulus-response) models without explaining the mechanism in between (McCabe, Li, & Chen, 2016). Dual-processing theories based on psychological

processes address these limitations (Evans, 2008). According to dual-processing theory, tourists engage in two distinctive but complementary systems when making decisions: System 1 is fast, automatic, experiential and related to affective factors; while System 2 is slow, rational, analytic and related to rational thinking (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Kahneman, 2011). The final decision is made based on a satisficing trade-off between these two systems (Evans, 2006). Neuroscience studies provide strong evidence for dual-processing models by identifying two brain systems, one related to affective responses (i.e. amygdala-dependent system) and another to cognitive reasoning (i.e. orbitofrontal-dependent system) (Bechara, Noel, & Crone, 2006; Phelps, Lempert, & Sokol-Hessner, 2014).

These new decision-making theories provide tourism marketers with innovative techniques to promote destinations and sell tourism products/services. As pleasure tourists seek experiential benefits such as fantasies, feelings and fun; traditional marketing focusing on product characteristics and functional benefits (i.e. rational factors) may not be effective (Barnes, Mattsson, & Sørensen, 2016). Experiential marketing, instead, uses sensory and symbolic stimuli to evoke imaginative and emotional responses during the decision process (Schmitt, 1999; Tsaur, Chiu, & Wang, 2007). For example, movies and TV dramas engage the audience with imaginative fantasies about a place; leading tourists to visit the film's locations (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006; Sangkyun Kim & Assaker, 2014; Seongseop Kim & Kim, 2017a). Destination marketers promote tourism dreams using experiential marketing stimuli including print advertisements (Ghosh & Sarkar, 2016; Walters, Sparks, & Herington, 2007), mini-movies (Gong & Tung, 2017), stories (Kim & Youn, 2016) and websites (Choi, Ok, & Choi, 2016; Hyun & O'Keefe, 2012).

The effectiveness of experiential marketing depends on how these stimuli are perceived and influence decision-making through the mental imagery processing (Escalas, 2004; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Imagery processing is “a (mental) process (not a structure) by which sensory information is represented in working memory” (MacInnis & Price, 1987, p. 473). Here imagery processing defined as a *mental process*, and hence distinct from the concept of a destination image which is a *knowledge structure* related to a destination (i.e. destination associations) (Boulding, 1956; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Josiassen, Assaf, Woo, & Kock, 2016; Kock, Josiassen, & Assaf, 2016). The definition also distinguishes imagery processing from the use of imagery as a general term referring to photos, pictures or visual images (Thompson, Hannam, & Petrie, 2012).

A significant literature examines the role of imagery processing in mediating the influences of experiential marketing on tourist behaviour using terms such as mental imagery (Kim, Kim, & Bolls, 2014), mental simulation (Jeong & Jang, 2016), consumption vision (Walters et al., 2007), narrative transportation (Hu, Chen, & King, 2014), telepresence (Hyun & O’Keefe, 2012), imagination (Ghosh & Sarkar, 2016), fantasies (Laing & Crouch, 2009) and memory recall (Kim & Jang, 2016). These concepts refer to tourist imagery processing at different levels of elaboration; that is the extent to which new experiential and sensory information is processed in working memory and integrated with prior knowledge structures (MacInnis & Price, 1987).

However, the existence of numerous imagery-related concepts (i.e. mental imagery, mental simulation, consumption vision, transportation, telepresence, imagination, fantasies, memory recall) has led to a dense, complex and somewhat disconnected body of literature. Against this background, this paper provides a theoretically based review and reconciliation of these diverse concepts.

The contribution of this review is threefold. First, the paper provides a useful guide for academics and professionals in navigating tourist imagery processing research. Second, a general framework based on dual-system mental processing (i.e. rational and imagery) approach is proposed to understand tourist experience and behaviour. These dual mental processes mediate how experiential stimuli influence tourist behaviour, but imagery processing is superior (Thompson & Hamilton, 2006). This framework explains tourist differences in perceiving experiential stimuli and raises the call for a customising approach to experiential marketing. Third, future research directions are discussed to address research gaps in the literature.

## **REVIEW METHODOLOGY**

This study applies a systematic quantitative literature review (SQLR) method to provide a reliable and reproducible approach in searching, extracting and synthesising the body of literature (Pickering & Byrne, 2014). SQLR consists of five stages: (1) defining the research questions; (2) formulating the review protocol; (3) searching the literature; (4) extracting the relevant literature; and (5) synthesising the findings (see Figure 1) (Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, & Arcodia, 2017). First, the main objective of the review was to explore how tourist imagery processing has been studied in the tourism literature. Second, a review protocol was created including concepts related to imagery processing (i.e. imagery processing, mental imagery, mental simulation, imagination, consumption vision, fantasy, telepresence, transportation and autobiographical memory) and tourism (i.e. tourism, travel, tourists, visitors) as search terms (Pickering & Byrne, 2014). Third, the literature search was conducted across the main tourism databases to identify papers containing the aforementioned keywords in the title, abstract and keywords. The seven most relevant databases for tourism research include (1) EBSCO Host (Hospitality and Tourism Complete); (2) Science Direct (Elsevier); (3) Emerald; (4) Scopus; (5) Web of

Science; (6) ProQuest; and (7) Sage publications (Figuroa-Domecq, Pritchard, Segovia-Pérez, Morgan, & Villace-Molinero, 2015; Yang et al., 2017). The search in Science Direct, Scopus and Web of Science was limited to the social science discipline (Yang et al., 2017). The review covered the period from 1997 to 2017 in order to identify research trends (Li, 2008). Only English-language peer-reviewed journal articles were included (Figuroa-Domecq et al., 2015).

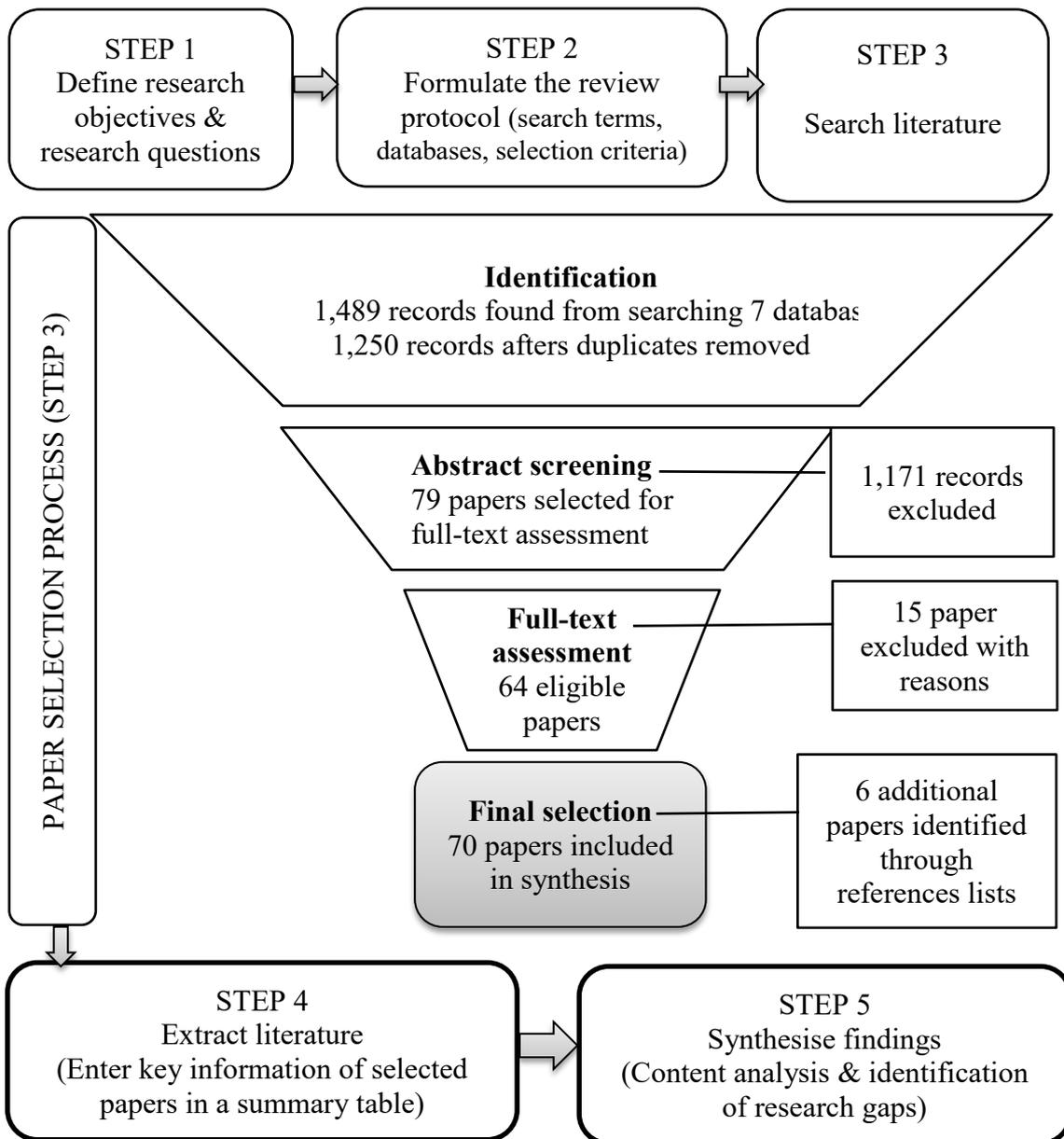


FIGURE 1. Systematic quantitative literature review process

The authors applied a four-filter process for paper selection purpose (see Figure 1). In August 2017, a literature search resulted in 1,489 records. After duplicate records were eliminated, 1,250 publications were found to meet the established search criteria. Next, the abstract was read in a screening process, and the authors deleted 1,175 papers which used the term imagery as a general term (i.e. tourism photographs or images) and not related to mental imagery processing. This process left 79 papers for full-text assessment. Among them, 15 studies were found to be out of review scope because the main concept (i.e. destination/tourist imagery) was conceptualised differently from this review approach. For example, some papers used content analysis to explore the representations of a destination in marketing brochures without discussing how these experiential materials are processed through imagery processing (i.e. the focus of this review) (Buzinde, Santos, & Smith, 2006; Kanemasu, 2013). Others studied destination associations which represent tourist knowledge structures related to a place (Adams, 2004), a specific country (Andersen, Prentice, & Guerin, 1997) or a continent (Shim, Vargas, & Santos, 2015). This conceptualisation of destination imagery is distinct from our review approach (i.e. imagery processing as a mental process) (Josiassen et al., 2016; MacInnis & Price, 1987). As a consequence, 64 papers were selected for further consideration. The authors scanned references from papers to identify six more relevant papers missed in the search process (Pickering & Byrne, 2014). Finally, 70 papers were considered for review.

Fourth, relevant information from the selected papers (n=70) was extracted and summarised in an Excel spreadsheet (i.e. authors, years, journal, key concepts, key findings). The last step of this SQLR was to use content analysis techniques for synthesizing knowledge. Leximancer was employed at this stage to identify key concepts and research topics (Indulska, Hovorka, & Recker, 2012). This software

replicates manual coding procedures by the use of algorithms, machine learning and statistical processes, reducing human bias related to human coding and interpretation (Dann, 2010). Leximancer also analyses the meanings within text documents and visualises the relationships between key concepts by generating concept maps (Scott & Smith, 2005). Key concepts related to tourist imagery processing were then classified according to several main dimensions (i.e. the level of elaboration, referencing characteristics and time-orientation) (Escalas, 2004; MacInnis & Price, 1987). Finally, the findings were organised into a framework to represent both the antecedents, consequences and moderators of tourist imagery processing.

## **FINDINGS**

### ***Overview of selected papers***

Research interest in tourist imagery processing has increased significantly during the review period (1997-2017), with a particularly noticeable increase papers published from 2012 to 2016 (Figure 2). Overall, 42 of 70 reviewed papers were published in the top ten listed journals.

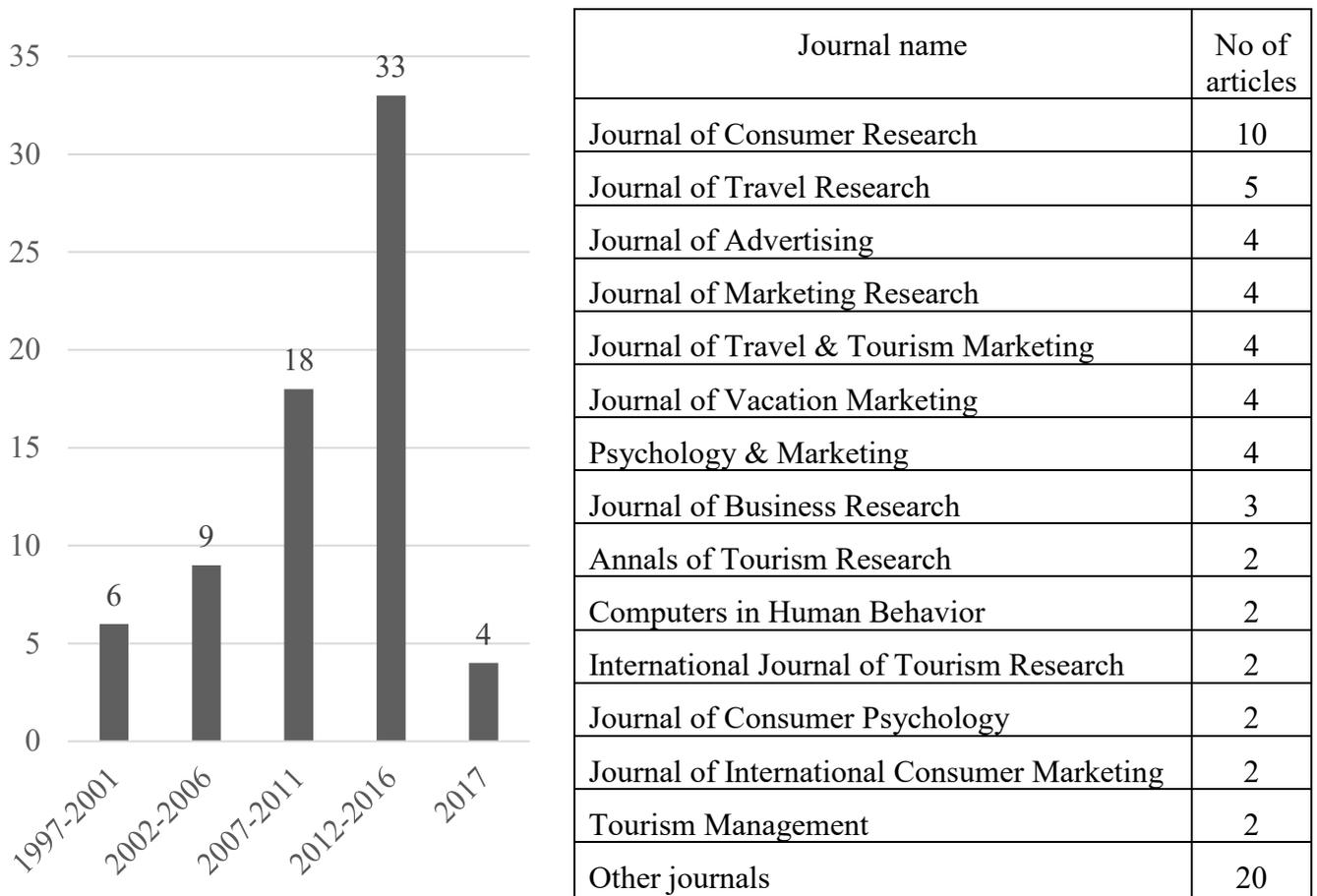


FIGURE 2. 70 papers selected by publication journal and time

In the selected papers, quantitative methods were the dominant approach used (57 papers), followed by qualitative methods (6 papers), five reviews and conceptual papers and two mix-method papers (Figure 3). Experiments were the most used quantitative methods (47 papers) as they are effective in testing causal relationships between variables (Cooper & Schindler, 2003; Punch, 2013).

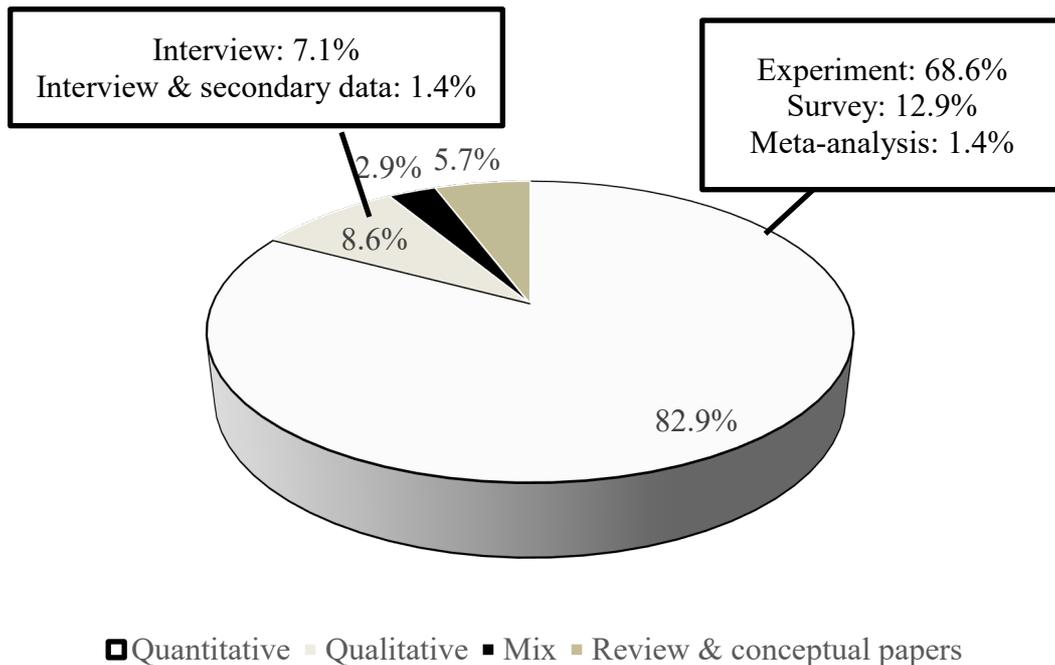


FIGURE 3. Research methods used in selected papers

### *Content analysis by Leximancer*

The abstracts of 70 selected papers were imported into Leximancer for content analysis. Several technical operations in using Leximancer were applied: (1) words such as “of”, “versus”, “the” were removed from the concepts identified during text processing; (2) a custom configuration and thesaurus were established; (3) several steps for examining the results, exploring and modifying settings were repeated to obtain interpretable outcome; and (4) relevant concepts and their relationships were grouped together into different themes (Tseng, Wu, Morrison, Zhang, & Chen, 2015).

A concept map was generated from Leximancer, providing nine key themes as visualised on Figure 4. These were classified in order of importance by the number of text blocks associated with each theme (i.e. hits) (Scott, Zhang, Le, & Moyle, 2017): imagery processing (321 hits), tourist behaviour (259 hits), telepresence (174 hits), stimuli design (114 hits), tourism (44 hits), imagination (39 hits), transportation (11



When tourists engage in low-elaboration imagery processing (i.e. non-enactive imagery), they hold mental images of a place or a product/service in mind and inspect their feelings to make decisions (Pham, 1998). High-elaboration imagery processing (i.e. enactive imagery) leads to the creation of hypothetical scenarios (Goossens, 1994). At high levels of elaboration, imagery processing enables tourists to form consumption vision (Walters et al., 2007), to experience feelings of being transported to another place (Hu et al., 2014) and to immerse themselves in imagination and fantasy (Laing & Crouch, 2009). Engaging in high-elaboration imagery processing is one pathway to flow experiences (Jeon, Ok, & Choi, 2017; Mollen & Wilson, 2010).

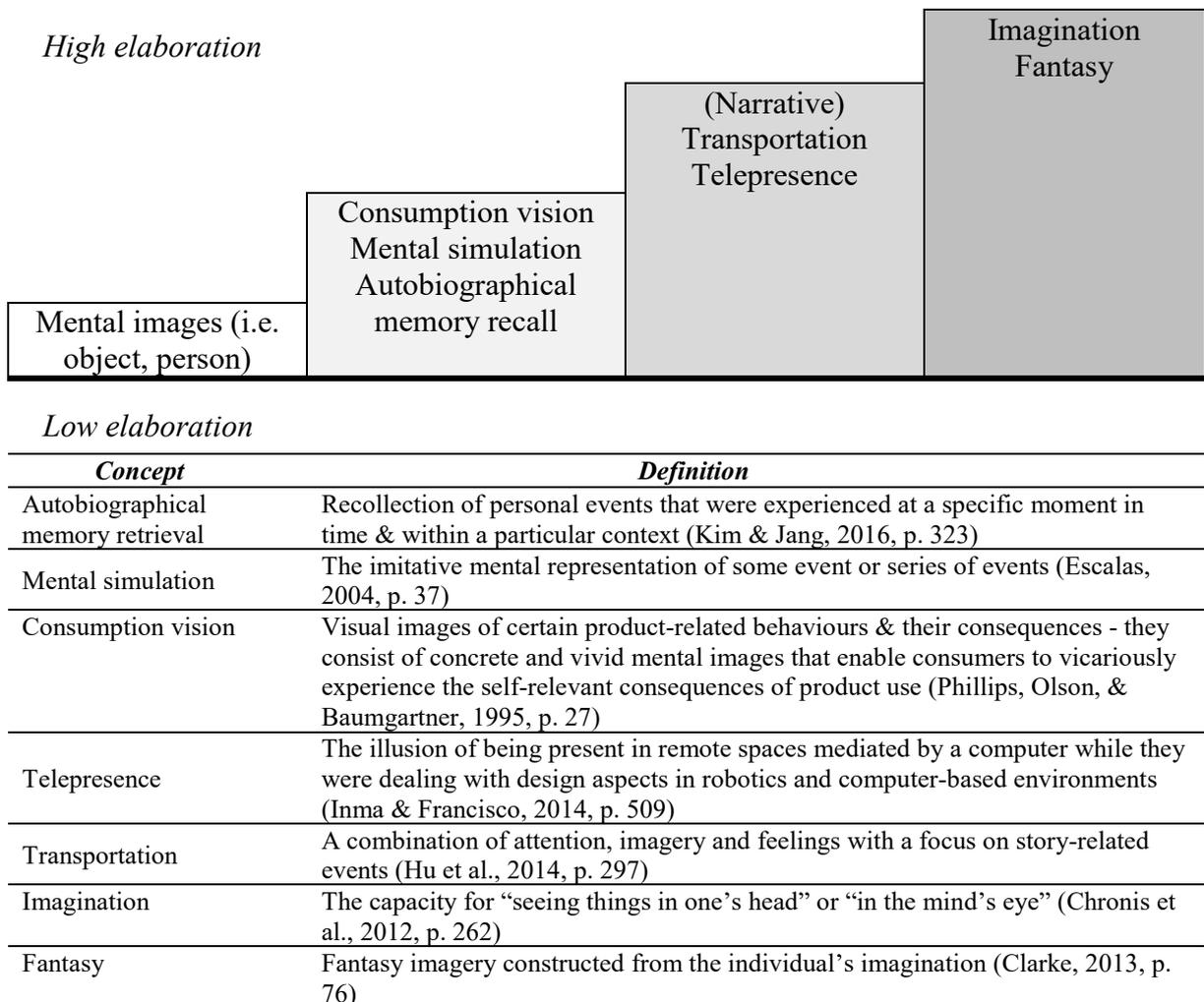


FIGURE 5. Tourist imagery processing at different levels of elaboration

At high levels of elaboration, tourist imagery processing also varies in two other dimensions: time-orientation (past, present, future) and referencing characteristics (self-imagery versus non-self-imagery) (see Table 1). Through high-elaboration imagery processing, tourists can pre-experience future holidays (i.e. future-oriented imagery), enrich their experiences on site (i.e. present-oriented imagery) and re-experience past vacations (i.e. past-oriented imagery) (Escalas, 2004). In other words, they can mentally travel in time (Suddendorf & Corballis, 1997, 2007). The concept “mental time travel” is supported by neuroscience evidence that people remember the past, perceive the present, and simulate the future using the same core brain network (Buckner & Carroll, 2007). By engaging in high-elaboration imagery processing, tourists imagine different scenarios about themselves (self-referencing imagery) or others (other-referencing imagery). As it is easier for people to create self-relevant imagination than other-relevant imagination (Bone & Ellen, 1992), self-imagery processing research is dominant in the literature. Only one paper investigating other-imagery processing was identified (Kim & Youn, 2016).

When tourists engage in self-relevant imagery processing, they can have different visual perspectives (first-person versus third-person perspective) (Hung & Mukhopadhyay, 2011; Libby, Shaeffer, Eibach, & Slemmer, 2007) and imagery focus (outcome versus process focus) (Escalas & Luce, 2004; Zhao, Hoeffler, & Zauberan, 2007). Hence, the same advertisement of a beach vacation can be processed differently by members of an audience and results in diverse fantasies. A young girl can imagine a beach vacation from a first-person perspective (i.e. looking at the beach through her own eyes) or try to anticipate how others may look at her (i.e. seeing herself through observers’ eyes). A married man may imagine his family relaxing on the beach (i.e.

outcome-focused imagery) while his wife may visualise in her mind concrete step-by-step process to organise this vacation (i.e. process-focused imagery).

TABLE 1. A classification of tourist imagery experiences in 70 reviewed papers

Time-oriented	Referencing	
	Self-imagery	Other-imagery
Past	<i>Autobiographical memory retrieval with vivid images</i> (Kim, 2010; Kim & Jang, 2016; Yin et al., 2017) <i>Post-consumption imagery</i> (Lakshmanan & Krishnan, 2009) <i>Fantasy imagery</i> (Laing & Crouch, 2009)	<i>Recall of a story or movie about others with vivid images</i> (Kim & Youn, 2016)
Present	<i>Interpretation of lived experiences with vivid images</i> (Roy & Tai, 2003) <i>Imagination</i> (Chronis et al., 2012; Derbaix & Gombault, 2016; Ghosh & Sarkar, 2016)	<i>Reading a story or watching a movie about others with vivid images</i>
Future	<i>Mental simulation with vivid images</i> (Escalas, 2004; Escalas & Luce, 2004; Jeong & Jang, 2016; Zhao et al., 2007, 2011) <i>Mental imagery</i> (Babin & Burns, 1997, 1998; Beichen & Cherian, 2010; Bolls & Muehling, 2007; Chang, 2013; Cornil & Chandon, 2016; Daou & Amira, 2016; Ding & Keh, 2017; Fennis et al., 2012; Goossens, 2000; Hung & Wyer Jr, 2011; Hung & Mukhopadhyay, 2011; Inma & Francisco, 2014; Jiang et al., 2014; Jiang & Wyer, 2009; Kamleitner, 2011; Kim et al., 2014; Krishna et al., 2013, 2016; Kwornik & Ross, 2007; Lao, 2013; Lee, 2012; Lee & Gretzel, 2010, 2012; Lee et al., 2010; Lee & Qiu, 2009; Libby et al., 2007; Miller et al., 2000; Miller & Marks, 1997; Miller & Stoica, 2004; Overmars & Poels, 2015; Peck et al., 2013; Petrova & Cialdini, 2005; Prugsamatz et al., 2006; Schlosser, 2003; Shiv, 2000; Soliman et al., 2017; Thompson & Hamilton, 2006; Weiler et al., 2016; Whiting & Dixon, 2013; Yoo & Kim, 2014) <i>Consumption vision</i> (Chang, 2012; Sparks & Wang, 2014; Walters et al., 2007, 2012) <i>Transportation</i> (Hu et al., 2014; Lien & Chen, 2013; Van Laer et al., 2014; Wong et al., 2016) <i>Telepresence</i> (Choi et al., 2016; Fiore et al., 2005; Hyun et al., 2009; Inma & Francisco, 2014) <i>Imagination</i> (Ghosh & Sarkar, 2016) <i>Fantasy</i> (Clarke, 2013)	<i>Imagination of a story about others in the future with vivid images</i>

Source: Adapted from Escalas (2004)

### ***A general framework of tourist behaviour***

Research findings of selected papers were coded and organised into a framework to explain tourist behaviour from a mental processing perspective. Even though this

review focuses only on tourist imagery processing, both rational/analytical and experiential/imagery processing are integrated into the framework (Figure 6). This approach is justified because tourists use both systems to process information and make decisions (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Paivio, 2013). Rational/analytical processing enables humans to encode information in the form of abstract symbols, words, and numbers while experiential/imagery processing involves encoding information in sensory forms and blending it into individuals' thoughts, beliefs and experiences (Epstein, 1991; Schlosser, 2003). Therefore, imagery processing predominates in case of experiential/sensory stimuli (Thompson & Hamilton, 2006).

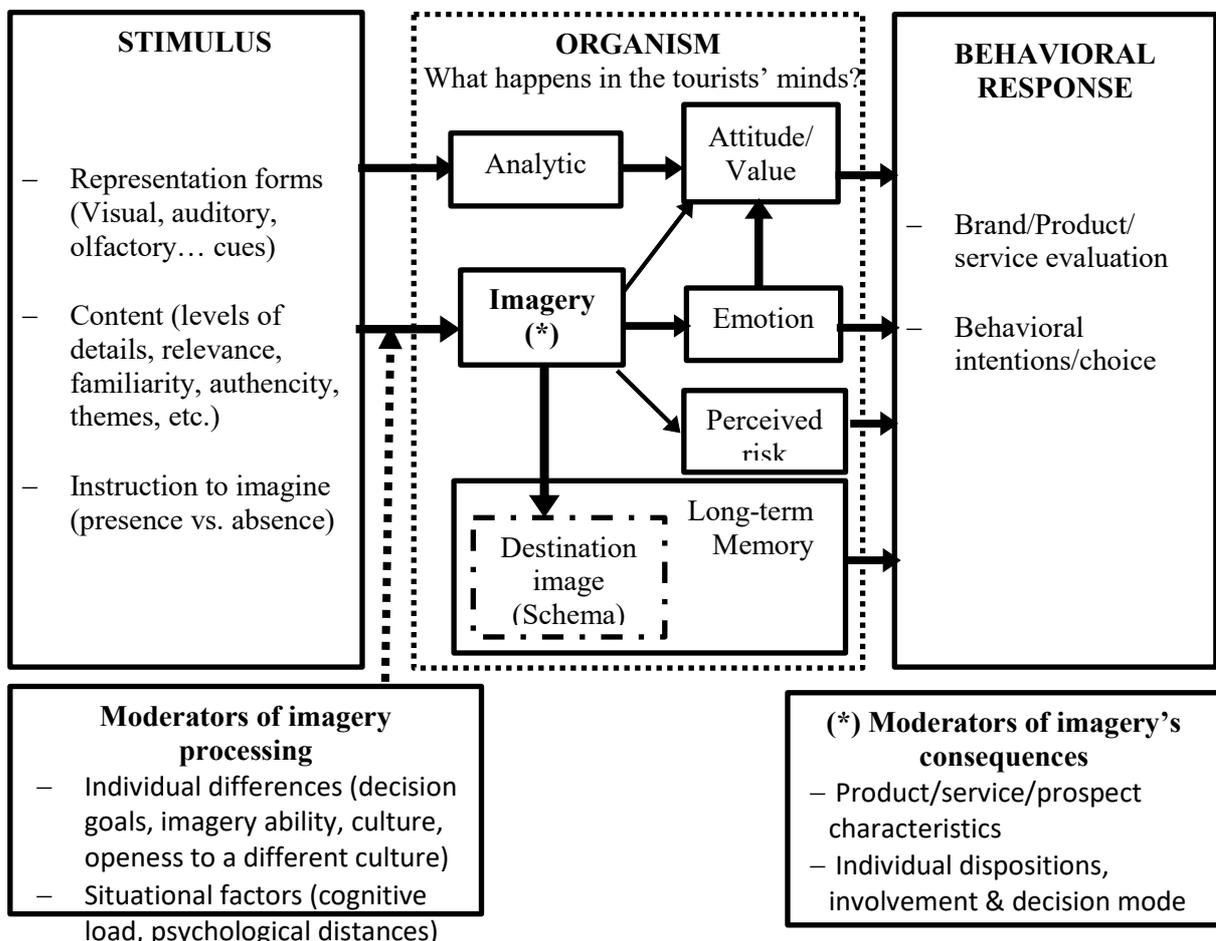


FIGURE 6. A general framework of tourist behaviour

### *Determinants of tourist imagery processing*

Experiential marketing stimuli are designed for inducing tourist high-elaboration imagery processing as a strategy to influence tourist behaviour (Babin & Burns, 1997; Petrova & Cialdini, 2008). Three key elements of successful design have been identified in the literature including representation forms, message content characteristics and the presence/absence of an instruction to imagine.

Regarding representation forms, pictorial, narrative and multisensory forms of experiential stimuli are more likely to be processed at high levels of imagery elaboration. The use of pictures is crucial in designing experiential advertisements (Walters et al., 2007) and tourism websites (Lee & Gretzel, 2012). Similarly, videos are better than audio stimuli in generating emotional imagery (Kim et al., 2014) and memory recall (Kim & Youn, 2016). Advanced visual technologies such as dynamic product presentation (i.e., a mix-and-match feature allowing the creation of visual images of apparel combinations) (Overmars & Poels, 2015), 3D visualisation (Lee, 2012), virtual interaction (Fiore, Kim, & Lee, 2005; Schlosser, 2003), and animation (Argyriou, 2012) also enhance tourist imagery processing. Second, experiential messages should be represented as stories. Narrative advertisements allow the audience to immerse themselves in imagined vacations (Chang, 2013; Lien & Chen, 2013). Third, experiential marketing containing multisensory elements such as olfactory and haptic cues, facilitate the creation of fantasies and dreams (Ghosh & Sarkar, 2016; Krishna, Cian, & Sokolova, 2016).

Moreover, the successful design of experiential stimuli relies on content development. For example, pictorial advertisements displaying product consumption are better than pictorial advertisements showing only the product itself in inducing tourist high-elaboration imagery processing (Beichen & Cherian, 2010; Chang, 2012; Yoo &

Kim, 2014). Advertisements containing natural pictures (Sparks & Wang, 2014), pictures of similar perspectives (Jiang et al., 2014) and photos of tangible features (versus intangible features) (Ding & Keh, 2017) are more likely to be processed at higher levels of imagery elaboration and imagery vividness. Narrative themes (Wong et al., 2016) and the perceived authenticity of the story (Kim & Youn, 2016) are key factors to enhance tourist imagery processing.

It is also important to exclude rational/analytical information when designing experiential marketing stimuli. Given that experiential/imagery processing and rational/analytical processing are both resource-demanding (MacInnis & Price, 1987), these two systems may compete in processing marketing advertisements due to the limited capacity of working memory (Baars, 2007). Mixed-design marketing stimuli limit the elaboration of both rational and imagery processing systems. Hence, experiential marketing messages containing rational arguments (Lien & Chen, 2013) or statistical/comparative information (Thompson & Hamilton, 2006) are not effective in inducing high-elaboration imagery processing.

Finally, tourism marketers should be careful in adding an instruction to imagine such as “imagine yourself...” in experiential ads. An instruction to imagine is effective in attracting tourists’ attention (Babin & Burns, 1997) and engaging the audience in imagery processing (Hung & Mukhopadhyay, 2011; Kamleitner, 2011). However, the inclusion of such instructions may be negative if the advertisement does not have a visual appeal (Chang, 2012; Walters et al., 2007) or the targeted audience has low imagery ability (Petrova & Cialdini, 2005).

#### *Moderators of tourist imagery processing*

Moderators of tourist imagery processing can be grouped into individual and situational factors. The same experiential stimulus can be processed differently by members of an

audience due to individual differences in decision goals (anticipated satisfaction versus choice) (Shiv & Huber, 2000), imagery ability (Chang, 2013; Fennis, Das, & Fransen, 2012), cultural background (Beichen & Cherian, 2010; Wang & Sparks, 2016) and their openness to a different culture (Kim & Jang, 2016). Experiential marketing is usually effective in influencing tourist behaviour because most people have some imagery processing ability (Lee & Gretzel, 2010). Marketing messages targeting mass tourism markets should contain rich visual content and multi-sensory elements including olfactory, haptic, auditory cues to facilitate imagery processing in case the audience has low imagery ability (Krishna, Morrin, & Sayin, 2013).

Situational factors also have a strong impact on tourist imagery processing. On the one hand, tourists encounter imagery difficulty under high cognitive load conditions such as dealing with an irrelevant visual-processing task (i.e. viewing irrelevant pictures) (Bolls & Muehling, 2007) or rational distraction task (i.e. memorising a nine-digit number) (Shiv & Huber, 2000). In contrast, when individuals close their eyes, their imagery processing is significantly improved (Peck, Barger, & Luangrath, 2013). On the other hand, tourists also experience imagery processing difficulty due to psychological distances (e.g., temporal, spatial, and social distances) between their imagined event and their reference point (here and now) (Ding & Keh, 2017; Hung & Wyer Jr, 2011; Trope & Liberman, 2010). The moderating role of psychological distance in imagery processing explains why people demonstrate preference inconsistency over time (Zhao et al., 2007). Therefore, familiar elements such as celebrity, symbolic features of the destination and familiar context, should be employed in marketing advertisements to reduce psychological distance and enhance the audience's imagery processing (Ding & Keh, 2017; Hung & Wyer Jr, 2011).

### *Consequences of tourist imagery processing*

Tourist imagery processing has both direct and indirect influences on tourist behaviour. Given that the simple act of thinking about a behaviour can increase the likelihood to engage in that behaviour (James, 1980), tourist imagery processing directly impacts individual evaluations (Ding & Keh, 2017; Jiang, Adaval, Steinhart, & Wyer, 2014) and behavioural intentions (Cornil & Chandon, 2016; Kim & Youn, 2016). Indeed, tourist imagery processing also indirectly influences tourist behaviour through its cognitive and affective consequences.

Tourist imagery processing also results in affective consequences which determine tourists' experiential decisions (Goossens, 2000; Kwortnik & Ross, 2007). Tourists make decisions to pursue actions linked to positive emotions like happiness and joy, while avoiding situations associated with negative emotions, such as regret or disappointment (Baumeister, Vohs, DeWall, & Zhang, 2007). Without affective consequences, imagery processing may not influence tourist behaviour (Lang, 1977, 1979). Indeed, affective consequences are included in some tourist imagery processing measurement scales of as a valence dimension - positive versus negative affect (Miller, Hadjimarcou, & Miciak, 2000; Weiler, Moyle, Wolf, de Bie, & Torland, 2016). Research on tourist imagery processing often focuses only on positive affect because of the hedonic nature of leisure tourism consumption (Kim et al., 2014; Walters, Sparks, & Herington, 2012; Yin, Poon, & Su, 2017).

In addition to affective consequences, tourist imagery processing may result in cognitive consequences such as changes in tourist attitude and perception. High-elaboration imagery processing is found to have a positive influence on attitude towards an advertisement (Lee, 2012; Lien & Chen, 2013) and attitude towards a brand (Chang, 2013; Fennis et al., 2012; Peck et al., 2013). Imagery processing also increases

confidence in attitude, attitude resistance (Lee & Gretzel, 2012), perceived usefulness (Lee, 2012) and perceived value (Fiore et al., 2005; Overmars & Poels, 2015).

Moreover, high-elaboration imagery processing decreases perceived risk related to an international trip (Hu et al., 2014) and contributes to the formation of destination image (Matos, Mendes, & Pinto, 2015; Weiler et al., 2016) as well as false memories (Lakshmanan & Krishnan, 2009). These cognitive consequences, in turn, have a potent influence on tourist behaviour.

#### *Moderators of imagery consequences*

Moderating factors such as product and consumer characteristics also influence the effect of tourist imagery processing on tourist behaviour. Tourist imagery processing has more powerful effects on tourist behaviour/decisions related to experiential products/services (Chang, 2012; Ding & Keh, 2017; Fennis et al., 2012) and positive events (Lee & Qiu, 2009). Travel-related decisions are likely to be influenced by tourist imagination and fantasies due to tourists' hedonic and experiential nature.

Differences in a tourist's processing style (Zhao, Hoeffler, & Zauberman, 2011) and level of involvement (Escalas & Luce, 2004) can also moderate the impact of tourist imagery processing on tourist behaviour. Tourists may be classified into verbalisers and visualisers, based on their dominant information processing system (Childers, Houston, & Heckler, 1985; Richardson, 1977). Verbalisers strongly engage in rational/analytical processing while visualisers rely more on experiential/imagery processing for decision-making purposes. Hence, visualisers are more receptive to experiential marketing (Chang, 2012). The level of involvement also moderates tourist imagery processing' consequences. When people have low to moderate levels of involvement and engage in process-focused imagery processing, they are more likely to be influenced by advertisements using rational arguments (Escalas & Luce, 2004).

## **DISCUSSION**

A comprehensive understanding of tourist imagery processing is crucial to explain how experiential marketing influence tourist behaviour. This research highlights a number of research gaps to discuss directions for future research.

### *Experiential marketing for tourist experience management*

Tourist imagery processing evoked by experiential marketing has a role in shaping tourist experiences at different stages of their visit. Pre-trip, exposure to experiential marketing messages engages tourists in future-oriented imagery processing creating fantasies and dreams about possible vacations (Goossens, 2000; Hu et al., 2014). This mental process results in emotional responses which influence decision-making (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Kwortnik & Ross, 2007). Arrival at a destination triggers high-elaboration imagery processing based on prior knowledge about the place (MacInnis & Price, 1987), enabling a tourist to co-create their own experiences. For example, tourists immerse themselves in their narrative imagination based on known stories about a historic site during their visit (Chronis, Arnould, & Hampton, 2012). This present-oriented imagery processing has the power to transform a visit to an almost empty place into an authentic and special experience (Derbaix & Gombault, 2016). Post-trip, tourists often engage in past-oriented imagery processing to savour their holiday memories (Filep, Cao, Jiang, & DeLacy, 2013; Wu, Pearce, & Dong, 2017) and create their own stories and fantasies around their past experiences (Alonso & O'Neill, 2012; Laing & Crouch, 2009). Such a recollection and reconstruction process of past holiday experiences determines tourist revisit intentions, word-of-mouth and purchase decisions of destination-related products ( Kim & Jang, 2016; Lakshmanan & Krishnan, 2009; Yin et al., 2017).

More research on tourist present-oriented and past-oriented imagery processing would complement current tourism research to date which focuses on future-oriented imagery processing. Only a small number of studies explore present- and past-oriented imagery processing (see Table 1). Pre-trip experiential marketing is effective in influencing first-time visitors' behaviour by inducing future-oriented imagery processing. However, on-site and post-trip experiential marketing are important because tourist imagination onsite and memories retrieval influence revisit intentions and word-of-mouth (Kim & Jang, 2016; Roy & Tai, 2003). On the one hand, future studies can investigate different imagery-provoking strategies in staging tourist experiences on site. On the other hand, exploring tourist imagery processing of post-trip experiential marketing suggest ways to enhance and reconstruct tourist remembered experiences (Braun, Grinley, & Loftus, 2006).

Research on tourist imagery processing at the post-trip stage can serve two important purposes. First, tourist past-oriented imagery processing improves the memorability of an experience. Given that tourist memory fades away over time (Larsen & Janssen, 2004), exposure to relevant experiential/sensory cues can improve memory recall (Kim & Jang, 2016). Future studies should examine how tourism marketers can apply post-trip experiential marketing to enhance tourist memory recall. For example, marketers can encourage tourists to share videos online as a way to bring back travel memories (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). The recollection of tourist experiences is important because remembered experiences are the most reliable determinant of tourist revisit behaviour (Wirtz, Kruger, Scollon, & Diener, 2003).

Second, imagery processing of post-trip experiential stimuli can lead to the reconstruction of tourist memories (Lakshmanan & Krishnan, 2009). Continuous exposure to misleading marketing information before and after a trip results in memory

distortion leading tourists to believe that they had experienced something they did not (Braun, Ellis, & Loftus, 2002; Braun et al., 2006). Such reconstruction of memories explains why tourists tend to remember and evaluate their trip on the basis of what they expected rather than what they experienced (Wirtz et al., 2003). Memory reconstruction may result in a “rosy view” effect. Even when a trip proved disappointing, tourists’ recollections of their trip are more positive than their actual experiences (Mitchell, Thompson, Peterson, & Cronk, 1997). Using post-trip imagery-evoking stimuli in reconstructing tourist memories is a promising research direction.

#### *Goals and tourist imagery processing*

Only three among 70 selected papers have investigated the effect of goals on tourist imagery processing. Goals are conceptualised as standards involved in the control of behaviour (Huffman, Ratneshwar, & Mick, 2000) and are sometimes labelled as drives, needs or motives (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003). Tourist goals have been studied at different levels including action goals, decision goals and behaviour goals. While action goals (searching versus browsing; story construction versus information acquisition) do not influence tourist imagery processing (Jiang et al., 2014; Schlosser, 2003), decision goals (anticipated satisfaction versus choice) do moderate tourist imagery processing (Shiv & Huber, 2000). Individual differences in travel motives or behaviour goals have not been studied in tourist imagery processing research.

Tourist imagery processing is goal-driven (Goossens, 2000; Kwortnik & Ross, 2007). In contrast with the consumption of functional products, tourists have a range of travel motives (Andreu, Kozak, Avci, & Cifter, 2006; Bieger & Laesser, 2002; Seongseop Kim & Kim, 2017b). It appears that travel goals influence future-oriented imagery processing and stimulating different “dreams” about a future vacation (Christian, Miles, Fung, Best, & Macrae, 2013). Therefore, tourists are inspired by

different marketing content to visit a place (Ye & Tussyadiah, 2011). In future research, tourist segmentation based on motivation should be applied to explore how experiential marketing stimuli are processed with respect to tourist goals/motives (Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010).

Further investigation of goals in tourist imagery processing is also necessary to expand our understanding of emotional experiences. Tourists experience a wide range of emotions and feelings when they imagine their future trips (Lao, 2013; Miller et al., 2000; Walters et al., 2012), engage in narrative imagination of their visit (Chronis et al., 2012) or recall their past experiences (Yin et al., 2017). The vividness, elaboration/quality/quantity dimensions of tourist imagery processing influence emotional experience outcome (Van Laer, De Ruyter, Visconti, & Wetzels, 2014; Walters et al., 2012; Yin et al., 2017). However, tourist emotional responses do not depend only on the sensory-perceptual qualities of their imagery processing, but also differ according to the personal importance attributed to the event (i.e. goal relevance) (D'Argembeau & Van der Linden, 2012). Respondents' emotional responses to an imagined event (self-conscious versus hedonic emotions) are also determined by their differences in visual imagery perspectives (Hung & Mukhopadhyay, 2011). These findings are supported by appraisal theories in the cognitive psychology literature. These theories suggest that one's emotions are determined by an individual's appraisals of the stimulus on dimensions such as goal importance, goal congruence, agency and novelty, rather than the stimulus itself (Ma, Gao, Scott, & Ding, 2013; Moors, Ellsworth, Scherer, & Frijda, 2013). Tourist researchers may wish to apply appraisal theories to better explain affective consequences of imagery processing.

### *Tourist knowledge structures and imagery processing*

Another potential research direction is to investigate the relationship between tourist knowledge structures and imagery processing. Tourism researchers usually consider this as a one-way relationship because tourist imagery processing contributes to the formation of tourist knowledge structures about a destination (Matos et al., 2015; Weiler et al., 2016; Wong, Lee, & Lee, 2016) and vacation-related memories (Lakshmanan & Krishnan, 2009). However, this relationship is a two-way process as high-elaboration imagery processing involves a mixture of perceived stimuli and prior knowledge structures (MacInnis & Price, 1987). Hence, prior knowledge structures related to a destination can determine how marketing stimuli are processed and interpreted (Chalip, Green, & Hill, 2003). Viewers may pay attention only to information that is consistent with their pre-existing knowledge through a selective perception process (Taylor, Franke, & Bang, 2006). Also different tourist segments such as long-haul versus short-haul tourists (Dolnicar & Leisch, 2017) or first-time versus return tourists (Chon, 1991) have different cognitive structures about a destination, indicating that knowledge structures should be considered in future search on tourist imagery processing.

Moreover, research on the involvement of tourist prior knowledge in imagery processing can be useful when staging tourist experiences on site. Tourists often hold complex systems of presumptions related to how they imagine a place (Salazar, 2012). For example, Tibet is attached to Shangri-La imaginaries, Verona is attached to the Romeo and Juliet story. Relevant stories (Derbaix & Gombault, 2016) and cultural imaginaries (Chronis et al., 2012) about a destination are retrieved through tourist high-elaboration imagery processing that enables tourists to create and experience narrative

imagination during their visit. Staging tourist experiences on site should be designed based on good understanding of tourist prior knowledge.

#### *Measurement scales for tourist imagery processing*

Several imagery-measurement scales have been developed and applied in tourism research. These include a communication-evoked imagery processing scale (Ellen & Bone, 1991), communication-evoked mental imagery scale (Babin & Burns, 1998), advertisement-evoked mental imagery scale (Miller et al., 2000), narrative transportation scale (Escalas, 2004), transportation scale (Green & Brock, 2000), consumption vision scale (Walters et al., 2007), and autobiographical memory recall (Kim, 2010; Kim & Jang, 2016; Kim & Youn, 2016; Yin et al., 2017). Across these scales, vividness is the most frequently measured dimension, followed by a dimension related to imagery quality/ quantity/ elaboration/collection. However, tourist imagery processing differs regarding other dimensions such as imagery fluency/difficulty (Chang, 2013; Thompson & Hamilton, 2006), imagery focus (i.e. outcome-focus versus process-oriented imagery) (Zhao et al., 2007), referencing (self-imagery versus others-imagery) (Bone & Ellen, 1992), visual perspectives (i.e. first-person versus third-person) (Jiang et al., 2014; Soliman, Buehler, & Peetz, 2017), time-orientation (Escalas, 2004) and sensory information - single versus multisensory (Krishna, Cian, & Sokolova, 2016). These dimensions should be considered when researchers try to understand how experiential marketing stimuli are processed by tourists.

Apart from the research gaps discussed above, research is also needed to test more imagery-inducing strategies for marketing implications. On the one hand, new visual communication technologies such as virtual reality, interactive 3D (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009), smartphones (Wang, Park, & Fesenmaier, 2011) may be used. On

the other hand, researchers should move from using visual stimuli to multi-sensory stimuli in imagery processing research (Krishna et al., 2016). Visual imagery research is the dominant research stream (Jiang et al., 2014; Lee, 2012). Only a few studies on olfactory imagery (Krishna et al., 2013), haptic imagery (Peck et al., 2013) or multisensory imagery processing (Cornil & Chandon, 2016) are available in the literature. The use of multisensory stimuli to induce multisensory imagery processing should be further investigated because tourist experiences are multisensory (Pan & Ryan, 2009). Finally, applying story-telling in experiential marketing is another potential way to leverage tourist high-elaboration imagery processing such as narrative transportation and imagination (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2008).

## **CONCLUSION**

By reviewing tourist imagery processing research, this review provides a useful guide to understanding how to apply experiential marketing in managing tourist experiences and influencing tourist behaviour. It offers tourism marketers alternative suggestions to promote destinations and tourism products. There is some evidence that traditional promotional activity has little influence on tourist perception (Govers, Go, & Kumar, 2007) and is not effective in inducing emotions (Li, Walters, Packer, & Scott, 2016). As fantasies and emotions are two core elements of tourist experiences, experiential marketing may be exploited further in order to deliver better results.

Regarding theoretical contribution, a general framework is developed to explain tourist behaviour from a mental processing perspective. In comparison with traditional input-output models, this framework has more explanatory power due to the integration of mental processes. It highlights two important points: (1) experiential marketing stimuli are individually and subjectively processed through mental processes and (2) environmental factors and individual differences in imagery processing moderate the

influences of experiential marketing on tourist behaviour. Hence, customising experiential marketing messages to target different tourist segments is highly recommended.

Through a systematic quantitative literature review process, this study identifies research gaps and suggest directions for future studies. Research gaps include further applications of experiential marketing for tourist experience management, the role of tourist motivation and prior knowledge structures in moderating tourist imagery processing, further development of measurement scales for tourist imagery processing and different imagery-evoking strategies in experiential marketing. Future studies addressing these knowledge gaps will advance tourism research.

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