Cognition, emotion and trust: a comparative analysis of Cambodia's perceived and projected online Image

Abstract

A comparative analysis of information on Cambodia as a tourist destination published on official tourism websites and amateur travel blogs suggest that there are substantial differences in the way Cambodia's destination marketers and commercial enterprises promote the destination and the way travel bloggers perceive it and write about it. Cambodia's projected online image elicited through the analysis of official tourism websites consists of mainly cognitive image elements (knowledge and beliefs about Cambodia), whereas its' perceived image obtained from amateur travel blogs contains both cognitive and affective (feelings and attitudes towards Cambodia) image elements. Furthermore, the 'friend'-style relationship that the reader develops with the travel blogger can be attributed to personal projections and thus induces an element of trust not established between the reader and the websites.

Findings suggest that a lack of perceived trust amongst destination marketers and an increased level of trust amongst authors of user generated content (UGC) and their readers, destination marketers are at a distinct disadvantage compared with their blogging colleagues. The use of affective evaluations of destinations by bloggers alongside their perceived credibility is likely to weigh more heavily in consumer's decision making process than promotional material presented by the likes of tourist boards and commercial enterprises. The theoretical and practical implications of these findings are also discussed.

Keywords: online destination image, cognitive image elements, affective image elements, trust, amateur travel blogs

1. Introduction

The critical role played by destination images and their effect on travellers' decision making processes has been widely acknowledged in the existing body of literature on destination images (e.g. Gartner 1993; Iordanova, 2015; Lee et al., 2005; Molina and Esteban, 2006; Ramkissoon et al., 2011; Tapachai and Waryszack, 2000; Yüksel and Akgül, 2007). Scholars have argued that it is such portrayed images that travellers rely on when evaluating destination choices given the intangible and experiential nature of the tourism product (Kim and Perdue, 2011; Lee et al., 2005, Nicoletta and Servidio, 2012). In the progressively competitive tourism market destinations frequently compete on the basis of their perceived image (Baloglu and Mangaloglu, 2001; Iordanova, 2015; Tasci and Gartner, 2007). This ascertains the importance of projecting the "right" (Govers and Go, 2004) and positive image (Gartner, 1989) as only destinations with strong and positive images are likely to be considered and consequently chosen by travellers.

Recently, the Internet has been recognised as a major destination image determinant and an important information source by a number of scholars (e.g. Bastida and Huan, 2014; Choi, Lehto and Morrison, 2007; Fernandez-Cavia et al., 2014; Kim and Lehto, 2013; Rodriguez-Molina, et al., 2015). The abundancy and variety of social media platforms (blogs, virtual communities, wikis, social networks, collaborative tagging, and media files shared on sites like YouTube and Clickr), representing various forms of user-generated content (UGC) have reshaped not only the way travellers share and talk about their travel experiences, but also how they research and plan their holidays (Fotis et al., 2012; Hudson and Thal, 2013; Tang et al., 2009; Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014). Moreover, this new phenomenon has already begun to place immense challenges on the tourism industry, due to its nature is very information dependent.

For instance, social media platforms enable consumers to create and circulate information to educate each other, which directly competes with traditional online promotional activities of many tourism businesses and destinations (Blackshaw and Nazzaro, 2006; Xiange and Gretzel, 2010) whose online presence was often taken for granted (Morgan et al., 2009; Munar, 2011). The increased popularity of UGC also leads travellers to be more wary of traditional mass media and traditional marketing tactics (Cox et al., 2009; Fotis et al., 2010; Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). A recent study (Xiang and Gretzel; 2010) highlighted the need for tourism marketers to acknowledge and accept the existence of blogs and social media platforms and to adapt to the diverse impacts these information sources are having on the traditional information distribution channels.

Alongside other online communications, travel blogs have begun to receive attention from scholars, where the blog is seen as a manifestation of the travel experience and the presented destination image is a product of creation by the travel blogger (e.g. Law and Cheung, 2010; Sun et al., 2015; Tseng et al., 2015). These images do not necessarily match official destination representations provided by destination marketing organisations (DMO's) (Banyai, 2010). In contrast to traditional marketing approaches, images projected within blogs frequently account for the affective image domain, where travel bloggers' personal impressions are portrayed through their words, photographs or videography thus enabling the creation of a collective tourism wisdom in the blogosphere for prospective travellers to access as reference for their own travel intentions (Schmallegger and Carson , 2008; Leibold, 2011).

The presence of this affective element is highlighted in Technorati's (2013) Digital Influence Report, where blogs are ranked among the top five 'most trustworthy'

sources for information on the Internet, with consumers now turning to the likes of review sites and travel blogs to inform their purchasing decisions (Wegner, 2008; Volo, 2010). UGC, in contrast to traditional online content, empowers emotional influence, which is linked to the so called "culture of exposure" (Munar, 2010). The application of emoticons or the use of a rather informal language by authors of UGC to express emotions or feelings towards a particular travel experience, either positive or negative, adds a new dimension to the overall concept of online information sharing.

Furthermore, the visibility travel blogs enjoy on the Internet secures them an important role in creating and promoting images of destinations, which has already provoked a few studies on this topic (Carson, 2007; Choi et al., 2007; Govers and Go, 2004; Matloka and Buhalis, 2010; Tang et al., 2009; Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, 2008; Wenger, 2008). In turn, this research calls for re-consideration of the destination image formation strategy to recognise the importance of new technologies and communication methods (Sun et al., 2015). However, based on the emerging literature addressing online data presentation, and the blogging domain in particular, it can be suggested that there is another essential key player which to date has been subjected to little recognition: trust.

Promoting certain destination images via official tourism websites should arguably be compared with the travellers' perceived image (Fernandez-Cavia and Huertas-Roig, 2009), which should be as close as possible to its projected image (Crompton, 1979; Mackey and Fesenmaier, 1997). Subsequently, any significant dissonances should be kept to a minimum (Dinnie, 2008) despite the fact that differences are inevitable due to the numerous image determinants that play a role in the destination image formation process (Choi et al., 2007; Andreu et al., 2001).

Despite the growth of research in this area, there remains a gap in the existing literature to account for the differences between perceived images generated by UGC such as travel blogs and projected images developed by destination management organisations (see Andreu et al., 2001; Bandyopadhyay and Morais, 2005; Chen et al., 2008; Mercille, 2005). This study addresses this shortfall by exploring the gaps between the projected destination image of Cambodia created and disseminated by Cambodia's destination marketers and commercial enterprises in comparison to amateur travel bloggers, taking into consideration the cognitive and affective elements alongside the role of trust in the process of destination image formation.

Cambodia has a population of over 15 million and is located in the southern portion of the Indochina Peninsula in Southeast Asia. There has been a strong positive trend in international visitors' numbers for the last two decades and in 2016 Cambodia was visited by more than 5 million international tourists whose length of stay was approximately 6 days (Ministry of Tourism, 2017). Apart from its distinctive historic and cultural heritage, Cambodia is also known for its plentiful natural and man-made attractions and natural scenery.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 Projected and perceived destination Image

There is a plethora of destination image definitions in the tourism literature. Some focus on its multifaceted structure and propose that it is "the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination" (Crompton, 1979:18), whereas others see it as an overall impression of a place, product or experience (Milman and Pizam, 1995; Reynolds, 1965). Another level of complexity is added by the multiple use of the

term "destination image" in the literature. It is applied to describe a) the projected/desired image of a destination through the purposeful distribution of promotional materials about it (Andreu et al.,, 2001; Gartner 1993; Gunn 1972; Komppula, and Laukkanen, 2016; Mazanec and Schweiger, 1981; Pritchard and Morgan, 2001;) and b) the perceived image, which is accessed based on visitors' beliefs and expectations and their perceptions of the place (Bramwell and Rawding, 1996; Hunter, 2012; Komppula, and Laukkanen, 2016; Mazanec and Schweiger, 1981). Hunter (2012) further argues that while it is clear that projected destination images result from the amalgamation of various promotional activities, it is unclear to what extend these promotional messages were influenced by the destination marketers' own perceptions of the place or might bear some political or commercial agenda.

A destination image is conceptualized as multi-dimensional, consisting of affective and cognitive elements (Hosany et al., 2006; Kim and Richardson, 2003; Martin and Bosque, 2008). People's beliefs and/or knowledge about a destination attributes (Baloglu, 1999; Gartner, 1993, White, 2004) which "...may or may not have been derived from a previous visit" (Pike and Ryan, 2004:334) and memories, evaluations and interpretations (Tasci et al., 2007) are used to describe the cognitive domain, which does not necessarily have to be representative of the reality of that destination (Neal et al., 1999). Affective image components, on the other hand, are defined as emotional responses (Pocock and Hudson, 1978), reactions (Walmsley and Young, 1998) and feelings (Russel, 1980; White, 2004) towards places. The affective image components have been presented in previous studies using four affective image attributes (distressing-relaxing, unpleasant-pleasant, boring-exciting, and sleepy-lively) on a semantic differential scale (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Martin and

Bosque, 2008; Wang and Hsu, 2010) or Russell's (1980) spatial model where affective evaluations could be positioned on four distinct continuums – arousal – sleepiness, misery – pleasure, distress- contentment, excitement- depression. Words people use to describe the emotional qualities of a destination including peaceful, beautiful, exciting, majestic, enjoyable, hectic, frightening, frustrating, ugly, fearful, desolated, etc. are also considered as affective evaluations (Russell and Pratt, 1980).

From a psychological point of view, there is a link between emotion and cognition. Emotions have the strength to influence and determine cognition, whereas "cognition can and do occur in the absence of emotion...in some cases one will be more significant or dominant than the other and there is a constant interplay between the two" (Strongman 1987:245). The cognitive-affective sequence of tourism destination image was initially suggested by Russell (1980). Stern and Krakover (1993) and Baloglu and McCleary (1999) were among the first who illustrated empirically that cognitive and affective image components are not only in a relationship with the overall tourism destination image, but also that the cognitive evaluation of a place influences its image indirectly through its affective evaluation. Kim and Park (2001) offer support for their findings by ascertaining that affective evaluations are influenced by cognitive appraisals, and that the overall image is shaped by both cognitive and affective images. Furthermore, the literature also suggests that cognitive components are the antecedent of these affective components, which are derivatives of the cognitive components (Russel and Pratt 1980; Woodside and Lysonski, 1989; Stern and Krakover 1993; Sonmez and Sirakaya, 2002) and are positively and significantly influenced by them (Yuang, 2009).

Recently, a substantial number of destination studies recognise the importance of both cognitive and affective image components and explore them simultaneously (Baloglu

and Love, 2005; Hosany et al., 2006; Kim and Richardson, 2003; Martin and Bosque, 2008; Kim and Perdue, 2011; Pike and Mason, 2011; Pike and Ryan, 2004; Sonmez and Sirakaya, 2002; Wang and Hsu 2010). In some instances, it was argued that affective evaluations of a place's attributes might become even more important than objective knowledge (Kim and Richardson, 2003; Kim and Yoon, 2003), which could indicate that information sources that focus on and promote affective images of places more intensively might be considered as more trustworthy and credible.

2.2 The language of tourism in destination marketing

In creating a communicative occurrence which is beneficial for both the tourists and the destination, there are certain rules to be followed, which refer to three levels of the event: textual, syntactical, and lexical (Fox, 2008). Text is recognised as easy to follow, precise and correct and the use of active voice is desirable, because it implies involvement and activity, whereas passive voice appears to be rather distant from the tourist and formal (Tarlow, 1996). Cohen (1985), MacCannell (1989), Dann (1996), Fox (2004, 2008) acknowledge the importance of the careful selection of lexical items in destination promotion, because they not only describe the destination's attributes, but also have a stimulating effect and create certain expectations in tourists' minds. Dann (1996:2) was one of the first to explain the true nature of this touristic language:

> ….the language of tourism is thus a great deal more than a metaphor. Via static and moving pictures, written text and audio-visual offerings, the language of tourism attempts to persuade, lure, woo and seduce millions of human beings, and, in doing so, convert them from potential into actual clients.

There are four major sociolinguistic theoretical perspectives of the tourism language that are reflected in tourism promotional materials: the strangehood perspective, the play perspective, the conflict perspective and the authenticity perspective (Dann, 1996). Words such as untouched, remote, unspoilt, picturesque, quaint, fascinating,

natural, exotic, remote, timeless, unchanging, adventure, discovery illustrate the strangehood perspective. The play perspective portrays tourism as a game and provides tourists with distinct experiences (e.g. theme parks). The conflict perspective, in contrast, is linked to a tourist's desire to escape from everyday life and experience exciting new things. The authenticity perspective is promoted through the use of words such as typical, authentic, real, true. (Dann, 1996). In some instances, authenticity is described as a "social construct" as it is created through the interaction of the users, situations and the texts (Lee, 1995; Grazian, 2003) which reflects the very nature of online blogging. Moreover, authenticity and authentic are often used to describe both written and spoken input that, according to Rogers and Medley (1988), reflects cultural and situational contexts. Coupland (2003) makes an important remark about the importance of authenticity: "Authenticity matters. It remains a quality of experience that we actively seek out, in most domains of life, material and social. […] We value authenticity and we tend to be critical of pseudo-authenticity." (2003: 417). Authentic and authenticity are used synonymously with words such as, validity, reliability, undisputed credibility and truthfulness (Tatsuki, 2006).

2.3 Trust the Blogosphere

A significant amount of studies on travellers' information search behaviour proposes that travellers undertake an extensive information search prior to making any final decisions due to the intangible nature of the tourism product (Baloglu and McCleary, 1997; Gunn, 1972; Gartner, 1989, 1993; Stylidis et al., 2010; Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007; Tasci and Gartner, 2007). With the development of new technologies, and the Internet in particular, new tools for learning about tourist destinations have emerged, with travel blogs being one of the most popular sources (Cayzer, 2004; Gretzel et al.,

2007) because of the highly rated advice of consumers with prior experience in general (Crotts, 1999). Nevertheless, various concerns about trustworthiness and credibility surround online travel information, especially UGC (e.g. travel blogs) (Ayeh et al., 2013; Chung and Buhalis, 2008; Dellarocas 2003; Litvin et al., 2008; Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014). An early definition of credibility describes it as believability of some information and/or its source (Hovland et al., 1953) and trustworthiness and expertise are seen as being two distinct dimensions of source credibility (Pornpitakpan 2004; Yoo and Gretzel, 2008) and of a particular importance in the context of UGC (Ayeh et al., 2013). Trustworthiness, according to Hovland at al., (1953: p. 21) is the level of confidence in the source's "intent to communicate the assertions" they consider "most valid [true]". Expertise is linked to readers' perception of the UGC authors as "a source of valid assertions [truth]". Another definition of credibility by O'Keefe (2002) portrays it as judgments made by perceivers regarding the believability of communicators.

A variety of studies suggested that UGC shows characteristics similar to information received from friends, family members of "like-minded" individuals (Bray et al., 2006; Yoo et al., 2009), which increases their trustworthiness compared to information received by destination marketers or service providers (Fotis et al., 2012; Yoo et al., 2009). An earlier study (Senecal and Nantel, 2004) even suggested that consumers turn to fellow consumers for advice and evaluation. Tourists are becoming more sceptical about information sources that merely have the interests of commercial entities at heart and perceive non-commercial information, such as UGC, as more objective, credible, trustworthy (Agarwal et al., 2008; Ayeh et al., 2013; Bickart and Schindler, 2001; Chung and Buhalis, 2008; Dickinger, 2011; Litvin et al., 2008; Park et al., 2007 Schmallegger and Carson, 2008). This is reflected in the ever increasing number of travellers who consult primarily UGC websites rather than service providers

(Gretzel et al., 2007). In contrast, Cox et al.'s study (2009) unveiled that state and travel agent tourism websites are perceived as more trustworthy compared to comments made by fellow travellers on various social network sites. This could, perhaps, be explained by the fact that in 2009 social network sites were still in their infancy and not as popular or accessible as nowadays, for as Chung and Buhalis (2008, p. 72) ascertain the "type and relative importance of information sources have changed over time". The level of trust in some studies was found to be dependent on "source-receiver relationships, channel variety and presentation of contents, opportunities for information solicitation, message retention capabilities, and content provider motivations for disclosure" (Tham et al., 2013, p. 152). Dickinger (2011), for example, compared the trustworthiness of three different online channels (personal, marketing, and editorial) and determined that user-generated content appears to be highly trustworthy, showing high levels of integrity, yet, are not always perceived as the most informative. Editorial content providers, in contrast, are seen as the most able as information providers.

On the basis that blogs are perceived to be more reliable and trustworthy sources of information than the traditional mass media information channels (Agarwal et al., 2008; Akehurst, 2009; Johnson and Kayne, 2003; Schmallegger and Carson, 2008; Technorati, 2013), marketers and "professional" bloggers have begun to exploit this niche, threatening the credibility of blogs as a reliable information source. A new concept that is increasingly common within the travel blogging industry, but remains sparsely discussed within the academic literature, is that of 'sponsored posts'. This is when an organisation remunerates a travel blogger for discretely advertising their service or product within a blog post (Schmallegger and Carson, 2008), resulting in the possibility that posts are written to serve the need of the marketer as opposed to

presenting the author's entirely genuine perceptions and experiences (Schmallegger and Carson, 2008; Snee, 2013).

3. Methods

The most common method of qualitative analysis employed when analysing websites and travel blogs tends to align most closely to that of content analysis (Banyai, 2010; Carson, 2007; Choi et al., 2007; Enoche and Grossman, 2010; Law and Cheung, 2010; Pan et al., 2007; Wenger, 2008). Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts and is particularly useful in increasing a researcher's understanding of a particular area or issue (Krippendorf, 2013), which in this instance is the projected and the perceived online destination image of Cambodia. This method allowed for the data collected to be systematically reviewed and classified according to themes, characteristics and patterns relevant to the research (Crano et al., 2015).

Within blog content analysis, the term 'sampling' does not accord with traditional definitions involving selecting a subset of participants from a targeted population of people. Rather, in this context, sampling involves obtaining a subset of elements from the targeted population of content located within online blogs (Neuendorf, 2011). Purposive sampling is an election method during which the researcher is free to choose research samples that are most likely to yield data beneficial to the research (Bryman, 2012; Kumar, 2011; Neuman, 2013; Punch, 2014). For this particular research, it was important that blogs analysed were written by amateur travel bloggers and did not incorporate intentional marketing such as sponsored posts or advertising. As such, it was deemed necessary to use a sampling platform that enabled the researcher to locate blogs appropriate to the study, which would not have been

possible when using alternative sampling strategies. Whilst it is important to recognise that adopting purposive sampling in this way can be a limitation to the study in terms of variability and researcher bias, this was the best approach to obtain the necessary data. To do this, the blogging platform wordpress.com was utilised to locate blogs, allowing for a search to be undertaken by key words and the results to be listed chronologically according to the date and time of publication.

It is also important to note that it may not always be possible to identify intentional marketing within blog posts. A set of criteria was developed around the main underlying principles and core values of blogging, such as being seen as similar to information received from friends, family members of "like-minded" individuals (Bray et al., 2006; Yoo et al., 2009) and implemented to ensure that only blog posts that reflect the original idea of blogs and blogging were included in the sample. This led to the following sets of criteria for blogs included in this study:

- Blogs did not appear to have been written by a person who is financially remunerated for their blog
- Blogs did not have a purchased URL (this was identified by the .wordpress.com ending of their domain)
- Where stated, blogs had less than 500 subscribers
- Blogs had no evidence of a significant blog following on social media
- Content was similar to that of an online diary

A total of twenty-two amateur blog posts were collated over a period of four weeks in March, 2017. This process was continued until saturation point was deemed to have been reached, that is, where no new themes or patterns were derived from the data during ten consecutive blog analyses. Whilst blogs are inherently multimodal in nature,

the analysis focused only on written text within the blogs to limit the amount of data collected to a manageable quantity. All amateur blogs analysed were travel-based, but did not focus entirely on Cambodia. As a result, blog posts were analysed as opposed to all of the blog content produced by a particular travel blogger to ensure that content analysed was specifically related to the destination image of Cambodia. Data was captured using the n-capture feature on Google Chrome and was then imported into NVIVO. Content analysis was inductive, allowing for coding categories and units to emerge empirically whilst continuously revising and updating the coding system (Crano et al., 2015).

In addition, during the same period of time, ten official tourism websites developed and maintained by local authorities and commercial organizations were considered for analysis to enable comparability of the destination image projected by these official channels and the travel bloggers perceived image of Cambodia. Among these websites were tourismcambodia.com, tourismcambodia.org, catacambodia.com. Unlike the amateur blogs, the selected websites were analysed in their entirety, with a number of web pages captured from each source. These sources provided significantly more comprehensive information regarding Cambodia as a destination compared to that of the amateur blogs, thus requiring a smaller sample size to be included in the analysis. To allow for comparability, the same coding system was adopted when analysing the websites as was utilised when analysing the blogs and textual data only was analysed. Once amateur blogs and DMO web pages had been coded in parallel, an additional coding practice was undertaken, where each code was further categorised as either cognitive or affective (Figure 1). Cognitive image elements were divided into the following sub-themes – accommodation, attractions, culture, history, food and drinks, nightlife, shopping, transport, weather, and

volunteering. The affective components were put into themes based on Russell's spatial model (1980) where affective evaluations can be positioned on the following continuums – arousal – sleepiness, misery – pleasure, distress- contentment, excitement – depression.

4. Results and Discussion

The text retrieved from the tourism websites appear to reflect the authenticity and strangehood sociolinguistic perspectives described by Dann (1996) through the use of keywords such as authentic, real, colourful, picturesque, fascinating, natural, different, tradition, adventure and discovery.

The collected data overall indicated that Cambodia's online destination image consists of ten themes – accommodation, attractions, culture, history, food and drinks, nightlife, volunteering, shopping, transport and weather. Attractions, transport, food and culture where the most prominent themes identified in both amateur travel blogs and websites on Cambodia as a tourist destination (Table 1).

[Insert Table 1 about here]

The analysis of both amateur blogs and the web pages, however, demonstrated a substantially different approach to destination images between the two sources of information, which confirms previous studies (Andreu et al., 2001; Mercille, 2005). A breakdown of the coding structure (Figure 1) demonstrates the prominence of cognitive perception by both travel bloggers and websites; the latter rely almost entirely on this element, whereas the former present an amalgamation of both cognitive and affective aspects of Cambodia's destination image in order to present travel perceptions of the place. Only once did the projected online image include only

an element of Cambodia's affective image when presenting its main attractions (6% of the coded material on this image element), which contradicts the notion in the reviewed literature that the affective image domain is as prominent as the cognitive domain, or even more dominant in some cases (Kim and Richardson, 2003; Kim and Yoon, 2003; Wang and Hsu, 2010). Travel bloggers, in contrast, mentioned adjectives that were coded as affective image components in 8 out of 10 categories (see Table 1 and Figure 1). Whilst it can be argued that the amalgamated perceived image described by the travel bloggers presents a more holistic image, it is also important to remember that the personal nature of their blogs is liable to have a significant level of bias and subjectivity, because these perceptions are based almost entirely upon little more than their personal experiences, and thus may not be representative nor objective.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

The coding of content also varied substantially between source types. Travel bloggers were more likely to include cognitive data to support their personal narratives and emotional reactions to their experiences, whereas official tourism websites tended to provide cognitive data as a means of information provision. This was demonstrated, for example, within the theme of accommodation. The following quotes both discuss accommodation in Sihanoukville and both were coded cognitive, yet demonstrate distinctly different styles:

'My friend did the research and booked us into a wonderful resort. We knew, because the weather was so hot, that we would only do sightseeing in the morning then after lunch return to our hotel and just relax. So we definitely needed somewhere with a pool, spa and area to sit and read in the shade. Our resort was perfect for just these things.' (Blogger quote)

'Sihanoukville offers places to stay ranging from $2 a night, to an island resort costing

16

thousands of dollars per day. Most hotels and guesthouses are either downtown, on 'The Hill' on an island, or on one of several beaches. Typical rooms run $7 to $70.' (website quote)

In addition to the worded description presented in the website quote above, much of the content coded on the website - particularly for the themes of accommodation, attractions, food and transport - took the form of a directory, simply listing available outlets for the tourist and detailing elements such as opening hours and prices. This presents a far more comprehensive information source for the tourist, but does little to contribute to the affective destination image of Cambodia. Several destination image studies (Kim and Richardson, 2003; Kim and Yoon, 2003) claim that affective evaluations of places' attributes might be more important than objective knowledge, suggesting that information sources that focus on and promote affective images of places more intensively might be considered as more trustworthy and credible. Also the preferred passive voice on the analysed websites is seen as rather distant from the tourist and more likely to be read in a more formal way (Tarlow, 1996). This may mean that, despite the logical assumption that objective detailed knowledge should be valued more than stories reflecting travellers' feelings and attitudes towards various holiday experiences, the information may be interpreted as lacking in detail.

4.1. Cambodia's Cognitive Online Image

As defined by Tasci et al.,(2007) the cognitive domain centres around ones' memories, knowledge, evaluations and interpretations of a place. In the context of this research, this is most strongly evidenced in the case of blog data, where narratives provided by travel bloggers provide details of their personal accounts of Cambodia. In contrast, the author of content provided by the official tourism websites is unclear and invokes a more distant, less personal relationship with its readership. Whilst this may make the

website content appear more objective and factual and less biased than data presented in blogs, it can be argued that the author is simply hiding behind the façade of the website and projecting the image of Cambodia on the basis of memories, evaluations and interpretations in the same way that a travel blogger is. Furthermore, the way in which the image is projected by the author has the potential to impact on the way in which it is perceived by the consumer. These differences can be emphasised through the following quotes:

'There are some great places to eat in Cambodia, I ate one night at a little stand located on the Mekong confluence. Meat on sticks that the friendly locals dipped happily into the chilli and nearly burnt my face off. Once I regained sensation in my face I had to admit that the method of eating here is quite fun.' (Blogger quote)

'While the main local cuisines are the Khmer fares which are widely available across town; at restaurants and even on the side of some streets in town, Asian and other European cuisines including Italian, Thai, Germany, Vietnamese, Indian, Chinese, Korean and Japanese are also well presented in this bustling tourist city. And of course French food- given Cambodia's long relationship with France's gastronomical traditions, it is no surprise that many of the town's finer venues offer French cuisine as well.' (website quote)

When in search of information such as transport timetables or available restaurants it can be argued that the simple directory-style output frequently provided by official tourism websites is appropriate for the consumer. Content of this type, however, lacks the details often desired when informing purchasing decisions such as comfort levels, reliability, customer service or tourist reviews. In effect, detailed narratives in this regard allow for the reader to place him/herself into the metaphorical shoes of the travel blogger, thus enabling them to achieve a more representative perception of the experience being researched and a more holistic image of the destination to be perceived. In this instance it can be argued that the cognitive content found within blogs may be more valuable to the reader, enabling the formation of a more detailed

image of Cambodia to be perceived. This can be seen, for example, through the details given in the quotes below:

'They really know how to pack a ferry full in Cambodia, this isn't the kind of ferry you're imagining either, I'm talking about the kind of ferry that doesn't even look like it's going to make it across the water. When Fila insisted we all wear life jackets, I understood why. Somehow the ferry reached the other side in one piece. (Blogger quote)

'Departing from Siem Reap taking the 7am boat, you'll arrive at Battambang about 10.30am. The cost is around US$ 10-15 per person, depending on demand. So it's negotiable. Departing from Phnom Penh taking the 7-8am boat, you'll arrive at Battambang around 3-4pm. The cost is around US$ 16-22 per person (website quote)

Whilst the travel blogger may allow for a 'deeper' destination image impression to be created, it is imperative to take into account the personal and subjective nature of the content presented. The cognitive domain is essentially made up from people's beliefs and/or knowledge about destination attributes (Baloglu, 1999; Gartner, 1993, White, 2004). In the case of the analysed websites, there was little evidence of the personal author's beliefs, whereas this was strongly portrayed through much of the blog content. One travel blogger presented their beliefs, for example, through their connotations of amazement and craziness:

'The traffic was next level crazy!! I've never seen this many motorbikes in one place and they just completely disregard all road rules…I was quite surprised when a man on a small bicycle tuk tuk turned up and I had no idea how he could possibly fit luggage for 10 people onto it but this is Asia, anything is possible and to my amazement he loaded it up and weaved his way into the crazy traffic bound for the bus stop.' (Blogger quote)

It can be argued that whilst narratives such as this may present more detailed and personal accounts of an experience in a destination, they are subject to an inherent level of bias, being based only upon the individual's personal experiences and reflecting the individual's own beliefs. This means that the image portrayed by the travel blogger may not be representative of the experiences of others and may

subsequently not always provide an accurate image of the destination, however, cognitive image elements do not necessarily have to be representative of the reality (Neal et al., 1999).

Analysis of the blog data did indicate that not all cognitive content was portrayed through such a personal narrative by the travel bloggers. It was particularly noteworthy that in areas such as history and culture, there was little differentiation between the cognitive content presented by the travel bloggers and by the selected websites, as evidenced below:

'37 years ago, there was a genocide in Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge killed more than 21% of the population at the time. 37 years later, evidence of the war is still visible: museums, killing fields, abandoned buildings and numerous books related to that tragedy. I saw a few older people with amputated limbs and couldn't help but wondered if these were the results of that war and if they were, what was their story.' (Blogger quote)

'Khmer Rouge forced the entire population of Phnom Penh and other cities to evacuate to the countryside where they were placed in slave labor units and forced to do manual work until they dropped from exhaustion. Pol Pot and his followers began a campaign of systematic genocide against their own people, with the aim of returning Cambodia to the agarian society of centuries before. Great segments of the population were slaughtered senselessly.' (website quote)

Travel blogger and website data did differ in that travel bloggers were more inclined to follow on from their cognitive accounts with narratives that fell within the affective domain, subsequently introducing emotion, which confirms the notion in the literature that cognitive components are antecedent of the affective components (Russel and Pratt 1980; Woodside and Lysonski, 1989; Stern and Krakover 1993; Sonmez and Sirakaya, 2002). This is demonstrated in the quote below:

'It makes me sad that that I can't afford to give every young girl that comes up to me a Dollar for a bracelet so that she can go to school. It disturbs me that the old war vets crawling around on the floor begging for money are people that I can't help in a way

beyond slipping them a few Dollars…. How could I, a 21 year-old comfortable and yet naïve, educated and yet selfish North American woman possibly relate to the struggles of the people of this country?...I can't.' (Blogger quote)

4.2. Cambodia's Affective Online Image

Strongman's (1987) work proposed that the emotions deriving from affective destination images have the strength to influence and determine cognitions. As such, and despite amateur blogs and websites presenting cognitive data that may often be of a similar stature (as demonstrated within the theme of Cambodian history in the quotes above), it can be argued that amateur blogs can portray a 'richer' and more complex image. This is achieved through the combination of cognitive and affective presentations that provide the reader with not only factual data, but also enable connection on an emotional level.

Table One demonstrates, in support of Strongman (1987), that cognitions do occur in the absence of emotion. Almost all data collected from the websites were coded as cognitive, with the exception of 6% that was categorised as affective under the theme attractions. In contrast, eight out of the ten themes identified included the affective presentation of images presented by travel bloggers, with the exceptions of accommodation and nightlife.

Given the number of studies highlighting the importance of the inclusion of both cognitive and affective image components in the formation of destination images (Baloglu and Love, 2005; Hosany et al., 2006; Kim and Richardson, 2003; Kim and Perdue , 2011; Martin and Bosque, 2008; Pike and Mason, 2011; Pike and Ryan, 2004; Sonmez and Sirakaya, 2002; Wang and Hsu 2010), it is surprising that some destination marketers still have not found a way to present a balanced view of their offerings where both cognitive and affective image elements are equally presented.

From a psychological perspective, it can be argued that by including a combination of both cognitive and affective remarks, travel bloggers engage the reader on a level still unobtainable by destination marketers relying only on the cognitive domain unless travellers' testimonials or links to social media platforms are made available on their websites. One travel blogger, for instance, relates her story of Cambodian food in such a way that she not only presents a cognitive account of the gastronomical options available, but also relays her emotions as part of the experience:

'The delicacies were fascinating and an exciting moment to the long drive we had been on… Tarrantulas-yes, the spider-are captured from the mountains beyond the villages, de-fanged and deep fried. I was too nervous to try, but my friend declared it tastes like chicken. There were also other scary food items like deep fried larvae, beetles and grasshoppers!' (Blogger quote)

4.3. The Element of Trust

The idea of a destination image has widely been conceptualized as multi-dimensional, consisting of affective and cognitive elements that accounts for both objective representation and emotional attachment formed mainly as a result of the nature and variety of information sources travellers consult prior to making their informed decision. Whilst the image projected may present elements of the truth, consumers are becoming increasingly aware of the intentions and level of bias commonly associated with marketers. The reviewed literature indicates that the affective evaluations of the attributes ascribed to places might be even more essential than objective knowledge in the decision making process (Kim and Richardson, 2003; Kim and Yoon, 2003). The preliminary findings of this research suggest that travel bloggers are more likely to focus on emotions and feelings in their blog entries (see Table 1), which supports the notion in the literature of the so called "culture of exposure" (Munar, 2010). This newly added dimension to the overall concept of online information

sharing could to some extent explain why many travellers are now turning to the likes of review sites and travel blogs to inform their purchasing decisions. This also may explain why blogs are ranked among the most trustworthy and reliable sources for information on the Internet (Agarwal et al., 2008; Ayeh et al., 2013; Bickart and Schindler, 2001; Chung and Buhalis, 2008; Dickinger, 2011; Litvin et al., 2008; Part et al., 2007 Schmallegger and Carson, 2008) and travel bloggers frequently viewed as the 'expert' in their area by their readership.

Based on Agarwal et al.*'s* (2008) research, whereby it is proposed that travel bloggers have the potential to be 'market movers', it could be suggested that travel bloggers may have a stronger influence on the formation of a destination image than websites, due not only to the combination of cognitive and affective domains attributed to their narratives, but also the trust that is established between the consumer and the travel blogger. This trust can, in part, be attributed to the personalities associated with travel bloggers. The personal and casual tone frequently adopted within blog posts coupled with the ability to demonstrate their personality through their narratives, helps establish a relationship between the consumer and destination image projector not possible with websites developed and maintained for the purposes for local authorities and commercial enterprises. It is as a result of the formation of such relationships that many readers may find blog content more trustworthy and engaging than content obtained via an official website, whose purpose is not to provide narratives of their experiences, as is often the intention of the travel blogger, but instead to project a positive image of the destination. Whilst the content of the vast majority of websites featuring Cambodia provided factual that was largely positive in nature, many travel blogger appeared to reflect the richness of their experiences by weaving both positive and negative details and emotional evaluations in their remarks. This amalgamation

is likely to induce trust in the information source.

'The tuk tuks were different to Thailand. They were more like chariots that can seat four Westerners or probably about eight locals… I read that the traffic here is terrible but it is merely reminiscent of the Indonesian island of Java… I feel no anxiety or nerves at all riding in the melee. There's the usual configurations of shops and stalls, the hectic traffic, the damp-affected buildings and the beautiful tropical greenery…' (Blogger quote)

5. Conclusion

Destination image gaps are well documented in previous studies and the preliminary findings of this study suggest that there are substantial gaps between Cambodian's projected and perceived online image. This research compliments the existing body of literature in two ways. Firstly, it demonstrates that the online image of Cambodia projected by local authorities and commercial enterprises consists of mainly cognitive image elements, whereas amateur travel blogs tend to project both cognitive and affective image elements. Secondly, this paper argues that UGC and destination marketers are applying contrasting approaches and strategies in an attempt to capture the attention of the same audience. This strategy acknowledges that the use of affective destination images alongside that of bloggers' personal branding and 'trustworthiness' is likely to weigh more heavily in consumer's decision-making processes than material presented by the likes of tourist boards and commercial enterprises. A comparative analysis of the use of cognitive and affective destination image elements portrayed by amateur travel bloggers with those of websites maintained for the needs of destination marketers demonstrates that travel bloggers typically present a more objective perception, addressing both the positive and negative elements of their experiences. Furthermore, the 'friend'-style relationship that the reader develops with the travel blogger can be attributed to their personal

projections and thus induces an element of trust not established between the reader and the websites.

The preliminary findings of this study are subject to some limitations that need to be taken into account. Firstly, despite the fact that amateur travel blogs were carefully chosen according to strict selection criteria, it is becoming increasingly unclear whether the content of travel blogs has been designed specifically for the person or organisation who is financially rewarding the blogger - or indeed, if there is an individual blogger. The role of authenticity on an analytical level was beyond the scope of this study, which mainly aimed to highlight the differences between perceived and projected destination images by analysing the use of cognitive and affective image components. Secondly, this study is of an exploratory nature and is intended primarily to lay the groundwork for further research exploring the similarities and differences between projected and perceived online destination images and the role trust plays in the process of destination image formation. Thirdly, due to time and financial restrictions the analysed sample of amateur travel blogs and websites could be considered as small and not truly representative of the variety and quantity of online information sources on Cambodia as a tourist destination. Fourthly, while this research is aimed at exploring the differences between projected and perceived online destination image, the case study nature of the study means that the results may not be replicated in all research in this area. Fifthly, for the purposes of this study, blogs and websites were seen as offering competing, rather than complementary information sources, which would hardly be the case in reality, where travellers usually consult a variety of information sources to form perceptions of places and finalise their holiday plans. Finally, the issues of generalisability and subjectivity characteristics for qualitative studies should also be recognised as weaknesses of this research. Further

studies drawing on larger and more heterogeneous samples would offer ways to explore the importance of cognition, emotion and trust in other contexts by taking into account the role social/cultural capital of the language used and authenticity play in evaluating and analysing information sources. Another research avenue could be to use a scenario-based approach to shed light on consumers' perceptions of amateur travel blogs and official tourism websites in terms of projected and perceived destination image.

Through the analysis of the online image of Cambodia represented by both travel bloggers and the analysed websites, this article argues that the optimal way to market a destination is via the inclusion of cognition, affect and trust. A solution to the problem faced by destination marketers, whereby they tend to achieve only one of the three elements needed for effective destination image projection, could be to work with travel bloggers in this way. Whilst there is some evidence online that destination marketers are already working with travel bloggers through the incorporation of the likes of sponsored posts, gifted products and affiliate links there is little acknowledgment of this within the academic literature. This is an area of research in its infancy and is undoubtedly an issue worthy of additional research in the near future.

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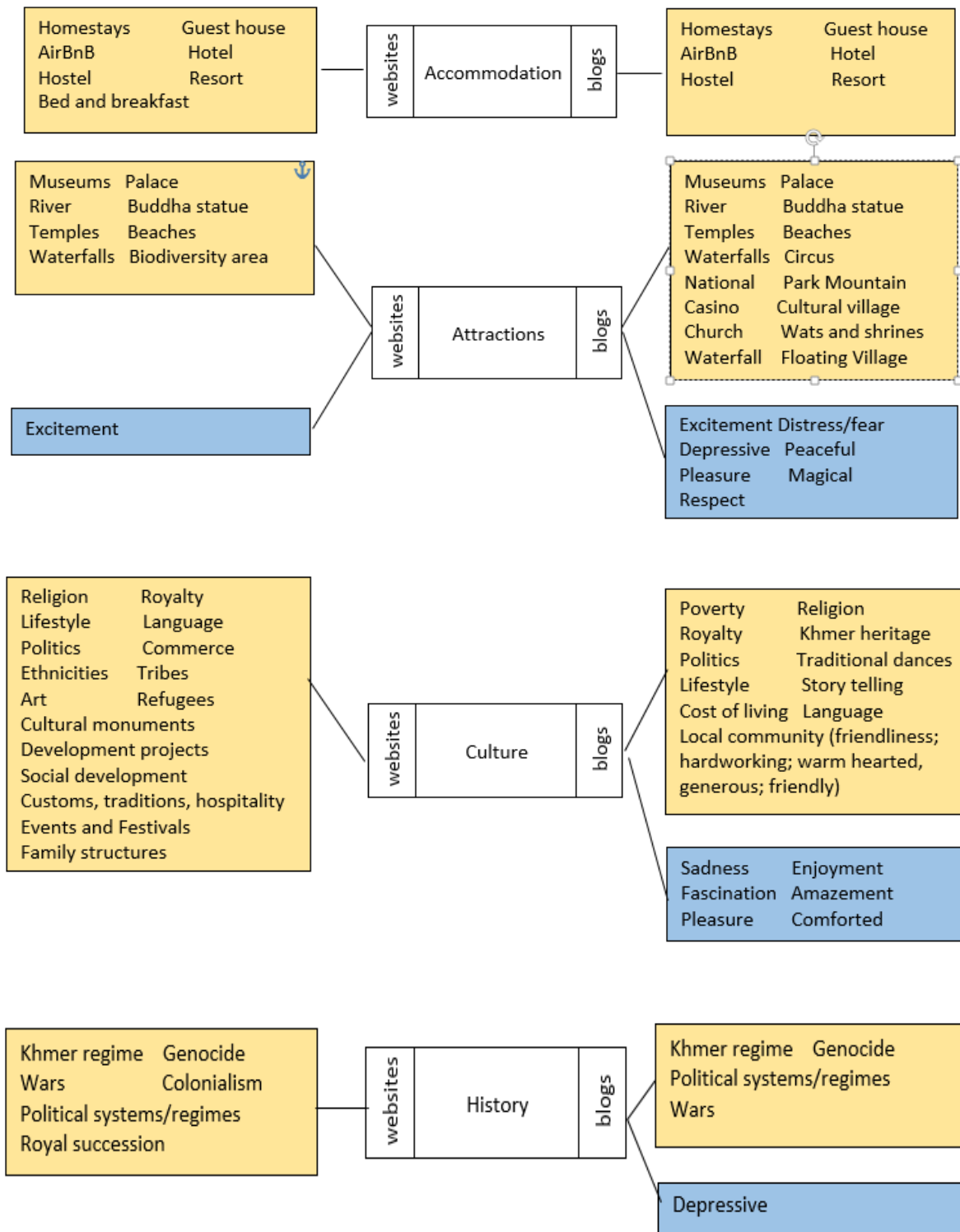
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Table 1: Cambodia's image elements identified in blogs and websites according to themes

Theme	Number of Codes		Type of destination image	
	Travel Blogs	Websites	Perceived image (blogs)	Projected image (websites)
Accommodation	9	8	100% cognitive 0% affective	100% cognitive 0% affective
Attractions	81	35	80% cognitive 20% affective	94% cognitive 6% affective
Culture	28	21	64% cognitive 36% affective	100% cognitive 0% affective
History	15	14	87% cognitive 13% affective	100% cognitive 0% affective
Food and drinks	37	11	92% cognitive 8% affective	100% cognitive 0% affective
Nightlife	7	11	100% cognitive 0% affective	100% cognitive 0% affective
Shopping	9	18	78% cognitive 12% affective	100% cognitive 0% affective

Transport	34	35	85% cognitive 15% affective	100% cognitive 0% affective
Volunteering	8	1	63% cognitive 37% affective	0% cognitive 0% affective
Weather	10	8	40% cognitive 60% affective	100% cognitive 0% affective

Accommodation

websites:
- Homestays
- AirBnB
- Hostel
- Bed and breakfast
- Guest house
- Hotel
- Resort

blogs:
- Homestays
- AirBnB
- Hostel
- Guest house
- Hotel
- Resort

Attractions

websites:
- Museums
- River
- Temples
- Waterfalls
- Palace
- Buddha statue
- Beaches
- Biodiversity area

- Excitement

blogs:
- Museums
- River
- Temples
- Waterfalls
- National
- Casino
- Church
- Waterfall
- Palace
- Buddha statue
- Beaches
- Circus
- Park Mountain
- Cultural village
- Wats and shrines
- Floating Village

- Excitement
- Depressive
- Pleasure
- Respect
- Distress/fear
- Peaceful
- Magical

Culture

websites:
- Religion
- Lifestyle
- Politics
- Ethnicities
- Art
- Cultural monuments
- Development projects
- Social development
- Customs, traditions, hospitality
- Events and Festivals
- Family structures
- Royalty
- Language
- Commerce
- Tribes
- Refugees

blogs:
- Poverty
- Royalty
- Politics
- Lifestyle
- Cost of living
- Local community (friendliness; hardworking; warm hearted, generous; friendly)
- Religion
- Khmer heritage
- Traditional dances
- Story telling
- Language

- Sadness
- Fascination
- Pleasure
- Enjoyment
- Amazement
- Comforted

History

websites:
- Khmer regime
- Wars
- Political systems/regimes
- Royal succession
- Genocide
- Colonialism

blogs:
- Khmer regime
- Political systems/regimes
- Wars
- Genocide

- Depressive

Food and Drinks

Websites:
Pubs, Restaurants, Bars, Asian cuisine, Seafood, BBQ, Fried insects, Seafood, Cambodian dishes, Tropical fruits and vegetables, European cuisine, Food quality/price

blogs:
Types of meals, Asian cuisine, Chinese cuisine, Durian fruit, Fried insects, Seafood, Stew, BBQ, Desserts, Indian food, Pizza (marijuana), Cambodian dishes, Lack of vegan and vegetarian food, Alcoholic drinks, Non-alcoholic drinks, European cuisine (Pancakes, croissants)

Arousal   Excitement

Transport

websites:
Bike rides, Boat trips, Train rides, Police checks, Road rules, Tuk tuk, Bus rides, Car rides, Travel tips (Visas/stamps/border controls/health and hygiene issues/money tips), Local driving license, Safety precautions, Air transport, Route planners, Taxis

blogs:
Bike rides, Boat trips, Train rides, Police checks, Road rules, Tuk tuk, Bus rides, Car rides, Travel tips (Visas/stamps/border controls), Road conditions, Drivers' attitude and behaviour, Congested modes of transport, Accidents, Traffic

Pleasure   Contentment

Volunteering

websites:

blogs:
TEFL, Community work (volunteering in orphanages; distribution/donation of medication, food and books), Sponsorship of a Cambodian child, Scam volunteering programs

Excitement   Sadness

Nightlife

websites:
Pubs, Karaoke bars, Night clubs, Discos, Opening times, Gambling

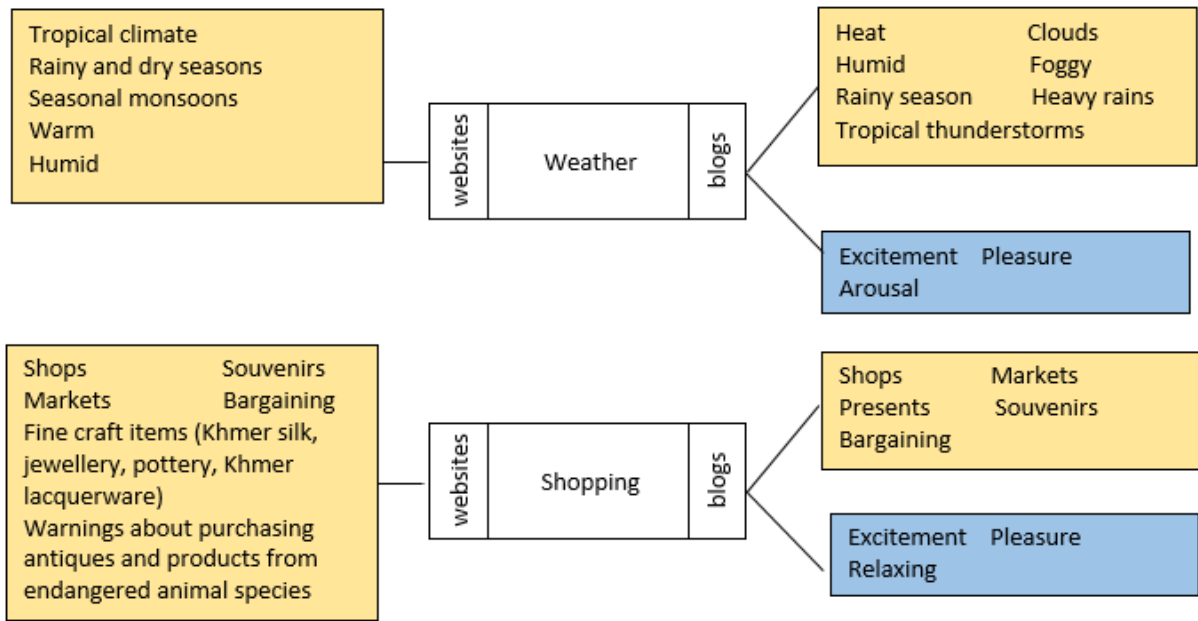blogs:
Activities in night clubs, Popular pubs, Pub crawl, Marijuana

Fig. 1 Sub-themes of Cambodia's cognitive and affective image elements