Destination Management in Belfast: A Visitor's Perspective

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Abstract

Despite the importance of tourists as a stakeholder in the overall tourism system, limited emphasis has been given in tourism research in exploring the importance of managing tourist perceptions on overall Destination Management. This paper, therefore, attempts to explore how Belfast has managed its tourism industry from a tourist's perspective by emphasizing the cultural tourism aspect of the city using participant observations and a detailed secondary data analysis. The key findings of the paper identify that Belfast as a destination largely owes its success in the tourism industry to its cultural heritage in all its tangible, intangible, and contemporary forms as it has functioned as a focal point in attracting tourists to the city. It is also evident that the city's DMO [i.e. Visit Belfast] has understood the importance of visitor perspectives in Destination Management and has consistently taken steps to cater to the needs of the tourists effectively and efficiently. However, the city is currently at a phase where it needs to consider adopting sustainable practices to achieve its ambitious goals and sustain its tourism industry in the long run. The paper provides recommendations for destinations like Belfast to carry out destination development based on the three main pillars of the Triple Bottom Line.
Keywords: Destination Management, Visitor Experience, Cultural Tourism, Sustainable Development

1. Introduction

The unrelenting growth of the tourism industry over the past six decades has played a vital role in the development of a multiplicity of destinations globally, with the industry contributing a phenomenal USD 1,220 billion to economies across the world (OECD, 2009; UNWTO, 2017). Belfast, the capital city of Northern Ireland, is one such destination that has witnessed such outstanding growth as a consequence of the growth of the tourism industry in the region, where the industry contributed a remarkable GBP 122 million to the local economy along with 1.5 million overnight trips to the city in 2016 alone (VisitBelfast-e, 2016).

As elucidated by Ortigueira & Gómez-Selemeneva (2011), the growth and development of a tourist destination are dependent upon several factors such as the host community, culture, security, accessibility & natural resources of a destination and how it successfully utilizes such resources to build the tourism industry in the region. However, from a tourist's perspective, the 'culture' of a city has been identified as a dominant motivational factor to travel amongst other factors (OECD, 2009). Even in the context of Belfast, as one of the first cities in Europe to specifically target the cultural tourism market, the cultural richness of the city has been one pivotal factor for the development of the city as a tourist destination, where the Belfast culture has been identified as one of the most prized assets of the tourism industry of the city (Sutherland, 2008; Belfast City Council, 2015).

Considering the above, this paper attempts to assess how Belfast has managed its tourism industry from a tourist's perspective by emphasizing the cultural tourism aspects of the city. Hence, following this introduction, this paper initially reviews the concepts of Destination Management from a visitor perspective and cultural tourism. Based on participant observation and analysis of secondary data, this paper critically analyses how Belfast has managed its tourism industry with a specific emphasis on the cultural tourism sub-sector. Ultimately the paper is concluded with a list of recommendations on how the city can potentially improve the destination using sustainable development as a base factor.

2. Literature review

2.1 Understanding visitor perspectives in destination management

The tourism system has long considered tourists or visitors to be one of the most important, if not the most important stakeholder in the industry in both its academic and industrial contexts (Sautter & Leisen, 1999). However, as Pearce & Schänzel (2013) points out, despite tourists being considered as a central focus in tourism, the perspective of the tourists has been given little attention when it comes to the management of destinations that engage in the business of tourism. Also, Packer & Ballantyne (2016) further points out that understanding visitors and their perspective on the experiences they had on a given destination is highly important since it allows the DMO's to concentrate on the aspects that are important to tourists.

Nonetheless, in line with the above statement, some researchers have distinctively identified the importance of centralising on visitor perspectives in destination management where they highlight the orientation of tourism services to satisfy the needs of their visitors to deliver a memorable experience (Fuchs & Weiermair, 2004; Zehrer, et al., 2005). However, (Clawson & Knetsch,cited in Pearce & Schott, 2005) elaborates that when giving prominence towards visitors in Destination Management, the dimension of understanding the extended behavioral phases that visitors go through during their travel process; i.e. pre-purchase phase, traveling to the destination phase, on-site phase, returning phase and ultimately extended memory recall phase needs to be given critical attention to formulate an effective destination management strategy.

2.2 Understanding cultural tourism

As identified by Hughes (2002), culture and tourism have had a mutually beneficial relationship for a long-standing period where the relationship between the two elements has been actively encouraged by industry practitioners from both parties over the years. As a result, the themes of culture and tourism have also gained tremendous popularity in the academic context making 'cultural tourism' one of the most researched areas of study under tourism (Barré & Jafari, 1997).

Despite cultural tourism being considered as one of the earliest forms of tourism in the world and the vast amount of studies done concerning this particular subject

area (Rohrscheidt, 2008) the concept of 'Cultural Tourism' remains relatively amorphous without a universal definition (Vasiliadis, et al., 2016). As elaborated by a plethora of authors, the task of devising an authoritative definition for the concept of Cultural Tourism has proven to be an extremely difficult feat due to the ever-changing nature of the scope of the concept along with the constant changes made by travelers in the way they consume 'cultural' products (Richards, 1996; OECD, 2009; Duhme, 2012).

Considering the above, this review does not attempt to create an all-embracing definition to the concept of cultural tourism. Instead, it focuses on curating a definition that can be specifically used in the process of analysing the cultural tourism sector in Belfast (Tomlinson, 1991). Hence, to develop a working definition for the paper, this review initially surveys some of the previous definitions of 'Cultural Tourism' in both academic and industrial contexts in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Cultural Tourism definition analysis

Author	Definition
1970's	
(ICOMOS, 1976, cited in Csapo, 2012)	*'Cultural tourism is that form of tourism whose objective is, among other aims, the discovery of monuments and sites'*
1980's	
(WTO, 1985, p. 131)	*'Cultural tourism includes movements of persons for essentially cultural motivations such as study tours, performing arts and other cultural tours, travel to festivals and other cultural events, visit sites and monuments, travel to study nature, folklore or art or pilgrimages'*
(Tighe, 1986, p. 02)	*'A term which encompasses historical sites, arts and crafts fairs and festivals, museums of all kinds, the performing arts and the visual arts*

1990's	
(Tighe, 1991, p. 387)	*'cultural tourism is travel undertaken with historic sites, museums, the visual arts, and/or the performing arts as significant elements'*
(Silberberg, 1995, p. 361)	*'Visits by persons from outside the host community motivated wholly or in part by interest in the historical, artistic, scientific or lifestyle/heritage offerings of a community, region, group or institution'*
2000's	
(McKercher & Du Cros, 2005, pp. 211-212)	*'A form of tourism that relies on a destination's cultural heritage assets and transforms them into products that can be consumed by tourists'*
(Richards, 2010, p. 15)	*'Movements of persons to specific cultural attractions, such as heritage sites, artistic and cultural manifestations, arts and drama outside their normal place of residence'*

When analysing the above definitions chronologically, it is evident that the early approaches towards defining 'Cultural Tourism' primarily focused on the physical attractions of a given destination that has a significant cultural value (Richards, 1996). However, over the past three decades, a broader image of the concept of 'Cultural Tourism' has emerged where the concept is seemingly being referred to as a psychological experience and a process of learning where a tourist actively engages with the host population of a given destination to experience the uniqueness of their culture (Mousavi, et al., 2016). Additionally, the concept has also increasingly highlighted how the tourist motivation plays a critical role in defining cultural tourism since in the present context, while some tourists purposively travel intending to visit cultural attractions, another group have the very insignificant cultural motivation and merely become accidental or incidental cultural tourists upon visiting a destination (Petroman, et al., 2013).

Cultural tourism has long been acknowledged and emphasized by Destination Management Companies when promoting destinations as a result of the increased

attractiveness of the sector amongst modern travellers (Tan, et al., 2016). Considering the importance of this sub-sector, this paper defines Cultural tourism as *'Movements of visitors to a given destination with a full or partial interest of experiencing its cultural offerings'*. Additionally, the term 'Cultural offerings' in the aforementioned definition has been used to encompass several cultural aspects, which have been segmented into three major components for this analysis as suggested (UNWTO, 2018): tangible cultural offerings (e.g. national & world heritage sites, monuments, historical places & buildings, etc.), intangible cultural offerings (e.g. crafts, gastronomy, traditional festivals, etc.) and contemporary cultural offerings (e.g. films, performing arts, fashion, and new media, etc.).

Furthermore, tourism researchers and industry practitioners have increasingly identified an important relationship between the cultural offerings of a destination and Destination Management from a visitor's perspective as well. As elaborated by Zeng (2017) cultural offerings are critical for the success and the sustainable development of a tourist destination where cultural tourism has an increased impact on the overall visitor satisfaction levels of tourists leading towards enhancement of the core values of the tourism product offered by a given destination (Valle, et al., 2011). As a result, the way a Destination Management Company projects their destinations' traditions and cultures to their potential visitors has been identified as a critical consideration in contemporary Destination Management (Morgan, 2012).

Considering the aforementioned key aspects discussed in the review, this paper critically evaluates how Belfast as a city has carried out its destination management function from a visitors' perspective with specific emphasis on the cultural tourism aspect of the city. Furthermore, the paper has also adopted the classification of visitor behavior by Clawson & Knetsch (cited in Pearce, 2005) with a slight modification of adjusting the five phases into three major phases [namely Pre-visit, on-visit, and post-visit] for the ease of this analysis as well.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This research adopted a case study strategy as it has been used extensively in the social sciences to examine various types of research questions (Dezin and Lincoln, 1994; Yin, 1994). Both theoretical and practical considerations played important roles in choosing the empirical area (case study). Following the initial research goals, this chosen area had to have a relatively mature tourism industry and cultural tourism activities; offering service encounters at diverse visitor facilities and exhibiting advanced quality management practices. Hence, key tourist attractions in Belfast were selected as empirical regions (case study) such as Titanic Belfast, Ulster Museum, St George's market, Belfast City Hall, and St Anne's Cathedral.

3.2. Data collection

Gill and Johnson (2002) developed a four-fold categorisation of the role the participant observer can adopt, and this research used the participant observation method. Although such method includes "the relatively prolonged immersion of the observer in a social setting in which he or she seeks to observe the behavior of members of that setting (group, organisation, community, etc.) and to elicit the meanings they attribute to their environment and behavior"(Bryman and Bell, 2011:272), it allows behavior to be observed directly and "far greater insight into the issue of what managers do" (Bryman and Bell, 2011:270). Primary data were collected based on participant observation during a fieldwork visit to Belfast from 26th February to 2nd March 2018. Titanic Belfast and Titanic Studios and tourism information centre were visited on 27th February and other cultural attractions (e.g. Ulster Museum, St George's market, Belfast City Hall and St Anne's Cathedral) were visited on 1st March. During the visits, conversations were carried out with tourists to understand their experience and overall satisfaction levels in Belfast, and what Belfast could do differently to make them more satisfied. Talks with staff at different attractions and tourism information centres were used to understand how they provided services and contributed tourist experience in Belfast. Many pages of fieldwork notes and promotional brochures were taken for further analysis.

Even though secondary data-based researches are sometimes deemed to be a relatively inferior method of research, Gordon (1995) argues that the significance of secondary data-based research is dependent upon the context in which the research is done making secondary research a valid approach to research in its own right (Heaton, 2012). Hence considering a large amount of published data available with regards to the Belfast tourism industry, secondary research was conducted where a wide array of data with regards to the destination marketing and management in Belfast was gathered through a thorough review of websites of destination management organisations, local newspapers, local council documents, Journal articles, and relevant magazines.

3.3. Data analysis

A thematic analysis was adopted to analyse the fieldwork notes taken during the field trip to Belfast. Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013) defined thematic analysis as a method of identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns in the data set. Such a process is one of 'characterising, cutting, coding, categorising, converting and creating knowledge' (Brunt, Horner, and Semley, 2017: 243). Therefore, it is about identifying the themes and applying these to the data itself.

A summative content analysis was also adopted to analyse a range of secondary data collected from different sources and Hsieh and Shannon (2005) seven classic steps for qualitative content analysis were followed. Content analysis (CA) is a widely used research method (Berg, 2009; Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) in social science as *'this is a well-defined technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characterises of method'* (Brunt et al., 2017:254). There is a range of uses of CA in the tourism field (Camprubi and Coromina, 2016), such as the study of advertising and brochures (Huang and Liu, 2009; Govers and Go, 2005), the examination of the context of texts written by tourists (Dincer and Alrawadieh, 2017; Xiang et al., 2017) themselves or the identification of different understandings of conceptual issues in tourism (Camprubi and Coromina, 2016; Yousuf and Backer, 2015).

4. Findings and discussion

This section presents findings from both primary and secondary data on how effectively and efficiently Belfast has managed itself as a tourist destination across three tourist behavioral phases.

4.1 Pre-visit destination management analysis

The pre-visit behavioral phase of most tourists is largely dedicated to the searching of information where potential tourists attempt to gather as much information as possible with regards to the destination, they hope to visit to avoid any uncertainties during their tour (McCleary & Whitney, 1994; Gursoy & McCleary, 2004; Chang, et al., 2015). Such information found in the pre-visit phase then plays a critical role by forming a destination image in the minds of the potential tourists, which leads to the final purchase decision of the consumer (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999).

As elaborated by Lončarić, et al.(2013), in many destinations, the formation of this destination image and then using this image to promote the tourism industry of the region is primarily a function of the Destination Management Organization. As a result, DMO websites function as an important source of information provider for potential tourists during their pre-trip planning course (Choi, et al., 2007). Even in the context of Belfast, the official DMO website of the city [i.e. visitbelfast.com] has been a major source of information for potential tourists where a staggering 6 million consumers visit the website each year (Visit Belfast-d, 2017). Considering this, table 2 evaluates the DMO website using the conceptual model of DMOs' website evaluation proposed by Li & Wang (2010) from a visitors' perspective along with observations made by the author by visiting the website.

This analysis showcases that Visit Belfast is a content-rich website providing potential tourists with valuable insights regarding the destination. However, the website is clearly on the back foot in terms of customer engagement and online relationship maintenance aspects.

However, the DMO website alone is not the only facilitator for destination image or sole provider of information as potential tourists tend to search for information

using a variety of sources (Ho, et al., 2012). As proposed by (Gartner, 1994), induced, autonomous and organic forces play a role in forming the destination image from the perspective of a tourist. Hence this Pre-visit destination management section focuses on discussing the induced & autonomous forces whilst the predominant organic source; word of mouth is discussed under the post-travel destination management section later in this paper.

Table 2 - Visit Belfast website analysis

Dimension	Y	Discussion	Observations from Visit Belfast Official website
Information Dimension			
Attraction & activities information	✓	As stated by Kaplanidou & Vogt (2004) information or content is considered as the 'king' amongst all website characteristics. In essence, a DMO website should be able to effectively satisfy the information preferences of any person visiting the website by publishing information on a number of aspects with regards to a destination such as its attractions, events, accommodation, and transportation (TIA, 2004; Luna-Nevarez & Hyman, 2012).	The website offers a wide array of information ranging from where to stay, how to get to Belfast, how to travel within Belfast, where to eat, special events and festivals, and several other details. Additionally, the website is also neatly categorised into 4 main segments of visitor, conference, cruise, and corporate to provide in-depth information for any form of potential tourist who visits the website.
Maps & directions	✓		
Destination background information	✓		
Themed products	✓		
Events Calendar	✓		

Communication dimension			
Search Function	✓	Amongst the multitude of factors that visitors expect from a DMO website, functionalities such as searchable lists and Chatbots have increasingly started gaining prominence in the tourism industry (Choi, et al., 2007; Reeves & Walker, 2018). In other words, visitors are seeking frequent two-way communication when they visit DMO websites as they expect these websites to be ready to answer their travel-related queries promptly (Li & Wang, 2010).	Apart from enabling the search function in the website, it has also enabled a 'Most viewed' section in the homepage itself, allowing visitors who are visiting the website to get an understanding of what other visitors are seeking to do in Belfast, which can assist them with their decision-making process. However, there is no presence of an online chatbot, online forum, or FAQ section and the website does not allow commenting on any of the sub-pages of the website inclusive of their official blog page.
Interactive communication tools	X		
Online forum	X		
Comment box	X		
Online survey & FAQ	X		
Transaction dimension			
Online Reservation	X	As (Li & Wang, 2010) states enabling a transaction function in a DMO website enables DMOs to generate revenue for both internal & external stakeholders. Hence, as (Luna-Nevarez & Hyman, 2012) further elaborates a DMO	Interestingly the Visit Belfast official website has not enabled online reservations for any function within the website. However, the site does provide detailed information about all available attractions, events, and
Secure transaction	X		
Attraction tickets	X		
Event tickets	X		
Shopping carts	X		

		website should be capable of satisfying at least the fundamental commercial transactions required by potential visitors such as accommodation and special event bookings.	accommodation facilities in the city and also provides direct links to the main websites of the respective partners for any potential visitor who is interested in making an online reservation.
Relationship dimension			
Personalisation	X	The relationship dimension of DMO websites is being viewed as a top priority in the travel industry as a mode of conversing, retaining, and assisting potential tourists online (Sabre.com, 2017). In other words, personalising in an online platform has been identified as a top digital priority as it allows destinations to build stronger connections with potential consumers who may decide to visit their region (Inspiretec, 2018).	The website has limited personalisation functions and also does not have a specific section to handle any visitor complaints as well. Even though the website doesn't have any virtual tours, it has highlighted the 'Belfast: Go Explore 360' a virtual reality mobile application, allowing visitors who are interested in such VR experiences before they travel with valuable information. Additionally, the website is also partnered with several external stakeholders including accommodation providers and event organisers, and facilitates many cross-selling
Complaint handling	X		
Best deals	✓		
Virtual tours	X		
Cross-selling opportunities	✓		

		opportunities within the website as well.
Technical Merit dimension		As (Li & Wang, 2010) states the relative effectiveness of a DMO website is highly dependent upon how it successfully integrates the technological aspect of the web with the marketing aspect of the destination. Furthermore, (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2004) also state that easy accessibility, ease of navigation within the website through well-organised sub-pages, and consistency among the typeface and colour schemes used within a website are essential technical considerations that help in attracting a technologically savvy travel population.	The website is highly maneuverable with easy access to the home page with a click on the 'Visit Belfast' logo from any sub-page. The website is also efficiently linked to all of its official social media pages and the google meta tags are well-written making 'Visit Belfast' appear as the first search reference for anyone who searches the term 'Belfast'. The website has been optimised for mobile and tablet viewing as well.

Legend

Y – Availability or unavailability of the function in the Visit Belfast website

✓ – Available on the website

X – Unavailable on the website

This analysis is done based on the older version of the website

4.1.1   Induced Forces

Even amongst the aforementioned three factors suggested by (Gartner, 1994), DMO's has a higher possibility of creating a positive image in the minds of the visitor through induced forces that relate to conventional advertising means since such messages are typically delivered by the DMO's themselves (Beerli & Martin, 2004). Hence, table 3 evaluates how such induced forces has enabled the formation of a visitor image on Belfast city amongst their visitors using examples from the 3 major marketing campaigns of Summer 2017 Campaign [SC], Christmas 2017 Campaign [CC] and Belfast Go explore Campaign [BGC].

Table 3 – Integrated Marketing Campaign Analysis

Factor	Discussion	Observations and Analysis
Offline advertising	As (Xiang, et al., 2015) argue, despite the internet assuming the leading role in information provision for travellers, other sources of information provided such as television and radio remain relevant amongst most travellers. Hence, such offline advertising mediums still have the possibility of creating a degree of disruption and 'push' the consumers towards purchasing a travel product as well (Gretzel, et al., 2000).	- Both SC & CC engaged in the distribution of leaflets in areas in which their target audiences resided with 67,000 & 100,000 leaflets per campaign, respectively. - CC also engaged in TV & Radio advertisements across many channels such as UTV, ITV, and Cool FM, RTE Radio 1. - Both SC & CC advertised on billboards using creative artworks in Dublin and Northern Ireland.
Sales Promotions	Sales promotions have always been an attractive marketing element for most visitors as they usually include some type of incentive attached to them	- SC carried out a special 'Win a unique trip to Belfast for two' competition - CC carried out several competitions such as 12 days of

	(Christou, 2011). Even amongst various sales promotions tactics, promotional competitions have stood out from a visitor's perspective as they perceive it as a form of further encouragement to purchase a travel product which they are already interested in (Peattie & Peattie, 1996).	Christmas giveaway, a Magical festive family trip to Belfast & a collaborative competition on the radio with U105 radio.
Online & marketing	In today's context, the initial destination image for most potential visitors regarding a destination is formed in an online platform as a result of online marketing by an internal or external party (Pan & Li, 2011). Most consumers also believe that the content published in online sources, including social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram, to be a highly trustworthy source of information, demonstrating that online marketing efforts are a crucial tool in establishing a positive visitor perspective for a destination (Fotis, et al., 2012).	- Both SC & CC carried out sponsored and promoted Facebook & Instagram advertisements specifically targeting their respective audiences. These campaigns alone created more than 2.5 million impressions on their official pages. - CC also carried out digital display advertising on google resulting in 900,000 impressions from potential consumers in Ireland. - CC carried out a comprehensive email campaign amongst 450,000 potential consumers across Ireland and UK. - BGC entirely focused on a mobile platform where promotions were made to push

		potential tourists to download the app. before they arrived in Belfast

Even though it is difficult to quantify how such campaigns impact a visitors perspective on a destination, 12 similar campaigns run by Visit Belfast in 2016 successfully generated 445,000 bed nights and 58 million GBP in revenue to the city, showcasing that such campaigns play a critical role in attracting visitors by creating a positive image about the destination in the minds of the potential tourists (VisitBelfast-e, 2016).

4.1.2   Autonomous Forces

As (Gartner, 1994) elucidates, autonomous sources refer to independent image producers such as books, films & documentaries that are separate from the direct forces discussed in the earlier section. Even amongst such autonomous forces, film-induced tourism has increasingly come into the spotlight as critical awareness and motivation creator for potential visitors to visit a given destination where a particular movie/ television series has been filmed (Busby & Klug, 2001; Tkalec, et al., 2017). Even in the case of Northern Ireland and Belfast, the popular HBO TV series 'Game of Thrones has been their single largest autonomous force driving the tourism industry bringing in an unprecedented number of fans of the show to the region whilst generating millions to the local economy (The Irish News, 2016).

This hit TV series has helped Belfast in creating a positive destination image, and despite the DMO having little control over the indirect marketing the destination is getting through the series; Visit Belfast has extensively used this opportunity to remodel Belfast's destination image to attract fans through initiatives such as dedicated Game of Thrones web page in the DMO website, Rebranding the airport as 'Westeros Airport' and featuring Game of Thrones attractions (Example – Game of Thrones Tapestry in Ulster Museum) within its existing cultural attractions (Hahm & Wang, 2011). The image Game of Thrones has built on potential tourists therefore been significant, with a tremendous £150 million being generated to the North Irish economy including Belfast in 2016 being a great testament for this matter (Girvin, 2016).

4.2 On-visit destination management analysis

As Bornhorst, et al. (2010) elaborate, there is a multitude of variables that needs to be placed by a given DMO before the arrival of any potential tourist to ensure that the tourists experience a memorable stay at their destination. An analysis of fieldwork notes, it is clear that in Buhalis (2000), four out of 6As [namely – Attractions, Accessibility, Amenities, and Activities] are considered as defining factors of success influencing the tourist experience and satisfaction in Belfast. Hence, this section of the paper presents a critical assessment on-visit experience of tourists in Belfast from these four aspects.

4.2.1   Accessibility & Amenities

Despite the increased use of the web for information gathering, Visitor Information Centres make a significant contribution to the overall visitor experience of travellers by providing quality information about the destination upon their arrival (Mistilis & D'ambra, 2008). Hence, as presented by (DiPietro, et al., 2007), visitor centres remain as a typical source of information for travellers while they are at a destination showcasing the importance of having an established Visitor Information Centre that can cater to the varying needs of tourists visiting the destination. Additionally, visitor centres are also key places in which tourists could obtain a 'visitors guide' on the destination, which remains the most influential source of information being used, especially amongst international travellers while in a destination (Pearce & Schott, 2005). The main visitor centre operated by Visit Belfast is centrally located right in front of the Belfast City Hall with easy access from anywhere within the city and also directly from the airport [via the airport express]. The centre gives a range of information on what to do, where to stay and eat in Belfast (Belfast City Council, 2018). Most importantly the visitor information centres provide tourists with a free visitor guide to the city which comprehensively details must-see attractions, special events, tours and places to eat, etc. (VIsit Belfast-j, 2018). Furthermore, another interesting observation of the main visitor centre was that it offered souvenirs & gifts for sale which were relevant for both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland as well.

Accessibility is a key element that links tourists to destinations making it a vital consideration for tourists when deciding with regards to visiting a specific country or region (Toth & David, 2010). Hence it is apparent that visitors tend to consider

the costs & the distance attached to visiting a specific destination before making a purchase decision with regards to travel (Celata, 2007). In this sense, making the destination at hand accessible and making the modes of transport to the destination reasonably priced are essential components for a DMO to attract an increased number of visitors to the region. Belfast is easily accessible to visitors from North America and over 20 European countries through their two airports (International & City). It can be reached by sea from both England & Scotland. Belfast can be reached either by road, by bus, or even by rail for any potential visitors from the Republic of Ireland as well (Visit Belfast-g, 2018). Visit Belfast also offers a 'Visit Belfast Pass' which the visitors could use for unlimited travel in Metro buses, NI Railways, and Ulsterbus services for a fixed charge making travelling within the city very convenient (Visit Belfast-h, 2018). Belfast city is also conveniently divided into 4 main quarters as Cathedral, Titanic, Queens & Gaeltacht each with its unique & distinctive attractions (Sutherland, 2008). Since the city is quite compact, walking, cycling, and taxi services are also feasible options for visitors travelling within the city (Visit Belfast-i, 2018).

4.2.2 Attractions

The growth of the internet and mobile technology has resulted in a significant change in the visitor behavior, where most travellers have seemingly started desiring more flexibility in the travel where they postpone and hold on to making secondary decisions such as attraction and activity bookings until they arrive at a destination without pre-booking (Pearce & Schott, 2005; Xiang, et al., 2015). However, upon arriving at a destination, visitors either voluntarily or involuntarily consider several aspects when selecting attractions to visit, which as (Swarbrooke, 2002) highlights are considered as product-based factors that determine the success of an attraction. Hence, some of these factors are analysed whilst deriving examples from the tangible cultural offerings highlighted in the literature review section above to understand how the attractions within Belfast are being managed in table 4 below:

Table 4. Attractions Highlights

Factor	Examples from Belfast
Unique concepts	The Titanic Belfast is one of the most unique attractions in its wake in the world (Titanic Belfast, 2018). A fascinating 159 reviewers in TripAdvisor specifically using the word 'unique' to describe Titanic Belfast is also a great testament to show how novel the concept of this attraction is as well (TripAdvisor, 2018). The ship HMS Caroline is considered a unique survivor of world war 1 and a ship of its kind (Visit Belfast-k, 2018). Fourteen reviewers have highlighted this attraction as 'Unique' in Tripadvisor too (TripAdvisor-b, 2018).
Location of the attractions	As mentioned in the official DMO website, attractions such as the Belfast City Hall, Ulster Museum & Crumlin Road Gaol, are located within a 2km radius from the city center, while Titanic Belfast & HMS Caroline are located within a 5km radius, showcasing that visitors can cover multiple attractions within a short amount of time as most attractions are located close to each other (Visit Belfast-l, 2018).
Visitor facilities	Whilst all attractions taken into consideration have quality basic facilities such as clean toilets and information facilities, attractions such as Titanic Belfast, Ulster Museum offer car parking and dining facilities as well (Titanic Belfast, 2018).
Price	Some of the city's infamous attractions, such as the Belfast City Hall and Ulster Museum, are open to visitors without any entrance tickets (VIsit Belfast-j, 2018). Additionally, most ticketed attractions (Crumlin Road, Titanic Belfast) in the city have also been considered as good value for money by many tourists across reviews.

In addition to the above, Swarbrooke (2002) also highlighted that factors such as quality customer service, high-quality environment, and offering variety at the attractions also assisted attractions in attracting visitors.

4.2.3   Activities

As highlighted by Russo & Van Der Borg (2002), when a given destination does not have sufficient tangible cultural assets to develop a viable tourism industry, it needs to concentrate on promoting other forms of culture such as special events and gastronomy to bring out a diverse and attractive destination image as well. Even though Belfast does not specifically lack tangible cultural offerings, the city offers many intangible and contemporary cultural offerings to compliment the overall tourism product of the destination, as highlighted below:

4.2.4   Gastronomy

Food is considered as one of the key elements of the culture of any society where tourists believe that experiencing new cuisines in visiting destinations is a part of experiencing the culture of that particular destination (Fields, 2002). As (Kivela & Crotts, 2006) further elaborates gastronomy-based tourists do not consume food & drinks at a visiting destination merely to satisfy their hunger, instead they use it as a method of gaining in-depth knowledge about the destination's culture. Hence, destinations need to consider and capitalise on gastronomy as a vital resource that can attract potential tourists to their region (Sánchez-Cañizares & López-Guzmán, 2012).

As displayed in the official DMO website, Belfast already has a remarkable 47 gastronomy-based events planned out for 2018 starting from mid-March until the end of the year (Visit Belfast-n, 2018). A highlight amongst these gastronomical events is 'Belfeast', an artisan street food market specialising in North Irish food which portrays the city's culture to visiting tourists (Visit Belfast-o, 2018). Additionally, as per TripAdvisor, there are another 13 gastronomy-related tours/ experiences organised within the city of Belfast ranging from cookery classes to beer tastings, each with very high customer ratings showcasing that gastronomy is a strong cultural motivator for travellers to visit Belfast (TripAdvisor-d, 2018).

4.2.5   Traditional events & festivals

Due to their perceived attractiveness, DMO's worldwide effectively promote local traditional festivals as a form of tourist attractions (Felsenstein & Fleischer, 2003). From the perspective of a visitor who is attracted towards special interest tourism activities, a traditional event of a foreign destination may appeal as a mode of experiencing the culture of the given area, motivating them to visit the particular destination as well (McKercher, et al., 2006).

Belfast city is home to many annual traditional events and festivals ranging from St. Patrick's Day celebrations to events such as Belfast Titanic maritime festival and 'Féile an Earraigh' that attract thousands of tourists year on year (Visit Belfast-r, 2018). For an instance, the St. Patrick's Day celebrations in Belfast attracted thousands of visitors to the city in 2018 despite harsh weather conditions showcasing the stimulating effect such events have on potential visitors to visit a given destination (Madden, 2018).

4.2.6   Music & Performing Arts

As elaborated by (Dolnicar, 2002) theatre & performing arts has become a popular subsector within cultural tourism, where a new genre of tourists has emerged within the tourism system with a specific need of visiting theatre, music, or opera performances at least once during a given trip to a destination. These omnivore's cultural tourists have been identified as a seemingly important segment of tourists for DMO's because, despite their specific interests, such tourists also tend to experience a breadth of cultural activities while touring, generating further economic benefits for the destination (Barbieri & Mahoney, 2010).

As listed on the DMO website, Belfast has 144 scheduled music events & concerts scheduled from mid-March to the end of 2018 ranging from cultural music events such as the Ulster Orchestra to international concerts featuring renowned global artists and bands such as Jason Derulo and Avenged Sevenfold (Visit Belfast-p, 2018). At the same time, Belfast also has a range of contemporary arts & craft-based events, whereas per the DMO website, there are 37 events listed for 2018 ranging from photo & arts festivals to contemporary orchestra performances (Visit Belfast-q, 2018). As highlighted by (Wiemers, 2017; McCreary, 2018), the performing arts such as the Ulster Orchestra in Belfast have often been referred to

as brilliant, showcasing the value of such activities for the city's tourism industry from a tourist perspective.

4.3 Post-visit destination management analysis

As Chi (2015) suggests, the ultimate goal for any DMO is to ensure that the tourists who visit their destination leave their city/ country with a long-lasting memory amassed through engaging in remarkable and unforgettable experiences during their holiday at the given destination. Even from a visitor's perspective, the level of satisfaction they derive from their holiday has a strong direct relation to destination loyalty where if the destination has met or exceeded their expectations, their image on the destination will improve significantly, resulting in word of mouth marketing and/or repeat visitations as well (Jani & Nguni, 2016; Antón, et al., 2017). This phenomenon has measured visitor satisfaction as an important attribute in destination management as it is increasingly being considered as a leading indicator of destination performance (Meng, et al., 2008; Wang, 2016).

4.3.1   Visitor Satisfaction

Despite a plethora of visitor satisfaction measurement models, this review utilises TripAdvisor reviews to derive insights on visitor perspectives regarding Belfast. Since most tourists are usually motivated to share a review online either when they go through a negative experience or a highly positive experience at a destination (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008), analysing Tripadvisor has allowed this paper to obtain valuable insights about the success of a destination from a visitors' perspective (Kladou & Mavragani, 2015). Hence the below table 6 examines the overall TripAdvisor ratings of the top cultural tangible/intangible & contemporary cultural offerings of Belfast analysed throughout the review while drawing out comparisons from Google & Facebook reviews as well:

Table 5. TripAdvisor review analysis

	TripAdvisor	**Google Reviews**	**Facebook reviews**
Tangible			
Titanic Belfast	4.5 out of 5	4.4 out of 5	4.5 out of 5
Belfast City Hall	4.5 out of 5	4.5 out of 5	N/A
Ulster Museum	4.6 out of 5	4.5 out of 5	4.8 out of 5
Crumlin Road Gaol	4.5 out of 5	4.6 out of 5	4.5 out of 5
Belfast Castle	4.0 out of 5	4.4 out of 5	4.3 out of 5
St. George's Market	4.5 out of 5	4.6 out of 5	4.8 out of 5
St. Anne's Cathedral	4.0 out of 5	4.2 out of 5	4.5 out of 5
Grand Opera House	4.5 out of 5	4.6 out of 5	4.6 out of 5
HMS Caroline	5.0 out of 5	4.6 out of 5	4.9 out of 5
Stormont (Parliament)	4.5 out of 5	N/A	4.2 out of 5
Intangible/ Contemporary			
Belfast food tours	5.0 out of 5	5.0 out of 5	5.0 out of 5
Ulster Orchestra	N/A	5.0 out of 5	4.9 out of 5
Game of Thrones tours	5.0 out of 5	4.5 out of 5	4.9 out of 5
Echlinville Distillery tour	5.0 out of 5	5.0 out of 5	N/A
Black taxi tour	4.5 out of 5	5.0 out of 5	5.0 out of 5
Belfast Walking tour	5.0 out of 5	3.8 out of 5	5.0 out of 5
Belfast Mural tour	5.0 out of 5	4.8 out of 5	N/A
Seedhead arts tour	5.0 out of 5	N/A	5.0 out of 5

By analysing the aforementioned overall reviews for each attraction across TripAdvisor, Facebook and Google it is evident that most attractions are maintaining highly satisfactory levels of feedback testifying that tourists visiting Belfast are happy with what the city is offering. However, apart from a few notable exemptions, it was noted that most of the above attractions had not responded to the client reviews in any of the platforms despite the critical importance of responding to such reviews, especially if they highlight any negative comments (Campbell, 2016).

Even from a DMO's perspective, visitor performance measurement has been identified as part of industry best practice, and DMO's have been forced to adopt comprehensive visitor satisfaction measurement models to remain competitive in the industry (Phillips & Louvieris, 2005). Belfast city has also adopted an annual survey to measure visitor satisfaction, and the year-on-year results of the survey are displayed in Table 6 below:

Table 6. Tourist Satisfaction Analysis

Year	Belfast Welcome	Attractions
2005 (Belfast City Council, 2005)	8.25/10	7.54/10
2006 (Belfast City Council, 2006)	8.30/10	7.67/10
2007 (Belfast City Council, 2007)	9.40/10	7.84/10
2008 (Belfast City Council, 2008)	8.66/10	8.03/10
2009 (Belfast City Council, 2009)	9.50/10	8.43/10
2010 (Belfast City Council, 2010)	9.30/10	8.54/10

| **2011** (Belfast City Council, 2011) | 8.68/10 | 8.51/10 |
| **2012** (Belfast City Council, 2012) | 8.45/10 | 8.09/10 |

Even though the most recent visitor satisfaction survey results are yet to be published, the aforementioned chart showcases that Belfast as a destination has remained highly consistent in delivering its tourism product by continuously scoring very high marks in the annual visitor surveys, which resonate with the findings from the above TripAdvisor review analysis as well.

4.3.2   Visitor Recommendation

As highlighted by Murphy, et al (2007), potential tourists view word of mouth as one of the most credible sources of information which have a direct impact on the purchase decision of a holiday to a given destination. Even in the context of Belfast (Belfast City Council, 2008) testifies that many tourists visiting Belfast rely heavily on word of mouth recommendations when making their travel choices showcasing the critical role WOM plays in aligning a visitor's image with regards to the destination. Hence, ensuring that the visitors leaving the destination provide positive word of mouth to their friends or relatives or even online is critical for destination success (Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003). As per the findings of the Belfast City Council's visitor surveys from 2005-2011, apart from a considerable fluctuation in 2011, almost three-quarters of the tourists who visited Belfast were likely to recommend the city as a tourist attraction to others. This figure comprehensively showcases that from a visitor's perspective, Belfast has been managed well, resulting in a higher probability for the visitors to recommend the destination to others.

5.   CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The critical assessment of destination management in Belfast showcases that the city is currently experiencing unprecedented growth in the tourism industry. It also shows that Belfast as a destination largely owes its success in the tourism industry to its cultural heritage in all its tangible, intangible, and contemporary forms as it has functioned as a focal point in attracting tourists to the city. It is also evident that the city's DMO [i.e. Visit Belfast] has understood the importance of visitor

perspectives in destination management and has consistently taken steps to cater to the needs of the tourists effectively and efficiently. However, the city is currently at a phase where it needs to increasingly consider the adoption of sustainable practices to achieve its ambitious goals and sustain its tourism industry in the long run. The concept of sustainability has come into the spotlight in the tourism industry, where both academic and industry practitioners have increasingly identified the importance of developing destinations sustainably (Curtin & Busby, 1999; Buckley, 2012). As elaborated by Vellecco & Mancino (2010) if the tourism industry is adequately channelled towards the path of sustainable development, the industry will not only show significant improvements in terms of economic growth but will also create social progress and enhance the cultural and natural heritage of the destination as well.

Considering the above, this section aims at providing recommendations for destination Belfast to carry out destination development based on the three main components of the Triple Bottom Line which are considered to be an ideal framework for sustainable tourism development (Stoddard, et al., 2012).

5.1 Economic bottom line

Engage in conventional marketing at high potential markets
Despite the rise of the internet as the leading marketing channel for tourism, Howell (2017) elaborates that traditional forms of advertising are still being openly welcomed by consumers as an acceptable source of information provision. Hence in the case of Belfast, the city should concentrate on how traditional forms of advertising could be used to attract more visitors from international destinations such as Italy and Spain that have shown an increased potential in recent years (Tourism Ireland, 2016). For example, Sri Lanka Tourism advertising taxis across 3 major cities of United Kingdom; i.e. one of the leading tourist generators to the country (Media Agency Group, 2014).

Increased focus on measuring destination performance
As highlighted by Belfast City Council (2015), one of the major constraints that are limiting Belfast from achieving further economic success from its tourism industry is the lack of current and accurate market data where proper destination

performance indicators have not been researched and/ or published since 2012. Hence, the DMO Belfast should concentrate on re-implementing its visitor satisfaction and other destination performance measurement schemes to get an idea of where the destination stands which will enable the destination to make better strategic decisions. Visit Belfast could adopt a balanced scorecard method to assess the overall performance of the destination (Phillips & Louvieris, 2005).

Increasing packaged offerings

As Belfast City Council (2015) identifies, one of the prevalent weaknesses in the current product offering in Belfast is the lack of packaged experiences. Hence, it is recommended to implement specialised or customisable packages for tourists visiting Belfast as it has a higher possibility of benefiting the tourism industry (Lam, 2018). Offering a standard pass at a fixed discounted price to visit top attractions in Belfast such as the London Pass which is an all-inclusive package allows tourists visiting London to cover multiple attractions using one entrance ticket (Ellen, 2018).

5.2 Social bottom line

Improved foreign relations to face the post Brexit era

Strong international relations with foreign countries that generate tourists to a destination is a critical success factor for the success of destination management (Kabus & Nowakowska-Grunt, 2016). However, Brexit has offered Ireland a brand-new challenge with a significant impact on the tourism industry (Quinn, 2016), including Belfast where the city's 2023 bid for the European Cultural Capital being removed by the European Union is one example of this matter (McKeown, 2017). Considering the above, Belfast must look into improving their foreign relations globally through looking into factors as highlighted in the examples to remain competitive in the tourism industry.

Catering to the information needs of all international travellers online

To cater to the modern tech-savvy consumer, DMO websites should not only have a rich set of information about the destination but instead should also be able to translate the website content into the language of preference of a potential international traveller (Mele & Cantoni, 2016). For instance, The VisitBritain website allows its web visitors to view the site using several different languages

such as French, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, and Italian (VisitBritain, 2018). Additionally, DMO's should also concentrate on advertising on 'Landmark websites' about individual countries of different international travellers as some potential visitors may never visit a DMO website before making a purchase decision (Ho, et al., 2012).

Creating a CSR strategy that benefits the local community

Destinations worldwide, and their specific DMO's have been forced to adopt coherent CSR strategies due to the increased prominence of sustainable development within the tourism industry in recent years (Estrella, et al., 2016). Additionally, consumers highly perceive that the local community should be a central benefactor from CSR programmes, showcasing the importance of Belfast adopting CSR strategies that ultimately benefit its host population (Öberseder, et al., 2013). Helping marginalised communities in Belfast from the revenue tourism generates to the city – 'Say Goodnight to Hunger' campaign by OMNI Hotels where the project provides a free dinner for a family of four in the US for every booking made with the hotel by a traveller (OMNI Hotels & Resorts, 2018).

5.3 Environmental bottom line

Creating a sustainability-oriented visitor center

Since the visitor center located in the city center is usually the first stop for most tourists visiting Belfast (Visit Belfast-t, 2018), this place needs to showcase itself as a sustainable venture in the perspective of tourists. A sustainable visitor center should aim at being energy-friendly, authentic, and environmentally responsible by adopting practices similar to the ones mentioned in the suggestions below (European Regional Development Fund, 2011): Limiting printed material within the center only for the most important documents such as the visitor guides and provide other brochures to visitors on request over the counter or via an E-brochure (Scottish Power, 2018). Developing unique concepts to manage elements such as waste management – The Whipsnade Zoo using the disposed water bottles to create park benches (Barbour Product Search, 2015).

Aiding partner companies to implement sustainable practices

As (Curtin & Busby, 1999) puts forward, some tourism entities do not adopt sustainability-based initiatives in their business practices as they believe such

attempts would put them at a commercial disadvantage whilst some entities believe that their specific clientele has a lesser interest in sustainable development and therefore adopting such practices is not a necessity. However, Belfast should focus on achieving a holistic environmental development within the city where the entire tourism industry attempts to implement environmentally friendly initiatives within their capacities (Williams, 2004). Educating the tourism businesses in Belfast and showcasing the potential returns they can have by adopting sustainable initiatives by providing factual data such as how 1 in 3 tourists visiting Northern Ireland prefer to stay at an accommodation with green credentials and how 25% of all tourists visiting the region are willing to pay more for eco-friendly products (Tourism Northern Ireland, 2018).

Educating tourists about the importance of Sustainability
For a destination to gain optimal results from their sustainable destination management efforts, the tourists visiting the area need to play an engaging role by adhering to such practices as well (Pulido-Fernández & López-Sánchez, 2016). Hence, it is essential to educate the tourists visiting the region on the sustainable initiatives that the destination at hand is following as they are then more likely to respond to such practices positively put in place when they visit the destination (Stanford, 2006). Highlighting the importance of Sustainability and what the destination is doing in terms of sustainable practices in the Visit-Belfast website, for instance, the official New Zealand tourism website generates '108' different search results ranging from excursions to blog posts when the word 'Sustainability is searched for in their website (Tourism New Zealand, 2018).

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