

## Destination Image: A Conceptual Study

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### ABSTRACT

Although product image has long been postulated in the marketing literature to have a powerful influence in the purchasing process, academicians and practitioners also have attempted to understand the role of image in the travel decision process and to measure destination images and therefore destination image has received much attention over the recent years. The purpose of this paper is to present a review and discussion of the concept and measurement of destination image, within a marketing perspective. The theoretical aspects of this concept and measurement are treated in this study.

**Keywords:** Destination Image, Tourism and Travel.

### INTRODUCTION

As an engine for economic growth, tourism has been found to be resilient and offers scope for foreign exchange earnings, generating employment, revenue and stimulating domestic consumptions well (Modeste, 1995; Steiner, 2006). Studies have demonstrated that tourism plays a significant role towards balanced sustainable development of an economy and that it can be effectively harnessed to generate net benefits for the poor (UNWTO, 2002). The potential of tourism as a tool for an economic growth and poverty reduction is derived from several unique characteristics of the tourism system (UNWTO, 2002). Tourism can play an important and effective role in achieving the growth with equity. Tourism has the potential to grow at a high rate and simultaneously ensure consequential development of the infrastructure of the destinations. It can help a nation to leverage upon its natural scenic resources and capitalize on the country's success in the services sector as well as provide sustainable models of growth. Tourism sector stimulates forward linkages and cross-sectorial synergies. Expenditure on tourism induces a chain of transactions requiring supply of goods and services from the related sectors. The consumption demand, emanating from tourist expenditure also prompts more employment and generates a multiplier effect on the economy as well as on the other allied economic sectors like agriculture, horticulture, poultry, handicrafts, transport, construction, etc. through its backward and forward linkages.

Tourism, the generic concept, is defined as the travel for entertainment, and offering all services relating to this activity (World Tourism Organization, 2007). Coltman (1989) defined Tourism as “a short-term journey, which starts from one point and finally ends there. And during the journey, several or many places are visited according to the program, and great amounts of foreign currency which tourists pay, go to the host country.” Travel and Tourism is an important economic activity in almost every country of the world. The sector has reflected significant indirect and induced impacts over the past six decades; tourism has experienced continued expansion and diversification, to become one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors in the world. According to the United Nations World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), the Travel & Tourism sector accounted for 10% (US\$ 8.9 trillion) of the global GDP, 330 million jobs (one in every ten jobs), 6.8% (US\$ 1.7 trillion) of total global exports and 4.3% (US\$ 940 billion) of total investment in the year 2019 (WTTC, 2020). This unprecedented growth in the tourism industry has created major challenges in tourism marketing. As more and more areas of the world are developed for tourism, the destination choices available to consumers continue to expand. Furthermore, today's consumers, facilitated by increased leisure time, rising levels of disposable income and more efficient transportation networks, have the means to choose from among this much larger variety of destinations. As a result, tourism marketers are now faced with influencing

consumer decision making in an increasingly complex and competitive global marketplace. One of the most significant marketing challenges arising from this situation is the need for an effective destination positioning strategy. In order to be successfully promoted in the targeted markets, a destination must be favourably differentiated from its competition, or positively positioned, in the minds of the consumers. A key component of this positioning process is the creation and management of a distinctive and appealing perception, or image, of the destination (Calantone et al., 1989; Echtner and Ritchie's (1991). One important aspect of destination marketing is destination image management. As an elusive and confusing construct, image is believed to have a rather strong effect on consumer behavior and, influence tourist behaviour (Hunt, 1975; Pearce, 1982). Thus, it has received increasing attention from destination marketers. It became a focus of tourism research in the early 1990s, and attention to this construct increased in the 2000s. This momentum coincides with the realization of the importance of the destination image in destination promotion by both academics and industry practitioners. It has been a relatively well-studied line of inquiry in the field of hospitality and tourism for more than 30 years (Tasci et al., 2006).

### **CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF DESTINATION IMAGE IN LIGHT OF VARIOUS RESEARCHES**

Destination image is the key construct in destination positioning and plays an important role in travel decisions, the definition of 'destination image' is not so certain. It is difficult to define what destination image exactly is, as this term has been defined and used differently in a variety of contexts and disciplines. The earlier definition of destination image by Reynolds (1965) states that destination image is a mental construct developed by a potential visitor on the basis of a few selected impressions among the numerous impressions; it comes into being through a creative process in which these impressions are elaborated, embellished, and ordered. Hunt (1971) defines destination image as the impression that a person or persons hold about a state in which they do not reside provides a narrow definition of destination even though it may be a well-defined geographical area such as a country, an island or a town (Hall, 2000). Destination image can be defined as not only the perception of individual destination attributes but also the holistic impression made by the destination (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). Morgan and Pritchard (1998) explained the concept of destination image as being more than just a set of attributes and added that brand strategists frequently incorporate "feel" or mood of the destination as well as function or attribute-based components. Destination image is in the "eye of the beholder"; different groups will understand the destination in different ways based on their previous experiences. The most cited definition in destination image studies has been that suggested by Crompton (1979) defined it as the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination. Choi et al. (1999) also maintained that destination image is people's belief, idea or impression about a place. Kim and Richardson (2003) summarized the destination image as a totality of impressions, beliefs, ideas, expectations, and feelings accumulated towards a place over time.

According to Xia et al. (2009), destination image has been frequently proved to have direct effect on tourist behaviour, i.e. tourist expectation and perceived value. The destination image is defined as an individual's mental representation of the knowledge, feelings, and overall perception of a particular destination. In fact, several dimensions related to the tourist behaviours, such as their expectations and perception of value, are conditioned by the image that they have from the destination (Chi and Qu, 2008). The image is the cluster of all perceptions the customers hold for that destination (Terzibasoglu., 2004). The different definitions for image as provided by various authors have some common features in the sense that they all talk of mental impression of something. However, each definition adds some flavour which helps to distinguish the concept from experienced based perception. The researcher considers a destination image as a holistic impression made by a destination to the prospect's minds basing on all available sources of information including physical experience and otherwise and varies from person to person.

## THE MEASUREMENT OF A DESTINATIONS IMAGE

The measurement of a destinations image in the customer's mind has received much attention from tourism marketing researchers. Due to the importance of destination image in tourism marketing research, numerous destination image studies have been conducted in the last two decades. There has been a strong preference for structured methods in researching destination image (Jenkins, 1999). Researchers using structured methods typically ask an individual to rate a set of the attribute components of destination image. The relevant scales usually include cultural and natural attractions, climate, accommodation and personal safety using standardized rating scales designed with Likert and semantic differential response formats. Structured methodologies are easy to administer and well suited for sophisticated statistical techniques. In addition, different tourists may value the same destination attributes for different reasons. Quantitative or structured techniques (positivist approach) have tended to predominate in the field of tourism research generally and image research specifically. As a result, the majority of destination image studies have tended to focus on the common, attribute-based aspects of destination image, Reiley and Love (2000) highlighted the preference for quantitative methodologies. They conducted a review of tourism research using feature articles from four journals: *Annals of Tourism Research*, *Journal of Tourism Research*, *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, and *Tourism Management*. Based on the number of quantitative versus qualitative articles in the four journals, they concluded that positivism is the dominant paradigm in tourism research. Similarly, Pike (2002) conducted a review of 142 papers in the destination image literature from the period 1973-2000: the majority of papers (114) used structured techniques to operationalize the destination image construct. The most popular data analysis technique was factor analysis (41 papers), followed by *t*-tests (21), perceptual mapping/multidimensional scaling (21), analysis of means (20), cluster analysis (14), importance-performance analysis (9), repertory grid (8), mapping techniques (3), constant sum (2) and conjoint analysis. Gunn (1972) study identified three types of images that individuals hold of a particular destination basing on their experiences- Organic and induced image. Organic image arises from non-tourism information such as geography, books, television reports, or magazine articles. An induced image can arise from tourism specific information such as a destination brochure or vacation website which is a product of destination marketing efforts. An individual can have an organic image towards a particular destination even though the individual has no intention to travel to the destination whereas people can purposefully seek travel information about a destination through its promotional materials and thus hold an induced image if they have a specific intention to visit the destination Fakeye and Crompton (1991) adopted this model and included a third image by incorporating the actual visitation experiences into a complex image. Image was proposed to evolve through three stages i.e. organic, induced, and complex. In their conceptualization, organic image represents an awareness of the destination and is present before destination promotions are introduced. Induced images are formed when promotions are viewed and evaluated against organic image. Complex image results from the actual visitation and experience to the destination. Furthermore, Fakeye and Crompton (1991) linked these three types of image to the three functions of promotion which are to inform, to persuade, and to remind. Informative materials were hypothesized to be most effective at the organic stage, persuasive materials at the induced stage, and reminding materials at the complex stage.

Building on the work of Gunn (1972), Gartner (1993) proposed a typology of eight image formation agents relating to degree of control by the promoter and credibility with the target market. They are overt induced I, overt induced II, covert induced I, covert induced II, autonomous, unsolicited organic, solicited organic, and organic. The four "induced" categories are within greater control of destination marketing organizations. For example, traditional consumer advertising by destinations, overt induced I, is the most highly controlled but the lowest in audience credibility. Credibility is increased somewhat by use of a celebrity spokesperson (covert induced I) in destination advertisements. Information provided by the travel trade is representative of overt induced II. The source of much of this information is a destination, so control is medium and credibility is enhanced through the

middle party. Familiarization tours, organized by a destination marketing organization for travel media and sponsors, are included in the covert induced II category. Autonomous image formation agents are authoritative and credible. They consist of news and popular culture, widely received sources beyond the destination's control that can swiftly create and change an image. Unsolicited and solicited organic image formation categories refer to information requested from unbiased sources, and information given by knowledgeable others, respectively. Finally, organic image formation is based on past experience with the destination and it is the most credible. Gartner (1993) argued that image formation agents differentially affect formation of mental destination images and therefore have important implications for creation and change of image by destination marketers.

Phelps (1986) categorized destination images into primary and secondary depending on the information sources used. While primary images are formed through internal information such as past experiences and secondary images are influenced by information received from some external sources. Baloglu and McCleary (1999) propose a model of destination image formation and postulated that an image is formed by two major forces i.e. stimulus factor (external stimulus, physical object and previous experience) and personal factors (motivation, personality, motivation, age, education, marital status and the like). Moreover, Echtner and Ritchie (1993) proposed a comprehensive, multidimensional definitional and measurement approach to destination image. Image was described as being comprised of three dimensions such as attribute-holistic, functional-psychological, and common-unique. The attribute holistic dimension refers to a continuum of an individual element to an overall impression. For example, a destination's image is comprised of beliefs about specific attributes such as accommodation, climate, ease of access, etc. as well as a more overall or holistic impression. The functional psychological dimension distinguishes between the parts of an image which are directly observable (e.g., prices) and those which are intangible (e.g., friendliness). The third element, common unique, recognizes what is similar about a destination and what is distinctive about it

The importance of the tourist destination's image is universally acknowledged, since it affects the individual's subjective perception and consequent behaviour and destination choice (Chon 1990, 1992; Echtner and Ritchie 1991; Stabler, 199 ).Stepchenkova and Mills (2010) suggested that researching destination image can aid destination marketing organizations *“to better understand how to control existing destination images, to repair damage inflicted by negative events occurring at a destination, and ultimately, to project desirable images of the destination in economically important markets”*. Several studies on the relationship between destination image and visitation intentions find that there is a positive correlation between image and behaviour intention. Destinations with strong and positive images are more likely considered and chosen in the travel decision process (Milman and Pizam, 1995). Many researchers conclude that images form a crucial basis for destination choice and travel decision making (Woodside and Lysonski, 1989).

The Image of a destination also has some impact on variables such as the satisfaction or dissatisfaction that a tourist derived from the destination. Chon and Olsen (1991) found that measuring an image by evaluating a list of attributes was significantly correlated to the satisfaction with a destination's products. That image can in turn mould expectations ahead of an actual visit (Bigne et al., 2001), while the evaluation of the experience at the destination can influence the image and modify it (Chon and Olsen, 1991; Etchner and Ritchie, 1991; Fakeye and Crompton, 1991; Ross, 1993). Thus, a two-way relationship could exist between the image tourists have and the satisfaction they derive from their experience. This two-way relationship highlights the importance of placing more emphasis on the measurement/identification of customers' perception and satisfaction of a tourism product for positioning purposes. Research examining customer's satisfaction with destination's products and attributes is to be found in the marketing literature (Crompton and Love, 1995; Spreng and Mackoy, 1996; Cho, 1998; Baker and Crompton, 2000). However, very few research studies acknowledged such a two-way relationship and have attempted to combine the two variables of customer's perception and satisfaction together to inform the development of a destination's positioning strategy. It is that these two variables are important and can be combined together to identify the strongest functional

and psychological attributes that can be used for positioning and promotion purposes. Therefore, we propose that the measurement of customer's perception and satisfaction when combined together can result in identifying specific niche markets, which can be used in developing and promoting an effective positioning strategy for a destination. In the competitive tourism market, tourist satisfaction is the leading criteria in developing a better destination image, attracting more tourists and generating more sales of products & services, therefore, to create a repeat business through customer loyalty. Bignee et al. (2001) show that a destination's image plays a direct antecedent role in perceived quality, satisfaction, tourist's intention to revisit destination and their willingness to recommend it to the other people.

## CONCLUSION

This paper presents a review and discussion of the concept and measurement of destination image, within a marketing perspective. In the past, product image has shown a powerful influence in the purchasing process. So academicians and practioners have attempted to understand the role of image in the travel decision process and to measure destination images. We in this study propose that the measurement of customer's perception and satisfaction when combined together can result in identifying specific niche markets, which can be used in developing and promoting an effective positioning strategy for a destination.

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