

Chapter 11

The Role of Destination Attributes in Assessing/Constructing the Image of Tourist Destination

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to present and discuss the concept of ‘destination image’, as shown in the literature to date and also to identify the way in which the image has been formed. The process of image formation is a dynamic one, in which the influence factors have a different importance and they continuously change and complete each other. It intend to analyze the formation and communication of the image, in the new context created by the Internet and social networks. Given the importance of destination attributes in the cognitive process of development/ evaluation of the destination image, it suggests a method for prioritizing these attributes, through fuzzy modeling in order to find the mix of attributes that best matches the expectations of the visitors. This could be a tool used by DMOs in image building, strengthening those attributes of the destination that best meet the wishes of the visitors.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter proposes to build a basis for empirical research into the evaluation of destination image, from the point of view of the attributes that characterize a destination, either functional or psychological, individual or global, concrete or abstract. It proposes a more accurate method to prioritize attributes from the perspective of importance (or expectations with respect to a given destination), determined directly or deducted, allocated to visitors.

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The objectives of the chapter are:

- To make an overview of investigations into the destination image, the themes investigated and a prominent names in the field of activity in order to establish the link between image and attributes destination.
- The investigation the relationship between image and brand at the level of destination, distinctivity, relationship or coincidence of senses.
- Find the marketer suitable for creating and promoting the image destination.
- The investigation of changes and opportunity offered by the new digital media, for the construction and promotion of images destination.
- The identification of the destination attributes in the result of empirical studies, attributes that influence perception of destination images (and influence even the purchase).
- To propose a method of operationalizing destination attributes, for the identification the most important attributes for the target group, to potency those attributes in building destination supply and tourist destination image.

BACKGROUND

The destinations have become more important than individual attractions, as a result of the increased demand for package holidays (Ozturk & Qu, 2008).

In the 70s, the research on destination image strated with three pioneers: John Hunt in 1975, Edward Mayo in 1973 and Clare Gunn in 1972. There have been many empirical studies and theoretical approaches for investigating topics related to destination image, mostly based on empirical research.

Summaries of published studies were made by: Chon (1990), Echtner and Ritchie (1991), Pike (2002), Tasci, Gartner & Cavusgil (2007), Stepchenkova and Mills (2010), B. Lee, C.K. Lee, & J. Lee (2014).

A meaningful analysis was made by Chon (1990), who presented the 23 of the most frequently cited studies on the image of the destination. Echtner and Ritchie (1991) examined the image conceptualization and operationalization in 15 previous studies published before 1991.

Pike (2002) made an analysis of 142 studies on, for the period 1973-2000, supplemented by Stepchenkova and Mills (2010) with a synthesis of 152 studies, for the time range 2000 to 2007.

Chon (1990) concluded from the analysis of the 23 studies that the destination image plays a crucial role in the purchase decision and the satisfaction / dissatisfaction of a visitor depends largely on the comparison between expectations and the perceived performance of the destination, at the time of consumption. This conclusion was further supported by the analysis made by Lee et al. (2014), on studies published after 1990: Cai and Bai (2003), O'Leary and Deegan (2003), Castro, Armario and Ruiz (2007), Chi and Qu (2008), Stepchenkova and Eales (2011) and Prayag and Ryan (2012).

Echtner and Ritchie (1991), after the analysis of 15 studies, concluded that the operationalization of the destination image has not been yet achieved despite numerous research done (especially with quantitative techniques).

The conclusions of the analysis made by Pike (2002) refer to: the number of studies focused on destination image in a given travel context (only 23 of 142); the most popular study destinations (North America 58, Europe-45, Asia 25, Africa-14, etc.); the type of preferred destinations (countries-56, fol-

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