

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Tourism marketing information and destination image management

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Destination image is commonly accepted as an important aspect in successful tourism management and destination marketing. The information about a specific destination is an important means of promotion for the tourism industry and influences destination image. In this context, the purpose of this paper is to identify those destination features which contribute to build a positive destination image and to analyze the relationship between those features and the image induced by brochures. Accordingly, this study is based on previous research on the impact of tourist information sources in destination promotion, and argues that brochures, as tourist information sources, have an important influence on destination image. Based on previous theoretical discussion regarding image, an empirical research was conducted to test the relationship proposed here. Multiple item indicators from previous studies were employed. Results indicate that there is a relationship between information sources and destination image.

**Key words:** Image management, brochures, tourist destination, information sources.

**JEL classification:** M30, M31, L83

## INTRODUCTION

Understanding how customers acquire information is important for marketing management decisions. This is especially true for services, travel and tourism products. Research has demonstrated that tourist information is a valuable concept in understanding destination image and the destination choice process of tourists. Information sources have been included in many research works as important factors for the analysis of tourist behavior. For instance, first, most of the tourist behavior models incorporated the search of external information as an important component (Bettman, 1979; Engel, Kollat et al., 1978; Gursoy and McCleary, 2004; Howard and Sheth, 1969; Mathieson and Wall, 1982; Schmoll, 1977; Um and Crompton, 1990; Woodside and Lysonski, 1989). Second, some studies have examined the influence of information sources on tourists' preferences and intentions (Mayo, 1973; Milman and Pizam, 1995). Third, other studies have centered on the relationship between

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information sources, destination selection and travel decisions (Baloglu, 2000; Bieger and Laesser, 2004; Capella and Greco, 1987; Chen and Gursoy, 2000; Eagles, 2000; Getz and Sailor, 1993; Gitelson and Crompton, 1983; Goossens, 1994; Gursoy and McCleary, 2004; Mathieson and Wall, 1982; Santos, 1998; Schmoll, 1977; Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005; Um and Crompton, 1990; Wicks and Schuett, 1991, 1993; Woodside and Lysonski, 1989; Woodside et al., 2000; Woodside and Dubelaar, 2002).

Finally, another important factor is image. Image plays an important role for destination marketers so as to differentiate their destination in this highly competitive market (Yilmaz et al., 2009). In this sense, formal (that is brochures) and informal information sources (that is relatives and friends), have an influence on the image formation of a tourist destination (Beerli and Martin, 2004; Crompton, 1979; Etzel and Wahlers, 1985). The role of information sources in forming destination images is also emphasized in Baloglu (2000); Baloglu and Mangalolu (2001); Echtner and Ritchie (2003); Gursoy and McCleary (2004); Sönmez and Sirakaya (2002); Um and Crompton (1990) and Woodside and Lysonski (1989). On the other hand, tourists formulate images of alternative destinations, so image also emerges as a critical element

in the destination choice process (Um and Crompton, 1999). This is consistent with the notion that information sources and the attributes of the different destinations form the basis for different image and experience expectations.

In addition, the information sources of tourist activities have changed greatly over the past fifteen years, due firstly to the impact of new technologies; secondly, to the change in tourist consumer behavior, thirdly to the increase in the number of tourist destinations, and finally to the growing competition among different destinations. As a consequence, information sources should meet one main objective in order to be considered as effective tools for destination promotion. Promotion is recognized by many as a critical element in tourism marketing. Among the array of promotional methods available, the travel brochure is one of the most important and widely utilized (Holloway and Plant, 1988). For years, travel brochures have been used by national, state and provincial governments, convention and visitors' bureaux and specific destinations as inexpensive and versatile communication tools. For this reason, the main aim of this study is to identify those destination features which contribute to build a positive destination image, and to analyze the role of information sources in the formation of positive destination image. More precisely, this study focuses on the analysis of brochures as a promotion means for tourist destinations and as induced-image generators. Additionally, it attempts to establish a relationship between the actual destination image, based on tourist experience and the image induced by the use of information sources. Consequently, the paper starts with a brief overview of information sources and destination image management according to the literature on the matter. Then, the methodology used for the collection of the primary data from several brochures will be presented, followed by the study's results. Finally, the conclusions and the main implications derived from this study for the tourism industry are considered, and directions for future research are proposed. This research contributes to the study of tourist information sources in the image forming process as a means of promotion for the tourism industry.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on tourist behavior has to begin with information search (Moutinho, 1987). One of the most influential factors in the purchase of a tourist product (destination) is information about tourist goods and services. Moreover, tourists differ in the information sources they use before making a decision (Moutinho, 1987). Institutions, travel agents and tourist businesses make great efforts and spend a lot of money to make tourist information circulate. Despite the high investment made on communication and promotion, there is a

general lack of knowledge as to which information source tourists use to make their choice (Kim et al., 2005; Nolan, 1976; Gitelson and Crompton, 1983; Snepenger et al., 1990; Weilbacher, 2003). Nolan's (1976) tried to determine how information sources are used, and the relationship between this use and tourist consumer behaviour.

The information about a concrete destination which is occasionally demanded by tourists is a particularly important means of promotion for the tourism industry. Sources of information about a destination have a great influence on the process of tourist decision-making, and the behavior of tourists determines how the search for information is done and how information will be used (Andereck and Caldwell 1993; Capella and Greco 1987; Snepenger, Meged, Snelling and Worrall 1990; Snepenger and Snepenger 1993). Coltman (1989) comments that potential customers "will compare the brochure of one destination or supplier with the brochure of its competitors, and it is likely that the one with the best brochure will receive the business". For many potential visitors the brochure they possess actually represents the product or destination they are purchasing. Another important factor is image, because it influences destination selection. Formal sources of information, like brochures, and informal sources, for example relatives and friends, have an influence on image formation in a tourist destination (Beerli and Martin, 2004; Crompton, 1979; Etzel and Wahlers, 1985).

By other hand, images serve many functions at many different levels; they are used in a number of practical ways to convey ideas and messages. These are all practical areas where promotion, through tourism imagery and representation, plays a vital role in a highly competitive and constantly changing marketplace. Destination image is certainly a determining factor of tourist buying behavior. Research by Pearce (1982), and Woodside and Lysonski (1990) demonstrate that there is an evident relationship between positive perceptions of destinations and positive purchase decisions. Although these perceptions may not be based on fact or first-hand experience, they nevertheless exert a vital influence on a potential tourist's decision to visit a destination. Similarly, negative images, even if unjustified, will determine potential tourists and result in a decision not to purchase (Morgan and Pritchard, 1998).

Moreover, image formation can be defined as the development of a mental notion based on limited impressions coming from a single information source. In tourist destination image, this information originates in numerous and diverse sources (Gartner, 1993). Firstly, induced information includes promotional material (brochures, posters), as well as tour operators' and travel agents' opinions. Secondly, self-information also plays a role and it is obtained from mass media and popular culture. Finally, organic information comes from friends and relatives, as well as from personal experience.

Although many people would have an image of destinations they have not visited, coming from different information sources, the most accurate, comprehensive and personal is formed when the destination is actually visited (Chon, 1987).

Therefore, the following question has been considered: Do information sources and brochures have an influence on destination image? Taking this objective as a starting point, this paper attempts to study the use of tourist information sources and analyzes the relationship with destination image. The conceptual and empirical perspectives from the literature led to the following research questions:

RQ1: Information sources used as means of promotion have an influence on the generation of tourist destination image.

RQ2: There is a positive relationship between brochures image and destination image.

## METHODS

The research process involved the following steps. First, a literature review was undertaken to identify the relationship between information sources and destination image within the tourism management. Second, the population and sampling procedure was established. Third, a questionnaire was constructed. Finally, the methods of data collection and analyses were determined.

### Sample

To carry out this research, a personal survey was conducted by means of a structured questionnaire. People who engage in information search about destinations can be considered as potential national tourists and represent the population of interest for this study. The sample for this study consisted of 1252 national adult (18-year-olds or over) tourists included in the list maintained by the International Tourism Trade Fair -FITUR in the Spanish acronym- and the information was obtained in the annual FITUR fair in Madrid (Spain). Non-probability samples may be useful for obtaining information about people's opinions, motivations, behaviors and demographic characteristics (Wicks and Baldwin 1997). Participants in the survey were asked to express their opinion about a given tourist destination they had already visited through a series of attributes (5-point Likert scale), and to answer a series of questions related to it. They were first asked whether they had visited any of the destinations advertised in the brochures to be analyzed (Barcelona, Madrid, etc.). If the answer was affirmative, they were shown the brochure of that specific city so that they could express their opinion about it. Finally, they were invited to recall the image of the destination generated by their actual visiting experience. The demographic profile of respondents showed a gender distribution with 42.5% male and 57.5% female. In terms of age, 48% of respondents were between 25 and 34 followed by 29% who were between 35 and 44. Most of the respondents were single (51.2%); 34.9% were married. The respondents were highly educated; 77.8% of them had been to university and 21% of them were high-school graduates.

### Measures

The survey instrument consisted of several sections: first, use of

information sources (Guides, Internet, Brochures, Travel magazines, Newspaper, Relatives and friends, Personal experience, Travel agencies and Government tourist information); second, image induced by brochures; third, destination image (Likert scale 5-point); and fourth, demographic information. To measure induced image there were four dichotomous (yes/no) dependent variables: brochures forming images, brochures present cities with tourist attractions, image induced by brochures, destination image corresponds to actual image. To measure destination image, a 32-item scale was developed after reviewing other measurement scales (Echtner and Ritchie 1991, 1993, 2003). Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale, whose extreme figures were strongly disagree/strongly agree. Finally, demographic information (sex, marital status, age and studies) was included in the questionnaire.

To select the sample of brochures to be analyzed in the study the following factors were considered: size of destination, inland versus coastal destinations, geographical origin (North, Centre and South), and the source of the brochure: Central Administration, Autonomous Governments or Town Halls. The brochures selected corresponded to eight relevant cities.

## STUDY FINDINGS

Different analysis techniques were used in order to process the information. The relationship between the use of tourist information and induced image was contrasted using the ANOVA. Finally, a discriminant analysis is applied to investigate which variables influence the generation of the positive image of a given destination. Thus, the results of this research are presented in two main sections. The first section presents the use of information sources and it allows establishing a relationship between the amount of information used by tourists and destination image. The second section establishes the variables that predict destination image.

This section centers upon the relationship between information source use and the destination image generated by such use of sources or promotional material. The variable applied for this measurement is the so-called *utilization degree*, which measures the intensity of information source use (amount of information), also paying attention to the number of sources used in order to establish whether image is influenced by the amount of information tourists made use of. This relationship should explain to what degree destination image depends on the use of promotional material (Gartner, 1993; Nolan, 1976). To determine the degree of information source use, this analysis considers frequencies of use in relation to the number of sources employed by surveyed tourists, with a maximum of nine and a minimum of zero. The results of this new variable, utilization degree, is split in three levels: (1) low utilization degree: figures ranging from 0 - 1 (27.1%), (2) average utilization degree: figures between 2 and 4 (57.2%), and (3) high utilization degree: figures between 5 and 9 (15.7%). The relationship analyzed here is then verified using the ANOVA in order to establish whether variation in information source utilization (independent variable) has an influence on destination image (dependent variable). Results after the ANOVA

confirm that the degree of utilization of information sources has an influence on destination image (induced image), with a reliability of 95% (Table 1). These results demonstrate that information sources have a strong influence on tourist destination image generation when they are used as promotion tools (RQ1) (Andereck and Caldwell, 1993; Bettman, 1979; Coltman, 1989; Gursoy and McCleary, 2004; Um and Crompton, 1990).

### **Discriminant analysis: Image formation**

The use of discriminant analysis is intended to predict whether image induced by brochures coincides with actual destination image, and to determine to what degree the different destination variables influence on destination image. However, the main purpose of this discriminant analysis is to predict membership in two or more mutually exclusive groups from a set of predictors when there is no natural ordering on the groups. So we may ask if we can predict whether the destination features will influence destination image formation after they are known (cultural attractions, transportation, price, service quality, gastronomy, safety, climate, etc.) (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993, 2003; Gartner, 1989). In the first approach to destination image formation by destination features, the discriminant analysis has been used in order to quantify the relative contribution of the 32 destination features (scale) as independent variables in the correct classification of two groups of categories in the following dependent variable: formation or non-formation destination image (Gunn, 1972). In order to achieve this, the stepwise estimation has been chosen and the discriminant function used is:  $Z = w_1X_1 + w_2X_2 + \dots + w_pX_p$  where  $X$  is the value of independent variables,  $w_j$  discriminant coefficient (discriminant weight) for independent variables and  $Z$  the discriminant score.

Before considering the discriminant function, the *a priori* discriminant power of each independent variable is evaluated with the statistic  $F$ . All of them had a discriminant capability when the significance level was higher than 0.05 (Table 2). In this case, only one linear function will be considered: the linear permutation of those variables together with their standardized coefficients. As all variables use the same measuring unit, the coefficients can function as indicators of relative importance: thus those variables with higher coefficient contribute more definitely to image formation. On the other hand, the sign shows the direction of its relationship with the dependent variable, being positive when the relationship is direct and negative when it is inverse. The resulting coefficients allowed us to formulate the following discriminant function:  $Z_{\text{image}} = 1.190$  quality accommodation - 1.228 sports facilities + 0.772 different customs. This function showed that there was a positive relationship between image formation and accommodation and different customs, and an inverse

one with sports facilities. In order to evaluate the significance of the discriminant function, Wilks' Lambda (0.584) has been calculated, obtaining a significant value ( $p = 0.002$ ). The classificatory results showed a high explanatory capability of the discriminant function, because the real value of belonging to a group coincides with the one predicted (100 and 96.6%) by the function in 96.8% of occurrences (Table 3). This analysis thus confirms that some features form image: quality of accommodation, sports facilities and different customs.

The results from the discriminant analysis demonstrated that there were significant differences between the two groups, because those individuals who think that destination image is positive give more importance to the fact that destination provides accommodation and is different while at the same time they consider that sports facilities are not a factor in positive image formation. Therefore, the results were that some features contribute to destination image formation (Fayeke and Crompton, 1991; Woodside and Lysonski, 1989; Wicks and Schuett, 1993). The following work was intended to establish whether there is a relationship between image generated by destination and tourist information brochures. Then, the next task would be to make an analysis of variance in the proposition *brochure image* (dependent variable), corresponds to destination image being the independent variable (Table 4). Results confirmed that brochures that build image have an influence on destination image (RQ2). Thus, once the analysis of the relationship between tourist information and image, and the relationship between induced image and actual image, has been finished, the results verify research questions 1 and 2.

## **COMMENTS**

### **Management implications**

The information obtained in this research has an added value when planning tourist destination promotion strategies. Providers and intermediaries selling tourist products, as well as public institutions promoting destinations may use it to their advantage. Although advertising is a widely accepted and proven antecedent of image, there have been relatively few studies on tourism promotion as the antecedent of destination image. Because tourist destinations are interested in creating image and enticing potential travelers to visit, brochures often contain photographs to capture the attention of travelers. This study also provides information useful for tourist businesses and public institutions attempting to reach tourist consumers and for the design and planning of their promotion strategies.

To know the structure of the tourist market is critical in order to provide better information for potential tourists and to address that information to more homogeneous

**Table 1.** ANOVA - information sources and induced image.

Factor	Sum of squares	Mean	F	Significance
Number of information sources used	1.471	0.736	3.260	0.040

**Table 2.** Statistics for variables in the equations.

Dependent variable	Independent variable	B	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp (B)
Brochure image	Quality of accommodation	0.879	3.998	1	0.050	1.190
	Sports facilities	0.724	5.346	1	0.011	-1.228
	Different customs / culture	0.584	6.423	1	0.002	0.772

**Table 3.** Classification results - image.

Actual group	Image	Predicted group membership (%)		Total
	Cases correctly classified: 96.8%	Non-formation	Formation	
	Non-formation	100	0.0	100.0
	Formation	3.4	96.6	100.0

**Table 4.** ANOVA - image.

Factor	Value	Variance	F	Significance
Quality of accommodation	3.281	0.820	5.360	0.000
Sports facilities	0.308	0.077	0.467	0.760
Different customs / culture	1.662	0.416	2.607	0.036

tourist groups, which share their basic features: travel frequencies, destinations visited, reasons for travel and activities expected during travel. Furthermore, tourist information should be designed following the criteria which better respond to specific tourist group demands, so that it is more attractive, relevant and consequently more influential on purchase choice; in short, tourist information should also be a satisfying experience for tourists.

Results in this study may be useful for marketing professionals and researchers. The conclusions imply that it is essential to incorporate image variables and dimensions of information search to the marketing of destinations. A special emphasis should be laid on the study and development of tourism experience marketing strategies, which suggests that all contacts between tourist service providers and tourists should be directed to the satisfaction of their expectations (before, during, and after the visit), for they will also determine the image of the destination perceived by the tourist.

## Conclusion

The value of the promotion channel depends on its

capacity to reach consumers and satisfy their interests and needs. In the tourism sector, the means of promotion (Internet, brochures, guides and tourist offices amongst them) constitute an active and open way of getting information for tourists. Most of the consumer and tourist behavior models incorporated the search of external information as an important component (Bettman, 1979; Engel et al., 1978; Gursoy and McCleary, 2004; Howard and Sheth, 1969; Mathieson and Wall, 1982; Schmoll, 1977; Um and Crompton, 1990; Woodside and Lysonski, 1989). Advice given by relatives and friends, tourist guides, tourist offices and brochures are among the most used and appreciated sources of tourist information (Nolan, 1976). However, Gitelson and Crompton (1983) concluded that information sources do not stimulate purchase of destination and that brochures are only a part of the destination marketing. The criterion most commonly used in order to determine whether one type of information source is more important than others was the fact that a great percentage of consumers may have access to it (Engel et al., 1978).

In this sense, upon review of a large body of literature on destination image and information search, it is clear that destination image is an important aspect of tourism

development due to its impact on both supply (positioning, promotion) and demand (tourist behavior, decision-making) side aspects of marketing (Tasci and Gartner, 2007). In this case, it has proved that the use of information sources as promotion tools has a strong influence on the formation of tourist destination images. Furthermore, this work has also revealed that the image generated by tourist brochures is firmly related to actual destination image. This research shows that the inclusion of image and tourist information in one model not only serves to highlight the importance of image, but also provides a better explanation for destination choice. Brochures and guides have proved to be the most valued information sources. In addition, tourists tend to prefer impersonal information sources (brochures, Internet, guides, etc.) (Molina and Esteban, 2006). Nevertheless, personal experience probably appears to be the most important information source. This means that all contacts between the tourist and the destination, companies and travel agents at a personal and direct level, have a decisive influence on the perception and image of a given tourist destination. Tourists long for satisfactory travelling experiences, and tourist businesses and public institutions should consider this fact and be aware of experience marketing strategies.

Tourists use external information sources as a first step when planning their holiday travel (Goossens, 1994). As a result, it is essential for entrepreneurs and tourism promoters to know exactly what kind of information should be included in tourist brochures and guides, in order to encourage the process of decision-making. At the same time, it is also important to analyze the effect of information on tourist behavior and image. The process of destination image formation implies two fundamental issues.

On the one hand, it suggests that individuals may have made up a specific destination image even before visiting and using promotional information sources. The measurement of this basic image is an essential factor in the design of experience marketing strategies, so that destination promotion strategies may be modified to efficiently respond to the strengths and weaknesses, accuracies and inaccuracies of destination image. On the other hand, it is necessary to differentiate the image perceived by consumers who have already visited the destination from the image formed by those who have not; due to the fact that image alters upon travel to destination.

This study indicates the influence of image variables on the respondents' perceptions, especially quality of accommodation and different customs and culture. With regard to this question, the results indicate a relationship between overall destination attractiveness and the image induced by brochures. The results also indicate the influence of functional attributes (quality of hotel accommodation) on consumers' perceptions. The conceptual implications of this research pertain to the multi-dimensional aspects of the destination image (Gallarza

and Calderón, 2002). This study supports Ahmed (1991), Echtner and Ritchie (1991, 1993), Sirakaya and Sönmez (2000), and Choi (2001), who focus on the dimensions of image.

## LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This study and its findings are not free of limitations. From a conceptual perspective, first, the research is limited to the context of its own objectives. While the study attempts to understand several features that influence destination image, other factors were not included. This research and the discriminant analysis can only provide some bases and directions for future studies. Additional studies are needed to test the model for other destinations. From a methodological perspective, this study also displays some limitations, which affect the generalization of its results. The area of research only permits the results to be generalized for the sample population and the singular type of information source (brochures).

The results of study also allow us to make the following further research proposals. Firstly, research could be enriched by including additional variables into the process of image formation. Secondly, future research on destination image adopting multiple approaches is bound to create models that have both theoretical and practical value for tourism suppliers. Thirdly, different destinations should be considered, in order to gain a better understanding about the nature of brochures influence on destination image. Finally, the development of new strategies of promotion, product, trademark, image, etc. by destinations and businesses intending to apply the concept of tourism experience marketing clearly should consider the feedback coming from the evaluation of their travel experiences by the tourists themselves.

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