A MODEL OF DESTINATION IMAGE FORMATION

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Abstract: Image has been shown to be an important influence in the selection of vacation destinations. A model that represents the important determinants of destination image formation was developed based on previous studies in a number of fields. The research reported in this article presents the results of an empirical test of the model using path analysis. A major finding of the study was that a destination image is formed by both stimulus factors and tourists' characteristics. The results of this investigation provide important implications for strategic image management and can aid in designing and implementing marketing programs for creating and enhancing tourism destination images. **Keywords:** image model, destinations, image formation, path analysis. © 1999 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Résumé: Un modèle pour la formulation de l'image de marque des destinations. On a démontré que l'image de marque est une influence importante dans le choix de destination de vacances. En se basant sur des études précédentes dans plusieurs domaines, on a développé un modèle qui représente les déterminants importants de l'image d'une destination. Cet article présente les résultats d'un test empirique de ce modèle en utilisant l'analyse de voie. Une conclusion majeure est que l'image d'une destination est formée des facteurs de stimulation et des caractéristiques des touristes. Les résultats de cette recherche fournissent des implications importantes pour la gestion de l'image stratégique et peuvent contribuer à la conception et à la réalisation des programmes de marketing pour créer et mettre en valeur les images des destinations touristiques. © 1999 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

Research of the past two decades has demonstrated that image is a valuable concept in understanding the destination selection process of tourists. Several studies centered on the relationship between destination image and preference or visitation intentions (Goodrich 1978; Mayo 1973; Hunt 1975; Milman and Pizam 1995; Scott, Schewe and Frederick 1978). A particular research stream investigated the impact of previous visitation (actual behavior) or familiarity on destination image (Ahmed 1991; Chon 1990; Dann

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1996; Fakeye and Crompton 1991; Fridgen 1987; Hu and Ritchie 1993; Milman and Pizam 1995; Pearce 1982; Phelps 1986). Some studies examined the relationship between tourists' geographical location (distance) and image (Ahmed 1991; Crompton 1979a; Fakeye and Crompton 1991; Hunt 1975; Scott et al 1978). Others focused on the measurement of destination image (Echtner and Ritchie 1993; Driscoll, Lawson and Niven 1994), its components (Dann 1996; MacKay and Fesenmaier 1997), or factors incfluencing it (Baloglu and Brinberg 1997; Walmsley and Jenkins 1993). Still others examined temporal influences on image change (Gartner 1986; Gartner and Hunt 1987), differences between tourist image (demand) and what is projected by destinations (Stabler 1990), variations by trip purpose (Javalgi, Thomas and Rao 1992), and the relationship between sociodemographic variables and destination image (Baloglu 1997; Walmsley and Jenkins 1993). However, little empirical research has focused on how image is actually formed, especially in the absence of previous experience with a destination. This suggests that most studies have largely focused on its static structure by examining the relationship between image and behavior, but not on its dynamic nature by investigating the influences on its structure and formation in the absence of actual visitation.

The initial image formation stage before the trip is the most important phase in tourits' destination selection processes (Gunn 1972; Mercer 1971). As noted by Brokaw "Before image can be used to influence behavior, it is important to understand what influences image" (1990:32). Goodall (1990) noted that knowing factors influencing it would help identify target markets and decide which image should be promoted to which segment of the market. Numerous researchers across fields emphasized the importance of understanding forces which influence image development and suggested that little effort has been undertaken to determine the factors that influence its formation (Brokaw 1990; Burgess 1978; Fakeye and Crompton 1991; Gartner 1989, 1993; Han 1989; Kotler, Haider and Rein 1993; Myers 1968; Phelps 1986; Russel and Snodgrass 1987; Stern and Krakover 1993). Despite importance and growing interest, destination image studies have also been criticized as atheoretical and lacking a conceptual framework (Echtner and Ritchie 1993; Fakeye and Crompton 1991; Gartner 1993).

To address the problem of identifying what influences image development, a model of its formation was developed based on the literature from several fields and disciplines. The model is designed to provide a framework for studying the forces guiding the formation of destination image and proposes relationships among the different levels of evaluations within its structure (cognitive, affective, and global), as well as the elements determining these evaluations. The purpose of the research reported here was to test the proposed model and to provide insights into how images of destinations are developed.