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A Study of Factors Influencing Tourist Destination Image

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Abstract

Economies all over the world are moving towards a focus on services. In the past decade, tourism has been seen as one of the leading sectors contributing in an increasing way to the national exchequers. This has brought the tourism sector under the purview of strategic planning, which begins from the level of Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) and goes up to the final consumer. At each level, attempts are made to provide the consumer with an experience which leads to a positive perception of the destination. In order to do so, it is imperative to understand the basics of tourist destination and the factors determining the tourist destination image. A review of the pertinent literature reveals how various aspects of a destination may lead to image formation. Different consumers may be influenced by a variety of factors which need to be managed by the DMOs and other tourism organizations and intermediaries.

Keywords: Destination, Image

Introduction

Tourism has been acclaimed as one of the most resilient sectors of the world economy. The tourism sector has been recording positive growth in all parts of the world. Deshwal (2015) observes that tourism contributes around 10% in the world's GDP, as well as in world's employment. International tourist arrivals recorded an annual growth of 4.8% in 2013, compared to the figure of 4.1% for 2012. The following table gives region- wise details of tourist arrivals all over the world.

Table 1 International tourist arrivals by region (2013)

Region	International Tourist Arrivals (million)	% change/ Growth over 2012	% age Share in International Tourist Arrivals Worldwide
Africa	55.9	5.6	5.1
Americas	168.3	3.4	15.5
Asia and the Pacific	248.7	6.5	22.9
Europe	565.0	4.8	52.0
Middle East	48.8	-0.6	4.5

Source: (Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India, Market Research Division, 2013)

In India, the industry has been contributing in excess of 6 % to the Gross Domestic Product of the country since 2003 (Knoema World Atlas, 2014).

Holloway (2002) recounts that the word ‘holidays’ finds its origin in the term ‘holy days’, where religion was the basis of spending leisure time and included a pleasurable side too. Today, the most widely accepted definition of tourism is that provided by the United Nation’s World Tourism Organization (WTO) in 1991. The WTO says: ‘Tourism comprises of the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business or other purposes’ (Williams, 2004). Mainstream tourism has been all about an ‘all inclusive holiday’ at one of the many identical destinations (Holloway, 2002). Sellier and Dahl (2011) have concluded that consumer satisfaction depends largely on the ability of consumers to come up with creative solutions. It is clear that people travel or undertake tourism for a variety of reasons. These may be holidays (including visits to relatives, friends and relatives- termed as VFR travel (Holloway, 2002), business etc. All the new and niche and specialty forms of tourism have some salient features about themselves, and have collectively come to be known as Adjectival tourism (Misra& Sadual, 2008).

Tourism destinations may be natural or man- made, i. e., constructed. In other words, the destination is just a place or even a meaningful location. Alternatively, a tourist destination may

be seen as an amalgam of tourist products, services and public goods consumed under the same brand name . The image is an important notion for products and services alike. It has been defined as the sum total of impressions which consumers receive from many sources (Aaker and Biel, 2013). For every tourist destination, there exists an image as has been planned by the planning organizations. These organizations are more popularly known in tourism parlance as Destination Management Organizations or DMOs. During a visit, the tourist is likely to interact with a number of intermediaries. Each of these interactions is an experience in itself, which leads to the formation of perception.

Objectives

In the above background, we may define the following objectives for the paper: -

- To understand the concept and background of destination image for tourism
- To comprehend the factors which contribute towards the image of a destination

Methods

The research approach followed towards this paper may be described as follows: -

- Types of data: Secondary data has been used for achievement of the above- listed objectives.
- Sources of data: Data has been collected from various secondary sources, such as journals, books, and the internet.
- Type of Research: In order to gain an understanding of the factors contributing towards destination image, an exploratory approach towards the study has been adopted. Analysis of content in the available secondary data has been undertaken for this purpose.

Literature Review

In 2002, **Holloway** categorized tourism as a service, rather than a tangible product. He supported this by mentioning certain features of tourism, such as simultaneous production and consumption, heterogeneity of the offering with respect to time, and requirement of the customer to travel to a specified place to consume it. **Qirci, Theodhori and Elmazi (2011)** define the tourism product as constituted by a bundle of products and services provided by numerous stakeholders. There is an intensive dyadic encounter between a host of service providers and the tourist (**Baksi, 2014**). This keeps the tourism product far from being homogenized. **Lyngdoh (2013)** has brought forth the concept of ‘tourism attractiveness’, referring to the feelings, beliefs and opinions that an individual has about a destination.

The Tourist Destination Image

Literature on tourist destination image dates back to the 1970’s. However, majority of the work available has been on the influence of destination image on tourist behavior. In the recent past, the concept of image has been extended to tourist places or destinations, bringing about the concept of ‘place image’, which draws from various disciplines (**Tiwari and Bose, 2013**). Such efforts used by regions and places have been given the nomenclature of ‘place marketing’ and ‘civic boosterism’ by **Metaxas (2009)**. Tourist destinations range from continents, countries, states, provinces, cities to villages (**Manhas and Dogra, 2013**).

Hosany, Ekinci and Uysal (2006) view the tourist destination as a bundle of tangible and intangible, just like a brand. The image of this brand is created in three potential ways- direct experience with the place, from information sources and information obtained there from, and from inferences to pre- existing associations. **del Bosque, San Martin, Collado& Salmones**

(2008) explain destination image as a mental representation of the place that helps individuals to anticipate their destination experiences. Consumers might even evaluate products in relationship to their personalities, where the product image shares some similarity with their own persona (Najdic, 2011).

The Determinants of Tourist Destination Image

Pike, Bianchi, Kerr and Patti (2010) explain tourist destination image and perceptions thereof to be made up of organic sources as well as induced sources. In their 2006 study on destination image, Kokosalakis, Bagnall, Selby and Burns have differentiated between the received and projected image of a destination, and the factors influencing these constructs.

Table 3: Types of Destination Image and Factors Influencing Them

Type of image/ Determining factors	Received image/ Semiotic image	Projected image/ Discursive image	
		Organic image	Induced image
Meaning	Image as perceived by the consumer	Image as projected by DMOs	Image as projected by destination marketing efforts
Factors influencing image	Stimulus factors, External factors, Personal characteristics of consumers (social and psychological parameters), time of consumption	Unbiased sources: Word of mouth, available literature, documentaries etc.	Efforts of tourism intermediaries and service providers

Source: Kokosalabis et al. (2006)

In any case, both functional and psychological characteristics of a destination determine its overall image (Upadhyaya, 2012).

Baksi (2014) has mentioned the following factors as casting an influence on the image of a tourist destination: attractions, accessibility, amenities, activities, available packages and ancillary services. He considers destination image as having a direct and indirect impact on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. **Lyngdoh (2013)** has mentioned the cultural and natural environments, events, recreation and entertainment, along with supporting services as the main determinants of destination image. Relating tourism offerings to competitiveness, **Navickas and Malakauskaite (2009)** have identified the natural and artificial environment of a place as determinants of its image. They also mention the price- competitiveness as well as organization of events at a place as pertinent factors. **de Carlo, Canali, Pritchard and Morgan (2009)** have identified the following factors as instrumental for the image of a destination: tourist information, street signs., language, conveyance, accommodation, pollution, green spaces, shopping, food, safety, weather, communication; and, options for tourists to plan their own local trips. **Dmitrovic, Velbar, Kolr, Brencic, Ograjensek and Zabkar (2009)** propose the following as determinants of tourist destination image: past experience through number of visits and the length of stay. **del Bosque et al. (2008)** identify five major factors for tourist destination image: infrastructure and socio- economic environment, atmosphere, natural environment, affective image and cultural environment. **Tasci (2007)** has suggested destination image to be contingent upon a variety of factors ranging from prior visitation, length of stay, overall travel experience at a destination, usage of promotional media, and demographic characteristics of the tourists (primarily education and occupation, race and age). Based on an exhaustive study, **Hosany et al. (2006)** have identified three major components of the image of a destination: affective components, the physical environment and accessibility of the destination.

The concept of ‘acculturation’ has been introduced by **Banerjee (2008)**. He classifies Indian culture into material, as well as abstract components. Taken together, these components include the signs, symbols, rituals, and languages of the country, along with the ingrained values such as respect for the elderly, wisdom etc. **Dmitrovic et al. (2009)** have expressed confidence in cultural activities as propellants of tourism, even if a city does not have a rich cultural history. In their **2009** study, **Leaver and Schmidt** support this point by saying that investment in heritage sites has increased the chances of tourism success. **Cellini and Cuccia (2013)** draw attention towards the role of museums as part of the heritage of a city. They candidly make the point that all tourists do not visit museums, neither are all visitors to museums necessarily tourists. **Cristina (2013)** discusses further about culture, behavior and hospitality as determinants of tourist destination image. Pronouncing it as the largest and fastest growing segment of global tourism, **Cristina (2013)** says that cultural tourism is headed towards domestication and glocalization, i. e., tourists do not prefer formalized and iconic structures alone. Rather, they wish to be a part of ‘everyday’ common places to understand a place better. Moving forward from cultural tourism, **Elliott, Spence and Casakin (2011)** talk about transcultural tourism. An intriguing concept of the ‘cultural turn’ has been mentioned by **Fernandes (2011)**, according to which, the authentic resources of a city may be used creatively to contribute to tourism. Instead of visiting museums and monuments, visitors seek to engage themselves in local culture through people and activities. **Jamal, Hartl and Lohmer (2010)** have even talked about touristic culture. It talks about the widespread interest which tourists hold in all aspects of a destination. This type of interest may even be exhibited by people who have changed their location due to job, education etc.

One of the growing forms of tourism is food- based tourism or culinary tourism. According to **Chen (2013)**, gastronomy and food tourism are useful tools for destination branding and promotion. Since food is part of the culture of a place, it is a sure contributor to the destination image (**Tsai, 2013**). **Oers (2011)** delved into details of food tourism and enlisted the requirements for the success of food- based tourism, viz., convenience, care, consciousness, choice, cheap prices and concepts.

Films and television are the leading channels of communication for the tourism sector. The cinematic representation of a place can reinforce the image of a destination in the consumers' mind or can even foster a new image for a potential destination (**Bolan and Williams, 2008**). **Mitchell and Stewart (2012)** also support the positive impact of films on tourist arrivals and destination image, concluding that films enhance destination image even if the plot is fictitious. The information so- gathered about a destination, leads to the formation of a destination image. **Murphy, Mascardo and Beckendorff (2007)** have identified word of mouth as a strong information source for tourism. They conclude that while younger travelers seek information from fellow travelers, others rely heavily on word of mouth spread by relatives and friends. This cognitive wisdom of tourists leads to formation of an organic image (**Sarma, 2007**). A collective impression received from the many sources of information is delivered to consumers, forming the destination image.

Elena and Andrea (2013) have identified how information and communication technologies (ICTs) are instrumental in changing the image of a destination from local to global. The use of ICTs has been applied by many destinations to enhance tourist experience (**Prideaux, 2005**). The internet has been recognized as an important tool for promoting tourism. In fact, **Hudson and Ritchie (2009)** have mentioned the number of hits on the website of a destination as an indicator

of its success and a possible determinant of its image. **Dabas and Manaktola (2007)** have highlighted the quality of information available online (on websites of tourism service providers), as a determinant of the image of a destination. **Qirci et al. (2011)** have indicated the potential which e- business holds, if ICTs are used by DMOs. **Larson (2008)** has captured one of the most important factors considered by consumers for any purchase. For analyzing the price competitiveness of a destination, he proposes to compare the Tourist Price Index of the destination with the Consumer Price Index. Specific to developed countries, a common currency is said to increase the number of tourist arrivals (**Gallego, Ledesma- Rodriguez, Perez-Rodriguez and Costes- Jinenez, 2010**). However, **Yap (2012)** suggests that instead of comparing prices between countries, the relevant exchange rates should be considered for comparison. **Larson (2008)** highlights the role of events, accessibility of a destination and its history as determining factors. Urban tourism is seen by him as a strong case for positive destination image. Buildings, businesses and venues (all parts of the urban landscape) have also been listed by **Hankinson (2012)** as antecedents of destination image. **Jin, Bauer and Weber (2009)** discuss about the potential of cities which have facilities for exhibitions and events. However, since urban tourism and urbanization in general are pressurizing urban resources, agri-tourism, farm- based tourism and heritage tourism (in rural areas) have been hailed as instruments to enhance the image of rural areas (**Bhattacharjee, 2012**). This may motivate people for reverse migration from cities to villages.

Asad and Lockyer (2010) identify personalization and empathy from tourism service providers and complaint handling by different agencies as primary factors for destination image formation. They highlight the role of perceptions held by tourists, mentioning that customer perceptions are of paramount importance, irrespective of the efforts put in.

Safety and security have been primary concerns of travelers all over the world. **Aschauer (2009)** talks about terrorist attacks as seeds of fright which get sown deep within the consumers' psyche. Through another study based on Kashmir, **Bhat (2013)** concludes that there are five major risks associated with tourism: war, political instability, health risks, culture and language difficulties and crime. **Manhas and Dogra (2013)** have identified safety and security as the most important factor which works towards the development of a destination image. **Wichasin and Dounghummes (2014)** have re-emphasized the importance of building travel safety confidence among foreign tourists.

Baksi (2014) has described the tourism industry as a hub and spoke network of stakeholders, with tourists as the hub. **Baggio, Scott and Cooper (2010)** highlight the role of interactions between tourism stakeholders in the formation of a tourist experience and the resultant image. **Dmitrovic et al. (2009)** propose that though a tourist destination is perceived by tourists as a single entity, it in fact comprises of several stakeholder groups. Place branding requires cooperation among the many stakeholders of a destination (**de Carlo et al., 2009**). **Najdic (2011)** rightly points out that a successful destination brand is based on the destination's characteristics and consistent messages, supported by the relevant DMOs. The performance of tourist destinations is affected by these networks. All members of the network need to have common goals. **Baggio et al. (2010)** consider tourism destinations as clusters of inter-related stakeholders embedded in a social network. The effectiveness of interactions among these stakeholders may increase through cooperative planning and organizational activities. **Discussion and Managerial**

Implications

The tourist destination lies at the heart of a tourist offering. It is the core around which destination management organizations build up experiences. This is a herculean task given the fact that consumers today have heterogeneous needs and motivations. Tourism destinations must be viewed today as places of consumption, where attempts must be made to provide experiences engaging all senses. This alone may maximize the 'takeaways' from a destination. Discovering linkages between tourism and other disciplines may prove to be helpful in this regard. Also, the resources available at a destination need to be linked to the needs of tourists. The synergy between components available at a destination may be exploited by linking it to other strategic tourist locations. Whether it is a country, region or a city, strategy should be made to create and manage an image. Ultimately, a tourist destination must be associated with a cluster of attributes and associations. These associations may be hard (tangible or functional) or soft (emotional).

Conclusions

Tourism is now deep- rooted as a phenomenon in the social as well as economic spheres of the world. The tourism sector has been gaining more importance due to the potential which it holds in terms of revenue generation and employment creation. Within its domain, organizations related to tourism have been applying innovative methods to strike a chord with the consumer. This is because each natural and man- made aspect of the destination has been seen as affecting the tourist destination image. In order to ensure that the tourist receives what has been planned by the DMOs, a concerted approach towards managing the image of the destination is required. However, before this, it is imperative to understand the perceptions towards tourism, as held by all participants of the tourism chain of delivery.

Directions for Further Research

The present study has drawn inferences from various research studies which have been carried out in the area of tourism destination image and destination management. However, most of the studies focus only on the destination, and not on the customer. Thus, an individual destination needs to be studied from the perspective of present and potential consumers, so as to understand their perception of a destination. The scope of study may even include an analysis of the evolving image of a tourist destination; the image perception across various sections of society or a comparison between the image perception of a destination at the level of DMOs, tourists and other stakeholders. The present study is an attempt to identify the factors which impact tourist destination image, and which may be considered as tenets to begin further research.

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