BUILDING UNDERSTANDING OF THE DOMAIN OF DESTINATION IMAGE: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Research on the image of destinations began in the early 1970s with Gunn's work in 1972 on how destination image is formed and Hunt's work in 1975 on how destination image is measured which since then and after destination image today remains one of the prevalent topics among researchers (Stepchenkova and Morrison 2008; Gallarza et al. 2002; Pike, 2002). While the topic of destination image is popular among authors in human science disciplines, it is difficult to define what a 'destination image' exactly is, as this term has been defined and used differently in a variety of contexts and disciplines (Gallarza et al., 2002; Pearce, 1998; Echtner and Ritchie, 1991).

Destination image is frequently described as simply impressions of a place or perceptions of an area. Hunt (1971) defined image as perception held by potential visitors about an area. Um and Crompton (1990) defined it as a gestalt of holistic construct. A more integrative definition was given by Echtner and Ritchie (1991) as the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination (Tasci and Cartner 2007). However, there is no clear definition of destination image regardless of the papers and each author looked into the topic from some aspects and from different disciplines.

The universally acknowledged importance of destination image has led to a substantial body of research on this topic. Not only in the field of tourism, but also in several other disciplines, including geography, environmental planning, psychology and marketing has been carried out significantly (Echtner and Ritchie 1991) from different approaches and perspectives (Gallarza et al. 2002). All the authors believed that they can promote the destinations through destination images but don't really explore the way that how people construct the image of places over time. Then the marketing perspective could be another good way to study the topic from a consumer behavior field.

This paper recapitulates the history of destination image from the early year into different stages. The objective of this paper is to provide an overview of destination image research based on a combination from tourism, marketing and consumer perspective. In order to provide a more comprehensive theoretical framework of destination image, a conceptual model from tourism and marketing perspective will be developed based on previous literature. In doing so, this paper provide an integrative review of the existing literature and suggest a conceptual model, and propose some ways that such an understanding of destination image from these new approaches can be implemented into researches and policy decisions.

In the pre-internet era destination marketing organizations (DMOs) were effective and influential in media content placement and in the coordination of destination positioning initiatives, but since the internet arrived the centralized control over destination information dissemination is almost impossible (Grover and Go 2003). Therefore, it is necessary to research and redefine the role of internet and ICT in shaping destination image. The marketing and consumer behavior researchers should go so far as to highlight the new consumer of the postmodern era. The world is more complex and filled with a variety of consumer who are ontologically disparate and who polysemically read the world around them in exceptionally nuanced and oftentimes orthogonal ways (Batat 2011). Then a conceptual framework regarding destination image should be develop in order to indicate a new perspective of postmodern research in marketing and consumer behavior. A conceptual framework that is useful in consumer research and can be used in managerial implications.

References available upon request