

UNDERSTANDING TOURIST DESTINATION IMAGE

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Abstract

The paper is aimed to examine the concept of destinations image and its utility in promotion of tourism industry. The term “image” has been used by different disciplines with different meanings. This paper is a modest effort to analyze different elements and components of the concept and its process with major factors affecting in its formation. Paper also discusses the role of destination image in holiday decision making process.

Key words: destination image; element, formation, process, role of image

The term ‘tourist destination image’ has different meanings in different contexts which makes its exact meaning determination quite problematic. The ‘stereotype’ image held by public published by tourism developers and held by individuals are some of examples in this reference. Early literature seems unable to define “destination image” in exact and definitions used in it are quite vague (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991). Pearce (1988, p. 162) indicated that destination image has shifting meanings. This is basically visual representation in psychology which is associated with impressions, emotions, beliefs and values in behavioral geography.

“The sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination” Crompton (1979, p. 18) is most cited definition till date. The definition focus on individual while other definitions indicate that image is shared by groups. But definition stressing group sharing has significant place in market segmentation. Lawson and Baud Bovy (1977) hold relevance among researchers in this controversy as it includes both view points. For detailed understanding of concept, researchers seem to accept this definition for further investigation and same is true with this paper.

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Elements of Destination image

The study of elements of destination in image formulation becomes important in contemporary times and literature paid its due share to it. Mayo (1975) investigated regional destination images and concluded that there are three dimension of tourism destination image i.e., congestion, scenery and climate. This is basically an inclusion of functional characteristic which are intangible in nature and can be observed or measured directly e.g. size, price, climate etc. Few studies have tried to involve less tangible or intangible elements of image which are basically very difficult to measure such as romance associated with a particular setting (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991). Ross (1994, p. 78) also stated that only friendliness which was psychological variable measured in a number of studies availed in literature. Followings are some of definition of destination image for understanding the concept in question.

Dictor (1985) defined that destination image is not only individual qualities but also an overall impression of a destination makes on minds of others. Following figure tries to conceptualize various components of destination image.

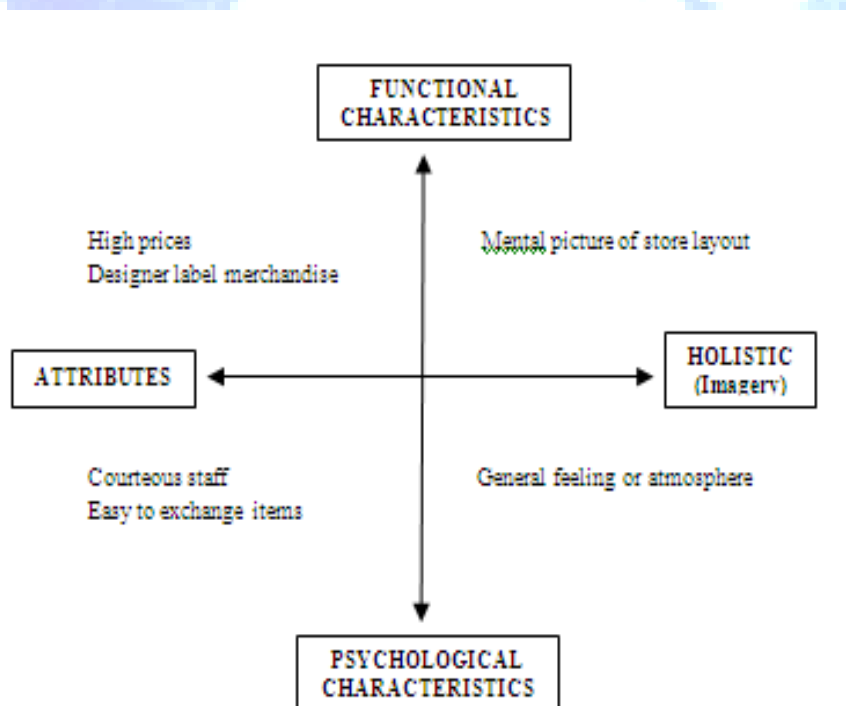


Image Formation Process

Images are formed at two levels i.e. organic level and induced level (Gunn, 1988) Organic level includes the attributes related to individual experience while induced level attributes are associated with information provided by surrounding and marketing process. The author also identified the process of individual image formation i.e. (1) organic image (2) modifying the image after getting more information (3) deciding to go to the destination (4) visiting the destination (5) sharing the destination (6) returning back to home and (7) modifying the image based after consumption of service. The above image formulations at each and every level are open to change (Vaughan, 2007). Baloglu, & McCleary, (1999a, 1999b); Gartner, (1993) described the formation process by three interrelated components i.e. cognitive, affective and cognitive. According to Gunn (1988) cognitive is total of what is known about a tourist destination while affective factor is developed during destination selection process (Gartner, 1993). The cognitive is likelihood of visiting the destination in future. Baloglu and McCleary (1999b) accepted that affective image is most important factor and authors divided it into two parts i.e. positive and negative dimension. Ryan and Cave (2005) also indicated that destination image becomes more important in familiarization with the destination.

Role of Destination Image in Tourism

Destination image play important role in decision making process of holidays *Fakeye and crompton (1991)* indicated that images are very important as it provides tourists a pre-taste. Destination images are basically “pull and push factors” to influence the peoples holiday making decisions. Baloglu (1999) also concluded that destination image is significant concept in prediction of travel behavior. The term ‘beneficial image’ coined by Tapachai & Waryszak (2000) was directly associated with familiarization of destinations, Laws (1995) revealed importance of image by comparing to visit of other destinations. Ekinici and Hosany (2006) concluded that perceived destination image, intention to recommend a place and destination personality are inter-related term. Based on literature survey, it is crystal clear that destination image plays crucial role in success of a destination.

Conclusion:

Rapidly changing trends in industry requires new products/services development and for quality experience of tourists. The suppliers have to create according to market demand. The demand of tourism products is highly influenced by their images. Apart that the planners have to verify to examine whether the destination image marketed and perceived by prospects are appropriate for new tourism destination. This study has discussed the concept from different aspects and examined the use of destination image for development of tourism industry.

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