# Destination Image and Its Functional Relationships

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Destination image is commonly accepted as an important aspect in successful tourism development and destination marketing due to its impact on both supply- and demandside aspects of marketing. Despite the ample amount of literature, a comprehensive conceptualization of destination image comprising its intricate relationships with several other factors on the supply and demand sides of the market has yet to emerge. In this study, a large body of literature on destination image and related concepts is reviewed and a comprehensive conceptualization of destination image is modeled. It was concluded that there are still many facets of this complex construct yet to be investigated empirically.

#### *Keywords:* Destination image; image management; image development; effects of image; image determinants

It is commonly recognized that destination image, "the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination" (Crompton 1979, p. 18), is an important aspect in successful destination marketing. Some researchers relate the importance of proper image development to the overall success of a destination in tourism (Chen and Kerstetter 1999; Crompton 1979; Dadgostar and Isotalo 1992; Hunt 1975). Others attribute destination image importance to its effects on supply-side aspects, namely, marketing related variables, such as positioning and promotion (Baloglu and Brinberg 1997; Baloglu and McCleary 1999; Calantone et al., 1989; Chen and Kerstetter 1999; Walmsley and Young 1998). Still others relate the importance of destination image to its effect on demand-side aspects, such as tourist behavior, especially decision-making (Alhemoud and Armstrong 1996; Baloglu and Brinberg 1997; Chen and Hsu 2000; Chen and Kerstetter 1999; Crompton 1979; Dadgostar and Isotalo 1992; Dann 1996; Fakeye and Crompton 1991; Gartner 1993; Goodrich 1977; Hunt 1975; MacKay and Fesenmaier 1997; Mayo 1973; Mayo and Jarvis 1981; Tapachai and Waryszak 2000; Walmsley and Young 1998). The ultimate goal of destinations in conducting marketing is to attract tourists by influencing their travel decision-making and choice. Therefore, it can be said that researchers, no matter how they approach the subject, are in consensus about the importance of image for a destination's viability and success in tourism.

Several researchers have studied destination image as an independent variable influencing several consumer behavior variables, such as destination choice, decision-making and satisfaction. Both holistic destination image and specific destination attributes were found to influence consumer behavior variables related to before, during, and after destination visitation (Chen and Hsu 2000; Chen and Kerstetter 1999; Court and Lupton 1997; Ross 1993; Schroeder 1996). Due to the importance of destination image in terms of its effects on tourist behavior, researchers have been trying to identify the determinants that define, modify, and strengthen this construct. Therefore, past studies have conceived of destination image as a dependent variable suggesting that several factors play a role in the destination image formation process (Alhemoud and Armstrong 1996; Bramwell and Rawding 1996; Gartner 1993; Gartner and Shen 1992; Gunn 1972; MacKay and Fesenmaier 1997; MacKay and Fesenmaier 2000; Smith and MacKay 2001; Sonmez, Apostolopoulos, and Tarlow 1999).

Although considerable work has been conducted in establishing a theoretical framework of the image construct along with its determinants and effects, destination image studies "have remained largely atheoretical" (Young 1999, p. 373). There is no clearly defined conceptual base leading destination image studies, especially the ones investigating causality between destination image and other concepts. It is the purpose of this study to investigate the relationship between destination image and its determinants as well as the effects on the receivers of image formation programs.

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*Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 45(4), May 2007, 413–425 DOI: 10.1177/0047287507299569 © 2007 Sage Publications This will be accomplished by a qualitative assessment of the tourism image literature. To this end, several destination image studies, both conceptual and empirical are reviewed. A model is constructed based on the evidence from the literature. In other words, the literature is the empirical evidence used to construct the model and therefore testing of the model has been accomplished through previous research. It is acknowledged that the entire model cannot be tested easily; however, parts of it can be tested and by doing so the evidence from the existing literature can be verified, or not, through replication.

#### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Early tourism image research established the concept as critical to destination success. After acceptance by the research community, attention then focused on different methods to assess image(s) and examining image change due to level of exposure to the destination (i.e., visitation). The vast majority of this work reinforced Hunt's (1975) conclusion that image was a critical factor in a destination's tourism success. Until recently, with renewed interest in image measurement and formation, there was no attempt to build a comprehensive understanding of tourism image as a multifaceted concept. Upon examination, the image formation process detailed by researchers is a supply-side approach to understanding the concept. Recently, however, attention has turned to how the image formation process is perceived by receivers of the information.

#### Image Formation

Image formation is defined as a construction of a mental representation of a destination on the basis of information cues delivered by the image formation agents and selected by a person (Alhemoud and Armstrong 1996; Bramwell and Rawding 1996; Court and Lupton 1997; Gartner 1993; Gunn 1972; Young 1999). There are two ends of information transmission in destination image formation: the destination and the receiver. MacKay and Fesenmaier contend that destination image formation comes from a wider spectrum of sources than those for consumer products or other services (Alhemoud and Armstrong 1996; Echtner and Ritchie 1991; Gartner 1993; Murphy 1999; Selby and Morgan 1996).

Destination image literature reveals three sources of image formation agents: (1) supply-side or destination, (2) independent or autonomous, and (3) demand-side or image receivers. Destination marketers engage in promotional efforts to establish a positive image or to change an existing image through advertising and other forms of publicity (Bramwell and Rawding 1996; Court and Lupton 1997; Day, Skidmore, and Koller 2002; Human 1999; Iwashita 3003; MacKay and Fesenmaier 1997; MacKay and Fesenmaier 2000; Young 1999). However, the projected image is not always the same as the received image. The original message may be altered by the very source communicating the message (Bramwell and Rawding, 1996; Young 1999), it can be modified by the perceiver (Court and Lupton, 1997), and most important, destination-originated messages are not the only messages reaching the perceiver. Image formation arises through personal experience (Baloglu and Brinberg 1997; Baloglu and McCleary 1999; Chen and Kerstetter 1999; Court and Lupton 1997; Crompton 1979; Dann 1996; Gartner 1993; Gunn 1972; Hu and Ritchie 1993; MacKay and Fesenmaier 1997; Ross 1993; Walmsley and Young 1998); it can be formed solely through information sources (Bojanic 1991; Court and Lupton 1997; Gartner 1993; Gunn 1972), or even in the absence of any commercial information (Alhemoud and Armstrong 1996). Gartner and Hunt (1987) in assessing Utah's image change over a 12-year period concluded that it would be impossible to separate the impact of each possible cause leading to a positive image change for Utah. They postulate that "in the absence of any catastrophic impact of international importance, image(s) will continue to evolve at a rate contingent on the relative strengths of an area's induced (i.e., advertising or second-party endorsement efforts) and organic (incidence of travel) factors" (p.18-19).

#### Image Types and Components

A discussion of image determinants needs reflections on organic, induced, and autonomous image formation agents and the resulting complex images that are formed. The basis for these image types was developed by Gunn (1972), and elaborated on by Gartner (1993). They contend that organic image is a function of noncommercial information sources including word-of-mouth and actual visitation that are presumably sources of information not controlled by destination marketers. Marketing efforts of destination promoters, namely promotional materials, constitute the induced image. These image types have been cited by many researchers (Chen and Hsu 2000; Chen and Kerstetter 1999; Echtner and Ritchie 1991; Gartner 1989, 1993; Lubbe 1998; MacKay and Fesenmaier 1997; Milman and Pizam 1995).

However, as realized by Gartner (1993) and Selby and Morgan (1996), because of astute efforts of destination marketers in developing skillful media relations, mutual exclusivity of organic, induced, and autonomous agents are practically nonexistent. Recognizing the diminishing borders between these image formation agents, Gartner (1993) delineated a typology of eight image formation agents with differing degree of control by the destination promoters, level of market penetration, and credibility to the information receivers. Gartner proposes that these agents affect formation of destination images differently, therefore they should be used in some combination for an effective destination image promotion.

It is believed that actual visitation creates an image more realistic than that existing prior to visitation (Gartner, 1989; Gunn 1972). Fakeye and Crompton (1991) separated this type of image from Gunn's organic image, and ascribed it as the third level, "complex" image (Chen and Hsu 2000; Chen and Kerstetter 1999; MacKay and Fesenmaier 1997). Fakeye and Crompton (1991) argue that it is complex because it allows a more differentiated outlook and truer comprehension of the destination rather than simple stereotyping, especially if the visitor spends "enough time there to be exposed to the destination's varying dimensions through developing contacts and establishing relationships" (p. 11). Organic, induced, and autonomous image formation agents form complex images in which a change in one agent affects the others and serves to modify the complex image.

# Information Sourcing from the Destination (Projected Image)

Due to the intangible nature of travel products, promotional materials become significantly important since they represent the product, the destination under consideration, until actual visitation (MacKay and Fesenmaier 1997; Sirakaya and Sonmez 2000). Promotional materials are used for establishing, reinforcing, or changing the image of a destination (Goodrich 1977; Gunn 1972; Human 1999; Hunt 1975; Iwashita 2003; MacKay and Fesenmaier 1997, 2000; Reilly 1990; Young 1999). They create awareness, generate interest, stimulate desire, and ultimately result in action (Court and Lupton 1997; Selby and Morgan 1996). Destinations use a myriad of promotional sources with verbal and visual messages.

The visual aspects of promotional materials receive more attention since they represent the actuality of the destination and illustrate destination dimensions (Day, Skidmore, and Koller 2002; Hanefors and Mossberg 2002; Smith and MacKay 2001). Before visitation, destination image is dependent on visuals rather than the destination's actual features (MacKay and Fesenmaier 2000); this means, except for the visitors, people's image of a destination is based on cues in the visual messages. Therefore, the content and amount of the visuals are of paramount importance and the inclusion or exclusion of certain dimensions determines what kind of image the destination is attempting to create in the minds of potential markets. A few researchers have studied the influence of visual materials on created images and how they are received by different types of people (Day, Skidmore, and Koller 2002; MacKay and Fesenmaier 1997, 2000; Smith and MacKay 2001). However, the literature on the impact of destination-originated information has remained mostly propositional (Alhemoud and Armstrong 1996; Gartner 1993; Gunn 1972).

Fakeye and Crompton (1991) found that the image held of destinations by nonvisitors differed from that of visitors; also, expectations of nonvisitors on some dimensions exceeded the actual performance reported by the visitors. Therefore, Fakeye and Crompton concluded that there must be some disconnect between what the destination projects in its promotional and marketing efforts and the actual delivery of products and services. This implies that induced image formation agents may hurt the image of the destination in the long run by setting up unrealistic expectations. For example, Britton (1979) cautioned against depicting underdeveloped places as "unspoiled," "paradise," or "sensuous" due to the adverse effects on both tourist experience and local's sociopsychological state (pp. 318-324). Similarly, Sirakaya and Sonmez (2000) criticize the depiction of women as subordinate and submissive to and dependent on men after conducting frame analysis of winter and summer vacation pamphlets of the United States.

## Information Sourcing from the Autonomous Agents

The image projected by a destination is only one factor among many playing roles in the process of image formation. There are intermediate factors between the destination and receivers, sometimes modifying, enhancing, and diminishing the information cues being transmitted. These factors are what Gartner calls *autonomous image formation agents* and consist of things such as news articles, educational materials, movies and popular culture (1993). Autonomous agents are postulated to be more influential on image formation because they have higher credibility and ability to reach mass crowds than the destination-originated information (Gartner 1993; Gartner and Shen 1992; Hanefors and Mossberg 2002). Autonomous agents create general knowledge about a destination, and are out of a destination's immediate control.

Autonomous agents, especially news media, are purported to have even greater impact when they depict a dramatic event occurring at a destination, including human caused disasters such as political upheaval, riots, terrorism, insurgency, crime, and war, and natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, and hurricanes (Alhemoud and Armstrong 1996; Dimanche and Lepetic 1999; Gartner and Shen, 1992; Mansfeld 1999; Milo and Yoder 1991; Sonmez, Apostolopoulos, and Tarlow 1999; Sonmez and Sirakaya 2002). Egypt, Israel, Northern Ireland, and Peru are examples of destinations whose images are tormented by political violence causing less tourism flows into these countries than otherwise expected. Baloglu and McCleary (1999) report both visitor and nonvisitor American respondents had less positive images of Egypt than other Mediterranean countries on the majority of the important image items, which they attributed to numerous cases of terrorist activity in Egypt. Gartner and Shen (1992), similarly, document the tarnishing effects of political unrest in China, namely the 1989 Tiananmen Square conflict. Most important, related dimensions to the focus of the event such as "pleasant attitudes of service personnel," "receptiveness of local people to tourists," and "safety and security" were significantly and negatively affected by this government action. Unrelated dimensions, such as image of natural resources, were also affected but not in a significant way. Although the trend was a lessening of the previously held positive images of all attributes in the country, only those central to the event were significantly affected.

There are different theories on the potential effect of such media coverage on image formation and change. Keaveney and Hunt (1992) defend the category-based information processing theory, and assert that people use schemas in evaluating incoming information. If the incoming information is mildly discrepant with the schema it will be quickly forgotten, if it is extremely discrepant, then it will trigger additional information processing and will be well remembered. In a similar vein, Boulding postulates that image change depends on the amount and extent of incoming information. If the new information is nonconforming, it will cause "cognitive dissonance" (Festinger 1957) and the person will try to avoid receiving the incoming information to reduce the "dissonance." If this avoidance is successful, image will remain the same; if the information continues to flow or is overwhelming and avoidance is not possible, image(s) will change, some facets gradually and others more quickly and significantly (cf. Gartner 1993, p. 205). Thus, autonomous agents can change image quickly if the information received is considered credible and differs substantially from previously held images or gradually if the information is less overwhelming but received constantly over a period of time. Image change in a short period of time

is possible when a world event is exposed to large audiences through the media (Gartner and Shen, 1992).

On the other hand, according to the social judgment theory, depending on their level of "ego-involvement," people have different latitudes of acceptance and rejection on issues, which result in categories of judgment in evaluating incoming information (Hovland, Harvey, and Sherif 1957; Sherif, Sherif, and Nebergall 1965). People try to keep these categories intact by distorting the incoming information. If incoming information differs moderately from their positions, they will change their position on the issue; if it differs grossly they will not (Hovland, Harvey, and Sherif 1957; Sherif, Sherif, and Nebergall 1965). Parallel to this theory, Gartner and Shen (1992) assert that in the case of a distant country, for which lack of knowledge exists, the autonomous agents, such as news reports, articles, and movies are able to cause a more dramatic change in image due to their high credibility and ability to reach mass crowds than destination-originated information. This might be true for the cases in which these agents depict dramatic events, especially with a content that would make people more conscious about safety and security. Referring to Maslow's (1970) theory of hierarchy of needs, which defines basic and higher level human needs with differing level of importance in different contexts, it would be logical to postulate that people would be more receptive, capable of receiving large amounts of information, in a short period of time, when the content is related to their basic needs. It is open for discussion if such dramatic effects occur when the content of the autonomous agents is related with higher level human needs, such as belonging and self-esteem.

Gartner and Shen (1992) question the persistence of the impact of such an "exogenous shock" from massive media coverage of events. They caution that an "exogenous shock" can alter images dramatically in the short run, but they might revert back to previous positions in the long run. The effect of such a dramatic event can also be twofold. Sonmez, Apostolopoulos and Tarlow (1999) report declining numbers of tourists in surrounding countries during the 1991 Persian Gulf War, whereas Alhemoud and Armstrong (1996) argue the war had a positive affect on Kuwait. They suggest that Kuwait might have tourism potential because it has received enormous free publicity, although not all of it positive. This, they purport, has resulted in a worldwide awareness of Kuwait although the country conducts no tourism promotion.

Despite these different theories on the impact of media, coverage of dramatic events is commonly accepted to have a sudden impact on the public consciousness. Therefore, destination authorities try to improve and enhance their image(s) by getting positive attention through hosting "hallmark" or "mega" events such as the Olympic Games (Beritelli, Boksberger, and Weinert 2004; Ritchie and Smith 1991; Westerbeek, Turner, and Ingerson 2002; Whitson and Macintosh 1996). However, Ritchie and Smith's (1991) findings on the longterm persistence of such events' impact confirm Gartner and Shen's (1992) postulation that image might revert back to its previous position in the long run. In an effort to measure the impact of the 1988 Calgary Olympic Winter Games on the host city's image, Ritchie and Smith (1991) used data collected annually from 1986 through 1989 in centers in Europe and the United States. They found that this "hallmark" event resulted in a dramatic increase in awareness and connotations associated with Calgary. However, they caution researchers about "awareness decay" since respondents' "total awareness" seemed stable while "top of mind awareness" declined when measured one year after the event.

Murphy (1999) suggests that the critical action of the destination to counter negative information transmitted through autonomous agents should be creating positive word-of-mouth by satisfied tourists, whereas other researchers emphasize reassuring tourists of their safety and security, especially after human caused disasters (Pizam, Tarlow, and Bloom 1997; Sonmez and Graefe 1998). For a successful recovery from the impact of such dramatic events, Milo and Yoder (1991) recommend destination authorities' involvement with travel writers, in an effort to utilize a strategic advertising tool, namely positive testimony of known people. This is what Gartner (1993) refers to as the covert induced II image formation agent.

Armed with the above information, it is possible to build a destination image program utilizing many of the image formation agents in combination. For example, at the same time that a destination is creating and delivering information through "overt induced I"-type agents it may also be using intermediaries, such as travel operators, to develop "overt induced II" types of images (Gartner, 1993). A destination cannot forget about the organic end of the image formation process either as the type of experience delivered will determine the word-of-mouth publicity that is spread around once the tourist returns home. There are connections and relationships between these image formation components that must be understood to be successfully employed.

#### Image Receivers' Characteristics

It is well accepted that induced, autonomous and organic agents are not the only sources of destination image determinants. Another source of destination image determinants is purported to be the consumers (perceivers) who filter the information from these sources and form images about travel destinations (Bramwell and Rawding 1996; Dann 1996; Gartner 1993). As distinguished by Bramwell and Rawding (1996), a projected image is the combination of messages and impressions created about a destination, whereas a received image is consumers' unique mental construct or representation of the destination formed through their comprehension, understanding, and interpretation of these messages. Perceivers' sociodemographics, as well as past travel behavior, are assumed to play a role in this image formation process, and, therefore, have been investigated in terms of their relationships with destination image.

Litvin and Kar (2003) discount the value of demographics in facilitating market stimulation. Similarly, Hunt (1975) accepts the possible systematic exclusion of certain groups when selecting research sample populations and argues for "brand or product image to be independent of consumer socio economic class" (p. 2). On the other hand, Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) suggest that image of pleasure products would be different for different cultural subgroups, especially for different ethnic groups, gender, and social classes. Dann (1996) states, "no two people see a destination in exactly the same way" (pp. 52–53). As can be seen in Table 1, many researchers have discussed and investigated the influence of perceivers' sociodemographic characteristics including age, gender, household status,

# TABLE 1 STUDIES INVESTIGATING THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIODEMOGRAPHICS AND CULTURE ON DESTINATION IMAGE

Researcher(s)	Study Destination(s)	Sample Destination(s)	Influential Variables	Area(s) of Difference(s)	
Hunt (1975)	Rocky Mountain states-Colorado, Montana, Utah, Wyoming	US	Distance (culture)	Further respondents could not differentiate between areas within study regions as well as closer respondents	
Scott, Schewe, and Frederick (1978)	Massachusetts	Non-resident visitors	Distance (culture)	Closer regions perceived friendlier people, more cultural, less commercialized, more relaxing less historical	
Crompton (1979)	Mexico	US	Distance (culture)	Further away respondents had more favorable images of destination as a vacation destination	
Gartner and Hunt (1987)	Utah	US	Distance (culture)	Closer regions had more impressive images	
Richardson and Crompton (1988)	Canada and US	Canada	Culture	Vacation attributes of the US and Canada	
Reilly (1990)	Montana	US, Canada, visitors	Distance	Distant respondents lack a vivid image	
Fakeye and Crompton (1991)	Rio Grande Valley in Texas	US	Distance (culture)	Infrastructure, Food and, Friendly People	
Alhemoud and Armstrong (1996)	Kuwait	Kuwait (residents and foreigners)	Age Distance (culture) Religion	Old chose shopping, young chose nightlife Foreigners chose cultural attractions Local students chose manufactured attractions Foreigners were not aware of national Islamic Museum	
Walmsley and Young (1998)	Local attractions in Sydney, US, UK, New Zealand, Bali, Hong Kong, Singapore, Fiji, Thailand	Sydney/ Australia	Residence/ Distance	Evaluative schema fit international destinations but not local	
MacKay and Fesenmaier (1997)	Riding Mountain National Park, Manitoba/Canada	Canada	Age Marital status Gender Income	No difference No difference Holiday, Atmosphere Holiday and Activity	
Chen and Kerstetter (1999)	Pennsylvania, US	US	Gender Household status Education Home country (culture)	Tourism Infrastructure, Natural Amenity Tourism Infrastructure, Natural Amenity Natural Amenity Tourism Infrastructure, Atmosphere, Natural Amenity, Farm Life	
Young (1999)	Australia	Visitors	Usual residence	Residents scored higher on natural values, cultural values, human impacts	
MacKay and Fesenmaier (2000)	Alberta, Canada	US and Taiwan	Culture	Number and interpretation of dimensions	
Baloglu (2001)	Turkey	US	Ade	Perception of attractions	
Joppe Martin	Toronto	Visitors	Home country	Attributes seen as important and levels	
and Waalen (2001)			(culture)	of satisfaction	
Rittichainuwat, Qu and Brown (2001)	Thailand	International travelers	Marital status age group level of education country of residence (culture)	Safe travel destination, good value for cuisine and hotels, adventure activities, scenic natural beauty, good shopping	
Smith and MacKay (2001)	Pictures of various destinations	Canada	Age	No difference in memory of visual stimuli	

education, income, and residence/geographic distance on destination image.

A few researchers have studied the impact of respondents' residence or distance from the study destination (see Table 1). The effect of distance in terms of its effect on overall familiarity, and knowledge with and propensity to travel to a destination has been the focus of a number of studies (Crompton, 1979; Fakeye and Crompton, 1991; Gartner and Hunt 1987; Goodrich, 1977; Hunt, 1975; Walmsley and Young, 1998; Young 1999). Walmsley and Young (1998) predicted that local images are based on personal experience and knowledge through "long-term assimilation of placerelated information gleaned from a variety of everyday sources," whereas international images are more likely to develop through induced formation agents (p. 66). They found that the proposed common schema for evaluating places fit international destination evaluations but not local, confirming that local level images are more based on intimate (i.e., organic) factors rather than promotional materials.

Socioeconomic factors have been studied with respect to influence on destination image however, the results have been divergent. Age, gender, income, marital status, education, and country of residence have all received attention (Table 1).

Richardson and Crompton (1988) compared the ratings of the United State's and Canada's vacation attributes by French- and English-speaking Canadians and found significant differences in the ratings from these two culturally different groups. MacKay and Fesenmaier (2000) also investigated the effect of home country; but they used only visual representation without the name of the destination. They found differences in number and interpretations of underlying dimensions revealed by U.S. and Taiwanese groups. They cautioned against projecting the same visuals consistently across different and culturally distinctive segments. However, their study actually investigates the influence of culture on environmental preferences since excluding the name of the destination strips many cues from destination image and turns it into pure landscape preference. Destination image is not solely based on interpretation of visual or verbal information; it includes biases, histories, assumptions, fantasies, preconceptions, prejudices, and factual stories, especially at the international level.

Reisinger and Turner (2002b) define culture and its relationship to tourism as "differences and similarities in values, rules of behavior, and perceptions, which influence interpersonal contact between international tourists and hosts and their satisfaction with each other" (p. 347). Reisinger and Turner (2002a, 2002b) argue that culture, with its intricate relationships with several other constructs, can be a defining factor in people's perceptions, impressions and interpretations about other places as well as people in those places. They conclude that "cultural differences are very useful constructs for international tourism promotion, and they can provide very accurate criteria for targeting and positioning. As a result, tourism marketers should take into account the cultural backgrounds of international tourists when developing marketing strategies. Similarly, Young (1999) proposes that ordinary places are shaped into touristic places with symbolic meanings some of which are attributed by place producers (destination promoters) and some by destination consumers (visitors). He combines these two perspectives intersecting at differing levels into a model, which explicitly reveals that places are sociocultural inventions with sociocultural meanings.

Branding-related literature also provides implications on the effect of culture on destination image. In a case study of Wales, Pritchard and Morgan (2001) analyzed tourism representations by investigating destination branding strategies in the marketing campaigns of the Wales Tourist Board. They concluded that Wales's marketing representations used in branding strategies, like any other destination, "are inextricably intertwined with historical, political and cultural processes and are not solely the outcome of elective marketing practice," which they defined as the basis for differentiated branding of Wales in international and U.K. markets (p. 2).

Research on attribute preference and cultural differences indicates that culture may not be as important in explaining needs to be met as some studies suggest. For example, Japanese business travelers were seen as differing greatly in their attribute desires from Japanese pleasure travelers who visited the same destination (Yong and Gartner, 2004). This suggests that different types of touristic travel (i.e., pleasure vs. business) may be more revealing in what tourists desire in the way of attributes and services at the destination. Therefore, cultural differences may be only important in understanding tourist preferences, and ultimately what images to project, between groups traveling for the same purpose.

As can be seen in Table 2, perceivers' past travel behavior variables, including previous visitation, the amount of previous visitation, and length of stay (i.e., organic image formation) have also been investigated and documented as important determinants of destination image by several researchers (Baloglu 2001; Baloglu and McCleary 1999; Chon 1991; Hu and Ritchie 1993; Pearce 1982; Schroeder 1996; Vogt and Andereck 2003). Several researchers have investigated the influence of prior visitation and arrived at different results. Some have observed that visitors hold more accurate and positive images (Baloglu and McCleary 1999; Chon 1991; Pearce 1982; Richards 2001), or more or better affective responses (Baloglu 2001; Baloglu and McCleary 1999; Dann 1996). Some have found mixed results (Fakeye and Crompton 1991; Hu and Ritchie 1993); yet others have found no significant influence of prior visitation on a destination's image (Chen and Kerstetter 1999; Hunt 1975; Young 1999). Despite a little variance in the results, researchers agree that visitation results in more realistic images due to first hand experience of the product.

#### Effects of Destination Image on Trip Behavior

Further refinement of the importance of destination image can be found in the literature on tourist behavior during travel stages. This is also considered to be a demand-side reaction to the image formation process. How image affects what tourists do or want to do during a trip is critical to designing the correct image formation program. Destination image, both in terms of an overall evaluation and within its different components, has been postulated to influence various consumer behavior variables. As can be seen in Table 3, a few destination image studies have investigated destination image as an independent variable influencing several consumer behavior variables concerning not only before, but also during and after visiting a destination.

Researcher(s)	Study Destination(s)	Sample Destination(s)	Differences Between Visitors and Nonvisitors
Pearce (1982) Chon (1991)	Morocco, Greece South Korea	England American visitors	Better images in different attributes of each country Safety and security, scenic beauty, shopping ,
Fakeye and Crompton (1991)	Rio Grande Valley in Texas	US	Social opportunities and attractions, natural and cultural amenities, accommodations and transportation, infrastructure foods and friendly people, physical amenities and recreation activities, bars and evening entertainment
Hu and Ritchie (1993)	Hawaii, Greece, Australia, France, China	Canada	Different dimensions for different countries in different contexts
Milman and Pizam (1995)	Central Florida	US	Several product, environment and behavior-related variables
Selby and Morgan (1996)	A seaside resort in Barry Island/ South Wales	Visitors to surrounding area	Prejudice in cleanliness
MacKay and Fesenmaier (1997)	Riding Mountain National Park, Manitoba/Canada	Canada	Activity, familiarity, holiday, atmosphere Familiars evaluated visuals affectively, unfamiliars cognitively
Baloglu and McCleary (1999)	Turkey, Egypt, Greece, Italv	US	Several variables, more differences in affective items
Chen and Kerstetter (1999)	Pennsylvania, US	US	No difference
Young (1999) Richards (2001)	Australia China	Visitors Dutch and Chinese residents of the	No affect of previous visitation Nonvisitors relied on clichés, visitors mentioned historical and cultural values
Rittichainuwat, Qu, and Brown (2001)	Thailand	International travelers	First-time vs. Repeat-Scenic and natural beauty, ease of immigration procedures, value for money, good
Vogt and Andereck (2003)	Arizona	Motorist visitors	Visitation increased knowledge ad desirability

 TABLE 2

 STUDIES INVESTIGATING THE INFLUENCE OF EXPERIENCE ON DESTINATION IMAGE

#### The Effect of Image on Previsit Behavior

Chen and Kerstetter (1999) found that survey respondents with intentions of traveling to rural areas within 12 months were more likely to have a positive image of certain dimensions than those respondents without visitation intentions. Similarly, Court and Lupton (1997) found that certain dimensions affected the likelihood of visiting a particular destination. Goodrich (1978) sums up this argument when he stated "the more favorable the perception of a given vacation destination, the more preferred that destination will tend to be" (p. 11).

Since travel destination products are rather intangible and the consumer has limited knowledge based on experience and reality; image is believed to represent the destination and affect the decisions of consumers. Not only different types of images but also different components and dimensions of destination image are proposed to have varying levels of influence on consumer decision-making. For example, it is suggested by some researchers that evaluative images rather than descriptive images are influential in discretionary trip-making behavior (Crompton 1979; Walmsley and Young 1998; Tapachai and Waryszak 2000).

Destination image is strongly believed to influence a tourist's choice of destination. Some researchers relate

destination choice to a positive overall image. Chen and Kerstetter (1999) postulate that tourists choose one destination over another only when its positive image aspects exceed its negative image aspects. Some researchers state that destination image must be not only positive but also strong to be chosen by travelers (Alhemoud and Armstrong 1996; Hunt 1975; Ross 1993). Yet, another proposition is that destinations should have distinctive images suggesting features different from tourists' everyday life experiences to be chosen as a travel destination (Bramwell and Rawding 1996). Dubbing image as a "conceptual appeal," Hunt (1975) proposes that image dimensions pertaining to resident populations, natural environments, and climate might be more influential than the recreational attractions and activities on site when examining tourists' destination choice. Hunt also implies that destinations with grossly exotic images may not be chosen since such qualities might pose discomfort for potential travelers. Hunt's proposition is supported by findings from MacKay and Fesenmaier (1997), who found that visuals depicting a destination's unique features caused anxiety in some subjects. Some other researchers base destination choice on tourists' needs and wants (Joppe, Martin, and Waalen 2001) and benefits that the destination is believed to offer (Gartner 1989; Tapachai and Waryszak, 2000). Specifically, Gartner (1989) stresses

# TABLE 3 STUDIES INVESTIGATING DESTINATION IMAGE'S EFFECT ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Researcher(s)	Study Destination(s)	Sample Population(s)	Pre/During/ Post-visit	Effected Behavior(s)	Effective Image Element(s)
Goodrich (1978)	Florida, California, Hawaii, Mexico, the Bahamas, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands	American Express travel customers (visitors and nonvisitors)	-	Destination preferences	Favorable perception across image attributes
Schroeder (1996)	North Dakota	Residents	-	Likelihood of recommending the state to others as a tourist destination Feeling about state government financial support for tourism development and promotion	Overall image
Court and Lupton (1997)	New Mexico State	8 US states' residents	Pre-visit	Likelihood to visit	Natural and cultural amenities Participative recreational opportunities
Ross (1993)	Wet tropics region of Northern Australia	Backpacker visitors	During	Levels of enjoyment	Friendliness of local residents Authenticity Variance in physical environment
			Post-visit	Evaluating the destination as an ideal holiday venue Recommending to friends and relatives	Friendliness of local residents, Physical environment, Authenticity
				Revisit intentions	residents
Chen and Hsu (2000)	Overseas destinations	Korean visitors	Pre-visit	Decision making-Budgeted travel costs	Similar lifestyles Plenty of quality restaurants No language barriers
				Decision making-Time planned to spend	Similar lifestyles
				Decision making-Planning time frame	Many interesting places to visit
Chen and Kerstetter (1999)	Pennsylvania, US	Students at a US University	Pre-visit	Intention to visit	Tourism Infrastructure and Natural Amenity
Leisen (2001)	New Mexico	8 US states' residents	Pre-visit	Intention to visit	Overall favorable image
Rittichainuwat, Qu and Brown (2001)	Thailand	International travelers	Post-visit	Intention to revisit	Positive-good value Negative- social and environmental problems
Sonmez and Sirakaya (2002)	Turkey	US, Puerto Rico, US Virgin Islands	Pre-visit	Likelihood of choosing the country as the next vacation destination	Cognitive, affective and holistic image components

that destination choice depends on a "benefit package, unique to the destination, expected to provide the greatest intrinsic reward to the traveler," which is derived from destination image (p. 16).

Some researchers argue that familiarity with a destination through tourist information (induced agents) plays an important role in tourists' destination preferences (Baloglu 2001; Court and Lupton 1997; Woodside and Lysonski 1989). Court and Lupton (1997) recognize the importance of well-formulated and targeted marketing communication, since, they argue, tourist information influences destination choice by generating awareness and interest, which thus stimulates desire and results in action. Nevertheless, Milman and Pizam (1995) argue that awareness by itself may not generate interest and, ultimately, a purchase decision. They purport that awareness means having an image of a destination, which may, at best, result in curiosity to learn more about the destination. Unless the image is positive, visitation will not occur unless travel to the destination cannot be avoided. Thus business travel or being part of a travel group but having no say (e.g., children) in where the group goes could result in someone visiting a destination for which they hold negative images. Normally, however, "awareness implies that an image of the destination exists in the mind(s) of the decision makers," which puts the destination into the "realizable opportunity set" at the time of the decision making. Unless the destination has "a strong image for the types of activities deemed important to the decision making group or individual" the destination will be eliminated from the "opportunity set" (Gartner 1993, p. 196). Gartner also postulates that the "opportunity set" is reduced, step by step, to the "consideration set," the "choice set," the "evoked set," and finally the "decision set" by evaluating destination attributes in terms of the expected returns, with the affective component of image being operational throughout this evaluation process. This evaluation process may not even be a conscious act, as Woodside and Lysonski (1989) argue that the more experience a tourist has with travel, the smaller the size of the evoked set is. If a destination assumes a dominant position, it will be selected and other destinations will not be evaluated at all. This may be the case when a tourist has a vested interest in a destination such as occurs when second homes are purchased. However, when choice is possible it is reasonable to assume that a decision process including the cognitive and affective image components does take place. One of the most important aspects toward image formation of a tourist destination is to determine the most important variables tourists consider while evaluating a destination (Govers and Go, 2003; Stern and Krakover, 1993). Looking at the preferences of visitors on these variables, and then by matching these with their perception of the destination, the preferred position for a destination, with a particular target market, can be determined.

### The Effect of Image During a Visit

Destination image influence on tourist behavior during a visit also lacks a substantive body of research. Dadgostar and Isotalo (1992) found a moderate effect of image along with other variables on recreation time consumption by tourists at near-home city destinations. The measurement of the effect of image on time spent might be confounded by a two-way causality between image and time spent in a destination since the respondents were questioned ex post facto. Those people who stayed longer might have gained a better and truer perception of the destination than those who stayed a shorter period of time. This type of causality was reported by Fakeye and Crompton (1991), who found that long-stay tourists.

Enjoyment and satisfaction are other visit variables postulated to be influenced by destination image. Ross (1993) found a relationship on some dimensions between backpacker visitors' level of enjoyment and their image of the Wet Tropics region of Northern Australia. Ross (1993) actually reports that "the image involving resident friendliness was found to be the most potent, being related to enjoyable experiences, (and) positive destination evaluations" (p.57). Researchers theorize that if the destination lives up to pretrip expectations and anticipations, the visitor will experience satisfaction, if not dissatisfaction occurs (Alhemoud and Armstrong 1996; Britton 1979; Ross 1993; Fakeye and Crompton 1991).

#### The Effect of Image on Postvisit Behavior

Although the effect of image on postvisit behavior has been recognized, this is one of the most overlooked aspects of destination image theory. Only a few researchers have examined this effect empirically. Ross (1993) found correlations between some destination dimensions and respondents' evaluative variables. In particular, he found that if visitors have a positive image of a destination in terms of the receptiveness dimension, they are more likely to want to revisit the destination. Milman and Pizam (1995) imply that once tourists are satisfied with their experience they might like to revisit a destination. Joppe, Martin, and Waalen (2001), referring to another study on the dimensions affecting destination loyalty, state that "different cultural experience and convenient transportation were significantly related to destination loyalty" (p. 523).

### **IMPLICATIONS**

The literature reviewed pertaining to destination image and its intricate relationship as both a supply- and demandside variable enable one to draw a conceptual model of destination image and its relationships as delineated in Figure 1. As was stated in the introduction, the purpose of developing this model is to provide a theoretical frame of reference for future studies. Peter and Olson (1999) assert that consumer behavior, affective and cognitive systems, and marketing environment form a dynamically interactive and "reciprocal system" where every factor could be both a cause and an effect of a change at any time, and cannot "be understood fully in isolation" (p. 23). A model of destination image and its relationships, which also include consumer behavior, affective and cognitive systems, and marketing environment, reflect the properties of such a dynamic and reciprocal system.

As can be seen from Figure 1, destination image is a composite of a wide spectrum of inputs, including the two ends of the information transmission, destination (supply) and perceivers (demand). These inputs are grouped as controllable (dynamic), semicontrollable (semidynamic) and uncontrollable (static), similar to the groupings made by Sirgy and Su (2000) and Chon (1989), respectively. For example, history is considered uncontrollable or static as it cannot be changed, but it can be interpreted in different ways giving it a semicontrollable feature, whereas legal systems are dynamic because they can be changed. The physical landscape is usually a static input but in the case of built environments this input can be considered semicontrollable. What all the inputs have in common is that, at least in the short run, they give a destination its image capital. "The warp and weft of the fabric of each locality is varied and complex, with each place having its own landscape, history and traditions, cultural patterns, community values and power relations, and these come together in a unique way within the locality" (Bramwell and Rawding 1996, p. 207).

The elements of image capital shown in the model and explained above, however, are rarely viewed "just as they are" by a target market since there are more dynamic and often uncontrollable sources of destination image formation agents, which can also act as bias agents. First, destinationoriented marketing activities are dynamic (controllable) factors that aim to polish and project a positive image for the destination. These marketing activities, or induced image formation agents, are what try to manipulate uncontrollable or static destination characteristics and turn them into semi controllable or semidynamic inputs. Independent sources of determinants (autonomous image formation agents), which are usually out of a destination marketers' immediate control, might work for or against the projected, induced image. Similar to destination marketing activities, independent determinants might reflect objective reality. Destination





authorities might adjust and modify their marketing activities depending on the information reflected by these independent and autonomous sources.

Yet a third and uncontrollable source of image formation is the potential market (demand side), acting as an input filter. As discussed above, numerous perceiver characteristics have been associated with how people receive and interpret information. People's sociodemographic and cultural characteristics define their needs and motivations; and the combination of these sociodemographic and cultural characteristics, needs, and motivations determine behavior, ultimately affecting destination image. Depending on their sociodemographic and cultural characteristics, people have different needs, inclinations, interests, and motivations, which define what they select to see, hear, read, think about, and pay attention to. This, in turn, affects how they interpret destination characteristics and ultimately destination image. The images held by perceivers can be revealed through research. However, this is another filter since researchers choose certain theories, methodologies and interpretations based on their personal and educational background (Dadgostar and Isotalo 1992; Echtner and Ritchie 1993). This makes researchers another determinant of destination image. Together, all these determinants shape the revealed image of a destination which, as shown in the model, consists of organic (demand), induced (supply), and autonomous elements that become a complex amalgam, in which it becomes most difficult to separate the input (e.g., history) from the filter used both on the supply side (e.g., marketing) and demand side (e.g., culture) to create a destination image.

Destination image has direct effects on consumer behavior. As shown in Figure 1 and discussed above, destination image has been linked to effects on pre-, during-, and posttrip consumer behavior. Literature has also linked various external or situational factors, usually referred to as constraints on travel behavior, affecting pretrip decisions including social, political, physical, financial, time, and distance (Botha, Crompton, and Kim 1999; Crompton 1979; Dadgostar and Isotalo 1992; Gartner 1989, 1993; Hunt 1975; Um and Crompton 1992). Due to intangible destination products and limited consumer knowledge and trial of the actual product, image, as a representative of the destination, affects the intentions and decisions of consumers before visiting a destination.

One obvious implication of the model presented in Figure 1 is that every person carries a unique image of a destination. Image uniqueness is due to many variables, including culture, prior experience and needs to be met. However, as has been shown in numerous studies, there is enough commonality among destination images to create useful market segments. More important, this model paints a picture of an increasingly complex environment in which to conduct destination image development activities. Destination tourism development requires a continuous flow of visitors. New markets and new destinations are emerging on a regular basis. Chinese tourists are becoming a force in Asia and are poised to spread to destinations around the globe. However, emerging markets should not be the only concern for destination image developers. Existing markets are not one homogenous mass. Aremberri (2005) examined travel flow patterns and concluded that most tourism is domestic and of a regional nature. Nevertheless, even within regional markets diversity still exists from activities preferred to length of stay to choice of accommodation. Even when a destination possesses dominant awareness with a sizeable portion of its market (e.g., seasonal home community), the image formation model presented above reveals that changing input values, of the semicontrollable and controllable nature, may be affecting images held of the destination by long-term visitors.

Despite the overwhelming amount of research on destination image, as depicted in the model, there are still many facets of this complex construct yet to be investigated empirically. Embedded into the social factors of a destination are residents' attitudes towards tourism and tourists and their image of their own community. Bramwell and Rawding (1996) argue that locals' perception of projected image is important since this defines their attitudes toward and support for tourism development. Therefore, Ross (1993) recommends destination authorities to include local input into tourism planning and development activities. Schroeder (1996) empirically depicts the relationship between the residents' image of North Dakota and the likelihood of their recommending it as a travel destination and their support for tourism development.

Sociodemographics have been the focus of several destination image studies. Although there is a lack of research on culture, it is recognized that destination image "must be related to culture". The same environmental cue would have different connotations for different cultures resulting in multiple interpretations and meanings (MacKay and Fesenmaier 2000). Therefore, culture must be influential on destination image and this influence should be investigated, especially when the study destination and sample destination are culturally distinct from each other. Cultural differences in not only values, but also rules of social behavior, perceptions, and social interaction might be determining consumers' held images of a destination (Reisinger and Turner 2002a, 2002b), especially image developed after visitation.

If the model discussed in this paper is operational, and the research cited would indicate that is the case, then destinations should consider implementing a long-term program of image assessment and modification when necessary. This process would include identifying the image capital for a destination, identifying the appropriate markets for this image capital, identifying the proper image formation agents for each target market, and implementation of the image formation process. The lack of case studies reporting this kind of supply-side image formation processes can be interpreted as either the destinations do not conduct such deliberate image formation activities (taking it as a spontaneous process), or the researchers have not captured such case studies yet.

Gartner (1993) argues that in the absence of autonomous image formation agents, present images will change slowly. Nothing presented in the paper refutes that conclusion. But images do change and they can be manipulated. Those two facts are what make image assessment and development work necessary and essential for destinations that are increasingly relying on tourists for their economic well being.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Upon review of a large body of literature on destination image and related concepts, it is clear that destination image is an important aspect of tourism development due to its impact on both supply- and demand-side aspects of marketing. However, despite the ample amount of literature, there still seems to be a gap when it comes to a comprehensive conceptualization of destination image and its intricate relationships. There still seems to be many facets of this complex construct yet to be investigated empirically. Therefore the comprehensive conceptualization of destination image presented in this paper is an attempt to provide a theoretical frame of reference for future studies.

As is depicted in the model, destination image is a composite of a wide spectrum of inputs that can be viewed as affecting either the demand or supply side of the image construct. These inputs are grouped as controllable (dynamic), semicontrollable (semidynamic), and uncontrollable (static), all of which, at least in the short run, give a destination its image capital. The elements of image capital are usually viewed differently by each target market. Destination image formed through the above delineated factors, in return, has direct effects on pre-, during- and posttrip consumer behavior. As depicted with the unidirectional and bidirectional arrows in Figure 1, the relationships in this model are rather intricate and complex with several potential research implications.

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