

VARIATION OF DESTINATION IMAGE AND ITS INFLUENTIAL FACTORS: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract: Destination image is a fundamental concept in destination marketing that has attracted many research endeavors. Despite the plethora of studies on destination image, destination image as a concept is yet to be affirmed whether it is static or dynamic with respect to its components including cognitive and affective. To fill this knowledge void, this study aimed to investigate the potential variation in cognitive and affective components of destination image and their influence on tourist decision-making. Moreover, it seeks to identify the potential influence of tourist type and nature of destination on the destination image variations. The study adopted a conceptual and theoretical approach by reviewing relevant literature on destination image, tourist motivation, and consumer behavior in coming up with the model. From the analysis several research propositions are developed based on established and emerging theories and typologies in the context of destination image. The analysis suggests that cognitive and affective destination images vary over time and tourist decision-making stages. Affective image is prominent in the early, passive stages, while cognitive image becomes dominant during active evaluation. Tourist typologies and destination types further moderate these variations. The study concludes that destination image components are dynamic and context-dependent. Integrating temporal and tourist-specific factors provides a more realistic framework for understanding tourist behavior, offering directions for empirical validation and practical application in destination marketing. Practically, the findings from the study provides insights on the tactics and strategies that practitioners can use in enticing potential tourists to visit their destinations as well as satisfying them. In attempts to make their destination visible, attractive, and well visited, destination managers need to segment the market and use the cognitive and affective image components differently to the different targeted segments as well as using them in a dynamic fashion by considering the tourist decision making process and stages.

Keywords: destination image, destination management, variation, information, tourist, tourism planning, decision making

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INTRODUCTION

Generally, it is agreed that the image held by potential tourists does affect the potential tourists to prefer and thus select those destinations having a positive image. This notion gave research impetus into elucidating the factor affecting destination image formation (Gartner, 1993; Beerli & Martin, 2004). Despite tourist decision making models agreeing on the role of destination image that have an influence in selection of tourist variables like destinations, there is no general model that integrates the decision-making process and image formation (Lin et al., 2007) using a dynamic perspective.

Destination image has been noted to consist of cognitive and affective image (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Lin et al., 2007; Bologlu & McCleary, 1999; Nonthapot et al., 2025) while others have included a conative component (Agapito et al., 2013; Gartner, 1993; Woosnam et al., 2020). The relationship between the cognitive and affective destination image have been said to be complex (Vogt & Andereck, 2003) and dynamic (Agapito et al., 2013). Some researchers believe that the cognitive destination image is an antecedent to the affective image (Agapito et al., 2013; Pramanik, 2023), and the two influences the overall image (Martin & Beerli, 2004). Others have found mixed results where the components vary with the type of destination (Lin et al., 2007) or the travel stage (Lee et al., 2023; Vogt & Andereck, 2003) which reflects travel decision making stage. This debate is yet to be settled as there are no empirical confirmatory results.

Within consumer behavior literature, some authors (e.g. Zojanc & Markus, 1982; Shiv & Fedorikhin, 1999) argue that the influence of the cognitive and affective image component might have a differential impact of consumer decision making process. In a sense these authors question the general belief of the cognitive component being an antecedent to the affective, which imply the former to play a prior influence in consumer decision making. From motivational perspective, tourists are said to be pushed by their internal motivations and pulled by destination attributes (Crompton, 1979; Goossen, 2000; Botha et al., 1999) where the former precedes the later. Lin et al. (2007) noted that tourist motivation (push factors) exerted a greater influence on the affective destination image. From the fact that push motivation exerts the initial thrust to take a vacation, and it creates an internal unease related to physiological that bring

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about to affect (Chaudhuri, 2005), then logically it can be said that the push and affective responses are interrelated and are at proximity. Moreover, tourism is said to be an experiential product laden with affect (Gnoth & Zins, 2009), then affective component probably should drive and initiate the selection process for the products at the initial stage (initial consideration set). However, this assumption is questionable and no empirical studies have confirmed it.

To this end, this article aims at filling the knowledge gap by integrating the literature and putting forward propositions that focus on answering the following: Is there a variation of the cognitive and affective image held by the tourist? What are the possible factors influencing the variation? Do the cognitive and affective images differ in the post visit phase? Does the effort in information acquisition (passive and active sought) have a different influence on the destination image component? The next section provides a brief methodological approach used to select the relevant literature and the respective analysis before providing the findings and the propositions.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This paper takes literature review synthesis approach in coming up with propositions and a model to depict the variations in destination image. Specifically, it involved the review of existing literature on the conceptual and theoretical aspects of destination image. Following Jaakkola (2020) guidelines on conceptual paper, we sought to construct a framework relating different concepts under destination image with the possible factors influencing the relationships. Articles published in different journals were initially explored using different platforms like Google Scholar, Researchgate, and Academia. This initial exploration reflects the scientometric analysis (Klarin et al., 2023) which aids in gaining an overview of the research in the area of focus, in this case destination image. Thereafter, the located papers were scrutinized to assess if they included destination image as the main concept, after that the articles were critically analysed before synthesizing the conceptual framework and stating the propositions. Due to language limitations of the authors, only articles published in English were included in the analysis.

Conceptual Foundation and Research Propositions: Relationship between Cognitive and Affective Image

Despite the importance of destination image concept in tourism and its long history in academics, there is no single firm agreeable definition for the concept (Das et al., 2024; Gallarza et al., 2001; Pike & Ryan, 2004). One of the widely adopted definition is that of Reynolds, 1965; in Gover & Go, 2009) who defines destination image as the development of mental construct based upon few impressions chosen from a flood of information. The mental construct element implies cognitive aspects that is widely accepted and utilized by destination image researchers following the cognitive stance (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Of recent, destination image has been considered having two components of affective and cognitive (Bosque, 2007; Pike & Ryan, 2004) thus challenging the destination image that relies only on the cognitive component. The affective part of destination image refers to those images that are related to feelings (Martin & Bosque, 2008; Lin et al., 2007).

The cognitive image consists of beliefs and knowledge about a destination and it primarily captures the tangible attributes (Lin et al., 2007). The specific relationship between the image components and their respective influence on destination selection process is yet to be conceptualized and to be empirically affirmed. Debate on the relationship between the destination image component can be placed on two camps, one that believe the cognitive image to be an antecedent of the affective image (Bologlu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Pike & Ryan, 2004), and those that asserts either the affective and cognitive image might precede differently depending on the nature of the destination (Lin et al., 2007). The second stance seem to get support in some emerging research in the consumer behavior that overrule the prior nature of cognitive image over affective; Ferreira et al., (2025) for instance squarely argued and empirically supported affective destination image to be a precursor for the cognitive destination image. Other researchers who support the dynamic and complex nature of affective and cognitive image indicate factors like nature of products (Shiv & Fedorikhin, 1999; Berbaum et al., 1982), and/or per-sonal characteristics (Haddock et al., 2008; Sojka & Giese, 2006; Yuksel & Akglu, 2007) particularly for hedonic and experiential products like tourism. The priori cognitive stance emanated from the cognitive theories, where the formation of image necessitates the inputs from the environment as information and stimuli, and that information has to be consciously processed. For instance, Bologlu & McCleary (1999) suggests cognitive image component precedes the affective image.

This notion seems to be correct for those situations where the tourist is actively searching for information, where they are highly involved with the decision or what Shiv & Fedorikhin (1999) term the available processing resources.

Contrary to the cognitive perspective, Berbaum et al. (1982) supported by Shiv & Fedorikhin (1999), argue that either of the two can precede the other, and sometimes concurrently occurring together. Shiv & Fedorikhin (1999) make note that there are situations where the information from the environment is automatically associated with knowledge that led to (lower) affective reactions and eventually action. Implicitly, it applies to passive information (low involvement) that the subject (potential tourist) acquires during periods where s/he is not considering travelling. Such a view can be supported by the Elaboration Likely Model of Persuasion (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The ELM model proposes that when an individual comes across an information, that information can be processed through the central or peripheral route depending on persons' motivation to process that information and/or the ability to process that information. When an individual is motivated (like during active information search or information needs related to functional needs) and/or when s/he has the ability to process that information, that information is objectively, carefully and thoughtfully considered through the central route that is conscious. On the other hand, when an individual is less motivated to process the information (like in passive information where that individual's motivation is latent) and/or s/he lacks the ability to process that information, then the information is simply associated with affective cues through the peripheral route that entails non conscious level. To further support the argument, Lojo et al. (2020) indicates information derived from blogs and agencies are more likely to lead into

affective destination images due to their pictorial nature compared to other sources which are textual based. Such findings imply pictorial based images are more likely to be processed through peripheral route than textual information which is likely to pass through the cognitive central route. In tune with these arguments, the following propositions are put forward that indicate the variation of destination image component with mode of information acquisition by the tourist:

Proposition 1: potential tourists who are passively acquiring travel information are likely to have more of affective image.

Proposition 2: potential tourists who are actively seeking for information are likely to have more of cognitive image.

Tourist Decision Making and Destination Image

The dynamic perspective of destination image where the components are liable to vary (Kim et al., 2019), implicitly offer an explanation to the relationship between destination image and time frame of tourist decision making (Jani & Nguni, 2016; Lee et al., 2023). Tourist decision making models basically reflect a reduction or funnel model where initially a potential tourist is pushed by internal motives that compels him/her to consider some potential destinations to satisfy their needs. Thereafter, the potential tourist actively seeks information pertaining to attributes of few selected destinations among the larger initially considered, with the aim of evaluating them and eventually coming to select one among the others (Um & Crompton, 1999; Botha et al., 1999). The funnel decision making process can be depicted as Figure 1 together with the possible association with destination image variations.

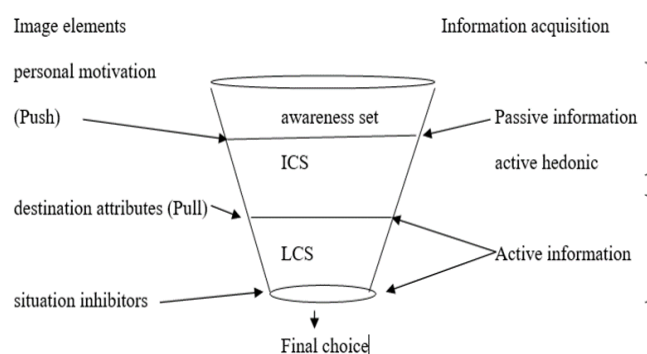


Figure 1. Relationship between tourist motivation, information acquisition, and destination image

Push motivations reflect the basic intrinsic, psychological factors that generate an uncomfortable tension within individuals' minds and bodies that lead into action (Goossen, 2000; Crompton, 1979). Since pleasure travel motivation relates more to the affective image component (Dann, 1996; Gartner, 1993; Beerli & Martin, 2004) and prior to be motivated that individual in most cases has been subjected to information passively through mass media and other sources. Such a notion is shared by Vogt & Andereck (2003), who noted that as the travel experience unrolls the cognitive image increases that starts at a lower level while the affective image that starts at a higher level continues at the same level throughout the travel. Contrary, Cohen, 1991; in Vogt & Andereck, 2003 suggest that the affective image is preceded by the cognitive image and there after revert back to the cognitive image during information search. Since tourism is a hedonic product/service (Lashley, 2008) then it is logically to assume that tourist during the early stages where their information is acquired passively and are pushed by intrinsic motivations are likely to have more affective image (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Bosque, 2007) than later in the decision-making process.

This argument is presented in the following proposition:

Proposition 3: The affective destination image prevails during the initial stages of planning

The pull factors are the destination attributes that serves as attraction to the tourist that hopefully will cater for the push motives (Crompton, 1979; Botha et al., 1999). During active information search process within the tourism decision models, the tourist directs his/her efforts towards seeking information pertaining to the destination attribute (Botha et al., 1999). Since the tourist at this stage is consciously attending to the information, then it can be proposed that the tourist is actively developing and appraising the cognitive image of the considered destinations, and thus dominating in the last part of tourist decision making.

Proposition 4: The cognitive destination image prevails during the evaluation stage of decision making.

Type of Tourist and Destination Image

Another factor that might influence the dominance of either the two-destination image include the type of tourist. According to Decrop & Snellder (2005) there are 2 major classifications basing on segmentation criteria and socio-psychological variables. Decrop and his coauthor argues that the segmentation typologies are good for marketing purpose but not for understanding the tourist daily life that might give more in-sight into tourist. On the other hand, despite the socio-psychological classification giving more insight into the tourist psychological aspects, they are yet to be integrated with the tourist decision-making process that further elucidates the tourist behavior. Consequently, they (Decrop & Snellder, 2005) proposed a new typology of socio-psychological that include hedonic, habitual, rational, constrained, opportunist, and adaptable. Since this new categorization factors in the tourist decision making where the destination image plays a big role, this article adopts the Decrop & Snellder (2005) classification in forging the relationship between image variation and tourist types.

Hedonic vacationers are typically characterized by their overreliance on their dreams in the travel decision process (Decrop, 2006). Their emotional drives are said to intense to the point of ignoring the constraints (Decrop, 2006) or their

cognition. Moreover, they are noted to be good information seeker and communicator that is essential in destination image formation. Since their decisions are more based on emotion, then by extension the following proposition is logically true:

Proposition 7: hedonic vacationer will harbor more of cognitive image

Contrast to the hedonic vacationers, rational vacationers are meticulous planners who carefully evaluate available travel options and select those that are more promising (Decrop, 2006). The element of planning and being rational implies they are consciously involved. In line with this thinking, we propose the following:

Proposition 8: A rational vacationer will harbor a more of cognitive image

The habitual vacationers are less involved in travel decisions as they tend to revisit the same travel spots, and risk averse (Decrop, 2006). Wood & Neal (2009) mention that such consumer decisions are context dependent, where once the situation calls for particular decisions, then the consumer decides unconsciously.

Proposition 9: Habitual vacationers will harbor lower affective and cognitive image

Decrop & Snelder (2005) describes the opportunistic vacationer as the one that has no plan and they tend to capitalize on the situations that are likely to provide them with satisfaction. Decrop & Snelder (2005) labeling this category as unplanned vacationers, that implies they are not cognitive, albeit their labelling they also indicate that they combine plans in their travel decisions. This two-sided sword implies that the opportunistic vacationer might rely on either the cognitive or affective in decision-making that relates to the cognitive and affective image, respectively.

On borrowing from impulse buying literature where the consumer is said to make a sudden purchase without plans (Silvera et al., 2008). This condition typically reflects the unplanned vacationer, which suggests they are affective based. Contrary to the affective impulse buying perspective, Hayes-Roth (1982) conceptualizes opportunity as time bound where it flows. In capitalizing that opportunity, Hayes-Roth (1982) asserts that the consumer does assess the available information pertaining to the opportunity that is purely cognitive. Consequently, we propose the following:

Proposition 10: opportunistic will have neither cognitive nor affective image prior to decision making

The constrained vacationer is limited in terms of their decision making by the situation like lack of finance, health, and decision voice (Decrop & Snelder, 2005). Due to the limitations enforces by the circumstances that make them passive decision making, they are unlikely to search for information and thus no evaluation process that could have indicate the presence of cognitive image for those destinations that they will be traveling to. Moreover, their inability to make decisions implies they neither harbor affective image that could have been used in decision making. Therefore, it is logic to propose the following:

Proposition 11: A constrained vacationer will have neither a cognitive nor an affective image prior to decision making

Adaptable vacationers are said to have many plans in mind that are altered to reflect the situation (Decrop & Snelder, 2005). In their decision-making process depending on the circumstances, they are noted to shift between exhaustive to simplifying information processing (Gegan-Paxton & John, 1997) where the latter involves less cognition than the former. This shift in information processing that relates to image (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003) convincingly indicates the different use of destination image with respect to the situation to be adapted for by the tourist.

The following proposition stands for this argument:

Proposition 12: adaptable vacationer harbors either more of affective or cognitive depending on the calling situation to be adapted for.

Variation of Destination Image component with Destinations

Previous research suggests a variation in destination image with the nature of destinations (Hamdy et al., 2024; Prebensen, 2007; Lin et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2019). Hamdy et al. (2024) for instance using masculine and feminine destination stereotypes noted to have influence on destination images. Hamdy et al. (2024) further indicates that masculine destinations which evoke rugged and far away destinations are more likely to use factual and utilitarian aspects which reflects cognitive image. Prebensen (2007) in her research of the image of distant destination argue that for such a destination to effectively brand through creating a positive image, then attitudinal image which basically are affective in nature (Peter & Olson, 2003) should be capitalized. This implies that affective image for a distant or unknown destination plays a bigger role in travel decisions. Such a perception finds supports from the Plog's (1972) destination classification and the nature of tourists attracted to the different destinations. Plog (1972) characterized tourists into allocentric, psychocentric, and mid-centric. The allocentric are those who like to have an adventure and thus travel to exotic (Pearce & Lee, 2005) or less known destinations, while the psychocentrics prefer well-known destinations where they perceive to be less risky. The riskier tourists or the allocentrics have been noted to be more driven by emotional (Lepp & Gibson, 2007). Moreover, the riskier tourists usually travel freely with less defined itinerary (Lepp & Gibson, 2007) that suggests they are more emotionally driven than being cognitive.

From the fact that they travel to exotic destinations reflecting masculine destinations (Hamdy et al., 2024) contrary to common destinations preferred by psychocentric, it can be proposed that:

Proposition 13: for exotic destinations, the cognitive image is dominant

Proposition 14: for common destinations, the affective image is dominant

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The article basing on the literature on destination image, charts the variation of destination image along temporal base that relates to information acquisition, decision-making stage of the tourist, and travel stage. To compliment the temporal dimension, 'characteristic' dimensions that comprise of type of tourist and the nature of destination have been integrated to explain the variation of the two image components. The propositions developed in this article pave way for future research to empirically test them in affirming the variation of the image components that is still debatable. The

temporal and 'characteristic' dimension appear simplistic separately but once integrated it is supposedly transformed to be complex to reflect reality. The temporal dimension perspective through the propositions (1 to 4) indicates the cognitive image follows the affective one. Contrary to such perspective the 'characteristic' dimensional propositions (5 to 14) indicate variation irrespective of time. Our intention is to provide a set of testable propositions that are researchable that at a conceptual level can be integrated to reflect reality.

Upon integrating the temporal and 'characteristic' dimension, it should be noted that the latter dimension will serve to pronounce the variation of the effect and cognition on the former dimension. In statistical words, the 'characteristic' dimensions are likely to appear as moderating factors for the impact of temporal dimensions on the variation of the destination image components. For instance, for the hedonic tourists who are likely to harbor affective image which assessing their travel choice, the affective image is more likely to be pronounced during the early-passive information acquisition than for the rational who are basing their assessments on cognition. In the later stages of decision making, the hedonic tourists nevertheless utilize cognitive images in evaluation but such images are not as pronounced as for the rational tourists.

The analysis and synthesis from the study provides both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, as destination image is dynamic, theories for destination image need to factor that dynamism in understanding destination image components. Practically, managers should design tactics and strategies that are dynamic and contextually based in influencing destination image components for different market segments to ensure destination competitiveness.

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