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THE IMPORTANCE OF COGNITIVE DETERMINANTS IN TOURISM DESTINATION IMAGE FORMATION

Abstract

The increasingly pronounced global ties, which affect social, economic, political, technological and cultural fields, have left a large imprint on the tourism market. There is growing competitiveness between tourism destinations, which try to find the best development strategy under the newly-arisen conditions. Under contemporary tourism development conditions, a destination must be observed as a basic functional unit that can respond to the demands of the modern tourism market by using its uniqueness and individuality for the creation of new, diversified products based on specific features of certain tourism destinations. The paper analyzes and researches the cognitive determinants that have an influence on the formation of a destination's positive image, using the case of the Dubrovnik tourism destination. The objective and the purpose of the research is to determine the importance of stimulus factors and socio-demographic characteristics of tourists visiting a holiday destination on image formation, which is a deciding factor in the creation of tourism policies. Empirical research was employed using a questionnaire survey on a sampling of 355 randomly-chosen tourists visiting the Dubrovnik tourism destination. The results obtained by this research indicate a lack of importance of cognitive determinants for an image destination formation.

Keywords: image, tourism destination, cognitive determinants

1. INTRODUCTION

Greater competition among tourism destinations were significantly influenced by new demographic, socioeconomic and technological developments. These developments mark the areas on which destinations mainly compete focusing on their perceived images relative to competitors. Tourism destinations can no longer use comparative advantages as a basis for their survival on tourism markets due to the strong competitiveness that dominates the tourism market. Instead, they must emphasize competitive advantages separately by forming an image of the destination that directly affects the tourist's perception and decision-making process on the choice of a destination. In the past four - decades the scientific researchers have put considerable focus to evaluation and analysis of tourism destination image. The reason is the relevance of tourism contribution to economic development of many countries. This attention resulted in the better understanding on the one side of the tourist behaviour and on the other side it resulted in better approach of defining destination tourism policy.

From the theoretical point of view, there is a general agreement that the cognitive component is an antecedent of the affective component and that the evaluative responses of consumers evolve from their knowledge of the objects. Regarding image formation the need for uncovering additional variables as image determinants has been recognized. Stimulus factors (information sources and previous experience) and personal factors (social and psychological variables) were included in this research. Previous studies have explored the role of stimulus factors and socio-demographic characteristics of tourists visiting a tourism destination on image formation. However, theoretical and empirical research on the influence of psychological factors on destination image has been limited. Therefore the purpose of this paper is to emphasize the importance of researching the cognitive determinants in tourism destination image formation. Understanding the importance of this group of determinants can be a good base and instrument for the selection of adequate tourism policies for destination management.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The term of an image is connected to the psychologically warped picture of objective reality that is formed in the consciousness of each individual, whose behaviour is connected to the projected image. An image is considered to be the mental expression of an individual that has developed from a collection of impressions derived from an overall group of impressions. The scientific approach to defining an image originates as far back as the fifties of the twentieth century from authors who established that human behaviour depends more on this formed picture of reality than it does on reality itself (Boulding, 1956; Martineau, 1959). An image represents the known picture of a company, product, person, process or situation that an individual forms based on overall experiences, attitudes, opinions and perceptions that are more or less in line with real features (Kesić, 2003). The image of a certain country is a set category based on civilized,

cultural, commercial, historical, geographical, political and sociological aspects. As a whole, it is very specific and measureable, and the positive or negative result of all the fore mentioned (Kesić and Piri Rajh, 2001).

Specifically, scientific circles began to analyze the image of a tourism destination in greater detail forty years ago. The image of a tourism destination is represented by a group of beliefs, ideas and impressions that people have regarding the destination (Crompton, 1979; Gunn, 1972). The image of tourism destination can be also defined as the expression of all objective knowledge, impressions, prejudice, imaginations and emotional thoughts an individual or group might have of a particular place (Lawson & Baud-Bovy, 1977). The image of tourism destination is an artificial imitation of the apparent form of a destination that include identity, ideas and conceptions held individually or collectivity of destination. Presentations of a destination image have to allow for the fact that is generally a matter not of creating image from nothing but of transforming an existing image (WTO, 1993). The tourism destination image is an important factor because it affects the potential tourist's decision-making process and also affects the level of satisfaction with the tourist's experience, which is critical in terms of encouraging positive word-of-mouth recommendations and return visits to the destination (O'Leary & Deegan, 2005).

Understanding the formation of a tourism destination image is one of the opportunities in developing a destination's competitive advantage on the tourism market, as the formation of a positive image of a tourism destination is one of the conclusive factors in the overall impression that attracts tourists to visit a destination. The basic features of a tourism destination's image are frequently considered to be complex, relative, multi-layered, and dynamic (Gallarza, Saura & Garcia 2002). The image of a tourism destination is a complex variable because it is influenced by internal and external environments that are formed by numerous factors (Ryglova & Turcinkova, 2004). Many authors consider that destinations with a pronounced, convincing and positive image have a greater chance of being chosen by potential tourists, and have a valuable role in many diverse models regarding travel decisions made by tourists (Goodrich, 1978; Woodside and Lysonski, 1989; Schmoll, 1977; Mouthino, 1984; Hunt, 1975; Kent, 1984, Telisman Kosuta, 1989).

Tourist forms an image of a destination through a process that has set levels, such as the accumulation of certain images and the creation of a unique image of the destination based on these images. The initial image is modified by additional information and the formation of a picture that is an incentive. This is followed by making a decision to visit the destination, visiting the destination, comparing it with competitors, returning home and reshaping the image on the basis of acquired knowledge (Gunn, 1988). According to this, it can be concluded that there are two kinds of images: an organic image that is based on non-commercial information and an induced one that is based on commercial information. A tourism destination image will influence a tourist in the process of

choosing a stay, the subsequent evaluation of that stay and a tourist's future intention (Bigne, Sanchez and Sanchez, 2001).

A tourism destination image should be composed of perceptions of individual attributes (such as climate, accommodation facilities, and friendliness of the people), as well as more holistic impressions (mental pictures or imagery) of the place. Functional-psychological characteristics could be perceived as individual attributes or as more holistic impressions. On the attribute side, there were numerous perceptions of the individual characteristics of the destination (from functional to psychological). On the holistic side, the functional impression consisted of the mental picture (or imagery) of the physical characteristics of the destination, whereas the psychological characteristics could be described as the atmosphere or mood of place. A tourism destination image could range from those perceptions based on "common" features to those based on "unique" features. They suggested holistic and unique images were important in categorizing a particular destination and used to differentiate the target markets (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993).

Tourism destination's image consider that an image is formed by a tourist's rational and irrational interpretations. These are two narrowly connected components: cognitive and affective. On the one hand, there is the formation of tourism destination's image in which there is an emphasis on the importance of cognitive factors (Hunt, 1975, Phelps, 1986, Fakeye and Crompton 1991, Echtner and Ritchie, 1993, Walmsley and Young 1998, Chaudhary 2000, Alcaniz, Garcia and Blas 2009). According to the analyzed literature, the formation of tourism destination image is formed by three factors: the perception of the quality of the tourist experience, the perception of the tourism attractions or elements of the tourism destination that attract tourists, perception of the environment and the value created by the environment. The formation of such a cognitive tourism destination image does not only depend on the information gathered by an individual from various sources, but also on its individual features (Jakeljić, 2010). However, many authors hold that besides the cognitive component, the affective one is also highly important (Gartner, 1986; Dann, 1996; Mackay and Fisenmaier, 1997; Baloglu, 1998; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Kim and Richardson, 2003; Beerli and Martin, 2004). Alongside these components, the authors also emphasize the conative one, but they do not go into the problems of the conative dimensions. Rather, they explain and research the primary cognitive and affective dimensions, analyzing them as dependent variables that form under the influence of various independent variables, such as motivating, demographic and informational-communication factors. Affective component of image of tourism destination is largely dependent on the cognitive evaluation because tourists may developed a positive attitude towards destination when they have adequate level of positive attributes of destination, otherwise they develop negative attitudes towards destination (Holbrook, 1978, Gartner 1993, Chen and Uysal 2002, Kim and Richardson 2003, Pike and Ryan, 2004, Rashid and Ismail 2008). The cognitive component has a factual character made up of trust and

knowledge of the physical attributes of a destination, the affective component is tied to feelings regarding the physical attributes that affect how a destination is evaluated, while a conative component becomes significant when a destination is selected (Križman, 2008).

Personal and simulative factors are the key factors in the formation of a destination's image. Diverse information, age, education, socio-psychological motivation directly influences the affective component, whereas the influence of perceptive-cognitive values is more pronounced than tourism motivation, and they state that the overall image is more influenced by affective than by cognitive components (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999).

Considering a differentiation between cognitive and affective evaluations leads to the great understanding of how an individual's values affect image formations. That is, while the cognitive component reflects knowledge of the product's characteristics, the affective components measure the emotional response to the destination product. These two aspects are at the two ends of the continuum along which the service experience can be evaluated and classified (Gil & Brent-Ritchie, 2009).

According to the analyzed literature, there are three main approaches for exploring a tourism destination image, such as a cognitive or perceptual point of view, by estimating attitudes that tourists have concerning the characteristics of the destination's product, then from an affective point of view based on the emotional experience of the destination and a holistic approach. All studies pointed out the cohesion between different variables, such as visitation intention, impact of previous visitation, geographical location, and purpose of the trip, socio-demographic variables and destination image. Therefore this paper research tourism destination image formation from the cognitive or perceptual point of view.

3.   DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Information sources are the forces which influence the forming of perceptions and evaluations. Woodside and Lysonskis (1989) pointed importance of understanding the impact of information sources on the perceptions of cognitive evaluations but not on affective component of destination's image. Related model was developed by Um and Crompton (1990) and Um (1993), under which cognitive evaluation of attributes are formed by external factors (information sources and social stimuli). Gartner (1993) noted that the type and amount of external stimuli received influence to formation of cognitive but not of affective component of image. There the first hypothesis is:

H1: Information sources have a positive impact on the cognitive evaluation of the Dubrovnik as a tourism destination

The socio-demographic variables influence perceptions of products and tourism destination (Um and Crompton 1990; Woodside and Lysonski 1989). On the basis of research findings this paper tests the influence of age, education and annual household income, hypothesizing that they don't have a significant impact on the cognitive evaluation of the Dubrovnik as a tourism destination:

H2: Demographic variables (age, education and annual household income) don't have a significant impact on the cognitive evaluation of the Dubrovnik as a tourism destination

Previous researches pointed out that cognitive evaluations form the overall image of a destination (Stern & Krakover, 1993). Cognitive components refer to beliefs and knowledge about objects Gartner, 1993; Holbrook, 1978). According to the above-mentioned theoretically accepted knowledge, it is assumed that cognitive evaluations influence the overall tourist destination image. Its acceptability will be tested on the image of the Dubrovnik, using the following hypothesis:

H3: Cognitive evaluations significantly influence the overall image of the Dubrovnik as a tourism destination

The results obtained from the survey were analysed using different analytical tools, including methods of analysis and synthesis, inductive and deductive methods, method of generalization and specialization, and different statistical methods. As dependent variable was measured on ordinal scale Kruskal-Wallis test was used. All statistical analyses were made using an SPSS package version 20.0.

4.   RESULTS

An empirical research was carried out in order to emphasise the significance of a cognitive determinants in tourism destination image formation. In order to identify the current situation in the Dubrovnik tourism destination, survey research was carried out using a sample survey taken from among 355 randomly-chosen tourists (only foreign) that stayed in the Dubrovnik tourism destination. The research was carried out from April 1st to October 1st, 2009. In total, 355 questionnaires were administered personally to the respondents. A structured questionnaire, including 6 grouped questions, was used. Overall image was measured applying 7-point Likert scale ranging from extremely negative to extremely positive. Cognitive evaluation that includes quality of experience, attraction, value and environment is mediator between exogenous variables and the final endogenous variable overall image (Kesić, Vlašić, Jakeljić, 2010). The first group of questions concerned the principal component analysis of cognitive evaluation, where evaluation was measured using three variables: quality of experience (COG_1) with 8 items (Crombach's alpha $\alpha=0,744$), attraction (COG_2) with 3 items (Crombach's alpha $\alpha=0,703$) and value/environment (COG_3) with also 3 items (Crombach's alpha $\alpha=0,588$). The second group of

questions was about the informational and experimental dimension of the destination familiarity index and the last group of questions represented the demographic profile of respondents. In the research, exogenous variables included information sources, age, education and annual household income. Information sources are characterized by different sources of information which factored out into the following groups: sponsored communication (INFO_2 SC) with four items (Crombach's alpha α=0,726), professional advice (INFO_1 PA), also with four items (Crombach's alpha α=0,712) and world-of-mouth (WOM) sources from friend and family (single item measure).

Table 1

Respondent's profile

Demographic characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
18-34	115	32,7
35-49	115	32,4
50-64	89	25,1
65 and over	35	9,9
Gender		
Male	175	49,3
Female	180	50,7
Marital status		
Single	114	32,1
Married	202	56,9
Divorced/widowed/separated	39	11,0
Education		
High school and less	74	20,8
College	215	60,6
Graduate school	66	18,6
Annual household income		
under €15.000	56	15,8
€15.000-€29.999	115	32,4
€30.000-€44.999	99	27,9
€45.000-€59.999	50	14,1
€60.000-€74.999	23	6,5
€75.000-€89.999	7	2,0
€90.000 or more	5	1,3

Source: Authors research

The results of the descriptive statistical analysis of the questionnaire indicated a respondent profile. About 50,7% of the respondents were female and 49,3% were male. The age groups are represented as follows: 32,7% from 18-34, 32,4% from 35-49, 25,1% from 50-64, 9,9% from 65. In other words, 65,1% were young and middle aged (18 to 50), 56,9% were married, 32.1% travelled alone, while 11% of them were divorced or widowed. The education structure showed that 78,6% of respondents completed high school and higher education, which indicated that a large proportion of the sample was well educated. The great

majority of the respondents 60,3% have annual household incomes from 15.000 to 60.000 €. Table 1 shows the respondents' profile

H1: Information sources have a positive impact on the cognitive evaluation of the Dubrovnik as a tourism destination

Table 2

Information sources and cognitive evaluation of the Dubrovnik as a tourism destination

		Mean Rank INFO_1 (PA)	Mean Rank INFO_2 (SC)	Mean Rank (WOM)
COG_1	1	267,00	0,00	271,23
	2	247,61	229,88	284,16
	3	228,60	248,99	257,26
	4	288,94	275,98	256,50
	5	**319,65**	**331,72**	**297,03**
COG_2	1	245,60	0,00	207,27
	2	284,05	270,31	257,08
	3	238,99	206,10	251,89
	4	275,95	292,55	263,61
	5	**322,95**	**357,51**	**303,98**
COG_3	1	239,70	0,00	283,68
	2	262,55	208,46	274,08
	3	248,72	247,91	249,13
	4	276,58	278,20	262,21
	5	**298,26**	**325,61**	**295,45**

Table 3

Results of the Kruskal-Wallis test

	COG_1	COG_2	COG_3	COG_1	COG_2	COG_3	COG_1	COG_2	COG_3
Chi-Sq.	32,851	21,256	11,464	19,813	64,719	21,737	17,967	15,498	18,852
df	4	4	4	3	3	3	4	4	4
Asym. Sig.	**0,000**	**0,000**	**0,022**	**,000**	**,000**	**,000**	**0,004**	**0,005**	**0,003**
Group. Var.	INFO_1 PA			INFO_2 SC			WOM		

p is lower than 0,005 and shows that there is statistically significant difference in information sources and cognitive evaluation of Dubrovnik as a tourism destination. Those tourists who strongly agreed that information sources (sponsored communication, professional advice and world-of-mouth) are very important considered that the quality of information sources have direct impact on cognitive evaluation of tourism destination such as on quality of experience, attraction and value/environment.
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H2: Demographic variables (age, education and annual household income) don't have a significant impact on the cognitive evaluation of the Dubrovnik as a tourism destination

Table 4

Demographic variables and cognitive evaluation of the Dubrovnik as a tourism destination

	Education	Mean Rank Education	Age	Mean Rank Age	Annual household income	Mean Rank Annual household income
COG_1	High school or less	**285,97**	18-34	258,01	under €15.000	273,06
	College	262,88	35-49	273,65	€15.000-29.999	265,07
	Graduate school	280,42	50-64	283,26	€30.000-44999	281,29
			65 or older	**289,50**	€45.000-59999	267,40
					€60.000-74999	**313,42**
					€75.000-89999	186,45
					€90.000 or more	235,67
COG_2	High school or less	**287,82**	18-34	264,44	under €15.000	244,14
	College	271,68	35-49	275,64	€15.000-29.999	239,63
	Graduate school	249,21	50-64	**281,60**	€30.000-44999	292,01
			65 or older	267,11	€45.000-59999	312,35
					€60.000-74999	**333,50**
					€75.000-89999	324,95
					€90.000 or more	225,67
COG_3	High school or less	**291,70**	18-34	255,93	under €15.000	250,89
	College	261,52	35-49	**293,18**	€15.000-29.999	260,18
	Graduate school	272,94	50-64	260,60	€30.000-44999	285,07

	65 or older	283,54	€45.000-59999	270,86
			€60.000-74999	**346,33**
			€75.000-89999	245,00
			€90.000 or more	211,67

Table 5

Results of the Kruskal-Wallis test

	COG_1	COG_2	COG_3	COG_1	COG_2	COG_3	COG_1	COG_2	COG_3
Chi-Sq.	2,987	3,854	4,244	3,708	1,268	7,896	8,643	26,257	15,266
df	2	2	2	3	3	3	6	6	6
Asym. Sig.	0,225	0,146	0,12	3,708	1,268	7,896	0,195	**0,000**	**0,018**
Group. Var.	EDUCATION			AGE			ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME		

p is lower than 0,005 only in the case of the annual household income and shows that there is no statistically significant difference between demographic variables and cognitive evaluation of Dubrovnik as a tourism destination only in the case of the annual household income. Those tourists who have between 60.000 and 74.999 € have direct impact on cognitive evaluation of tourism destination such as on quality of attraction and value/environment. Therefore it can be concluded that hypothesis is confirmed.

H3: Cognitive evaluations significantly influence the overall image of the Dubrovnik as a tourism destination

Table 6

Correlation cognitive evaluation and overall image of the Dubrovnik as a tourism destination

		Mean Rank COG_1	Mean Rank COG_2	Mean Rank COG_3
	2	115,5	115,17	164,11
	3	215,48	199,75	179,67
OVERALL IMAGE	4	280,97	249,95	284,63
	5	**370,23**	**326,15**	**345,71**

Table 7

Results of the Kruskal-Wallis test

	COG_1	COG_2	COG_3
Chi-Sq.	59,483	62,567	69,694
df	3	3	3

Asym. Sig.	,000	,000	,000
Group. Var.	OVERAL IMAGE		

p is lower than 0,005 in every cases and shows that there is statistically significant difference in cognitive evaluation and overall image of Dubrovnik as a tourism destination. Those tourists who strongly agreed that Dubrovnik as a tourism destination offers very much in quality of experience, attractions and value/environment have direct impact on overall image of Dubrovnik tourism destination. Therefore it can be concluded that H3 hypothesis is confirmed.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In conditions where globalization is affecting the tourism market, the formation of a positive tourist destination image is a necessity, which will differentiate it from other destinations and make it stand out. In order to achieve differentiation, an emphasis must be put on the authenticity and originality of the tourist destination's traditional culture. The image of a tourism destination can be defined as a collection of images, feelings or associations that tourists feel when seeing or mentioning a specific tourism destination. It can be concluded that a destination's image is created on the basis of a lot of diverse information. From another angle, a tourism destination's image can be considered as the picture of a destination that is directed towards a specific tourist segment using promotional activity. This psychological factor is important in both cases, which is formed on the basis of different kinds of information on the destination, stemming from various informational sources during a set time period. For this reason, the image of a destination represents one of the key factors affecting travel decisions for a specific destination, so communication processes hold a very important role on the formation of an image prior to arriving in a destination. Keeping in mind the importance of promotional efforts in the creation of a tourism destination's image, it is necessary to differentiate the three various aspects of using the image of a tourism destination in promotional activity, which are the creation, transfer and acceptance of this image. The objective of such activity is to provide potential tourists with information that will determine their choice of destination.

Analysing cognitive evaluation of image of Dubrovnik as a tourism destination and its antecedents has been shown to be important for managing the destination image. This paper confirmed hypothesis that information sources have significantly impact on image destination formation especially on quality of experience in destination, attractiveness of destination and destination value and environment. Therefore in creating tourism policy of the destinations these determinants must be considered since also hypothesis about impact of cognitive determinants on overall image is confirmed. Demographic variables are not significant for the cognitive evaluation. Keeping in mind the importance of

promotional efforts in the creation of a tourism destination's image, it is necessary to differentiate the three various aspects of using the image of a tourism destination in promotional activity, which are the creation, transfer and acceptance of this image. The objective of such activity is to provide potential tourists with information that will determine their choice of destination. Therefore this study presents foundation for further research of destination image of Dubrovnik thus providing insight into future development of tourism.

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