An Analysis of the Impact of Destination Image on Tourists’ Loyalty (Case Study: Tabriz City)

Omid Ali Kharazmi
Assistant Professor in Urban Management, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran

Leili Ebrahimi1
M.Sc. Student of Geography and Urban Planning, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran

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Extended abstract

1. Introduction
Growing needs of city-dwellers to amusement and rest environments and most importantly, the movement of millions of tourists throughout the year, increases the necessity and importance of research on aspects of the tourism industry. One of the popular topics in the tourism literature is the subject of destination image, since it affects the individual’s subjective perception and consequent behavior and ultimately destination choice. Destination image is composed of individual’s beliefs and impressions about a state. Tourists who visit the city want a real experience, and if their experience does not fulfill their expectations, they will never visit a place again. Because always there are places that provide a better visit experiences which try to attract those tourists. The understanding of visitor images is an important subject and urban tourism researchers are always looking for its evaluation. Because attracting tourists to revisit and to recommend the destination to others is crucial for the success of destination tourism development. The various types of destination image include cognitive, affective and unique images. The evaluations of overall image and its components would be different; therefore, both should be measured to better understand the relative position of a destination. Generally, it is accepted that destination image affects the behavior of tourists. Destination experience is considered as a product and tourists may choose to revisit or recommend it to friends and relatives. In this regard, this study is aiming to clarify the component dimensions of the city image and measure Tabriz image from the perspective of tourists, evaluate the relationships between types of image (e.g., cognitive, affective, and unique images), the visitors’ overall image and future behavior.

2. Methodology
The target population of this study was the domestic visitors who had chosen Tabriz as a travel destination. The required data were collected using a questionnaire. The sample size consisted of 384 people estimated by applying Cochrane formula for uncertain statistical society. The survey questionnaire consists of two sections. The first section included questions related to the characteristics of tourists including age, gender, level of education, and location, and the travel behavior items including the number of trips, purpose for the trip, and the length of stay. The second section was developed to assess the respondents’ cognitive, unique, affective, and perceptions of overall image of Tabriz. This choice of dimensions was based on the relevant theoretical literature, as well as the empirical studies that analyze the factors determining image forming of a city. To assess cognitive image, 42 items, and to assess unique image 17 items were selected, and the respondents were asked to rate Tabriz as a travel destination on each of the items on a 5-point Likert scale where 1= strongly Disagree; 2= disagree; 3= neutral; 4= agree; and 5=

1. Corresponding author. E-mail: leili.ebrahimi@mail.um.ac.ir
strongly Agree. Affective image was measured by using Semantic differential scales. The scale included four bipolar scales: arousing/sleepy, pleasant/unpleasant, exciting/gloomy, and relaxing/distressing. A 5-point scale was used for all four bipolar scales where 1= arousing and 5 = sleepy, 1 = pleasant and 5 = unpleasant, 1= exciting and 5 = gloomy, and 1 = relaxing and 5 = distressing. In addition, to assess Tabriz overall image, the respondents were asked to rate their perception of overall image of Tabriz on a 5-point scale with 1 = very negative and 5 = very positive. Moreover, two questions were considered to determine the respondents’ intention to revisit Tabriz and the respondents’ intention to recommend Tabriz as a favorable destination to others with a 5-point Likert scale (1= most unlikely; 5= most likely). Data analysis was done by structural equation modeling (SEM) using SPSS and SmartPLS softwares.

3. Results
The results of the structural equations confirmed the previous studies’ results concerning the effect of types of image on overall image and the effect of overall image on the tourists’ behavioral intentions. The results showed that the unique image, cognitive image, and effective image had 0.25, 0.22, 0.21 standard coefficients, respectively, and that they had a positive impact on the overall image. In addition, the overall image acts as an mediating between the three images and tourist behaviors (i.e., intention to revisit and intention to recommend), and it has a positive impact on desire to re-visit with 0.57 standard coefficients and recommend the destination to others with 0.55 standard coefficients. Additionally, the t-test to assess the images’ current situation showed the desired situation of three images in Tabriz city. The positive impact of cognitive and effective images on the overall image was consistent with the results of Baloglu and McCleary (1999), San Martin and Rodrigues del Bosque (2008), Qu, Kim, & Im, (2011). The positive impact of unique image on overall image confirmed the findings of Qu, Kim, & Im(2011). Contrary to Baloglu and McCleary’s (1999) findings (i.e., more impact of effective image), Qu, Kim, & Im(2011) findings, and San Martin and Rodrigues del Bosque’s (2008) findings (i.e., more impact of cognitive image), this study showed that unique image imposed the greatest impact on the overall image and thereinafter on cognitive and effective images, respectively. Since cognitive image measures the perceptions of the general quality based on tourist experiences, difference in results could be due to lower quality of considered factors to assess cognitive image in Tabriz. Similarly, since the cognitive image constitutes the resource for the formation of the affective image, effective image can have less impact on overall image. Also, findings showed the strong effect of overall image on intention to revisit and intention to recommend, which were in harmony with previous research results (i.e., Ramkissoon, Uysal, & Brown, 2011; Bigne, Sanchez, & Sanchez, 2001; Castro, Armario, & Ruiz, 2007; Chen, & Tsai, 2007)

4. Conclusion
Destination image is a multi-dimensional construct influenced by the cognitive, unique, and affective images that collectively affect tourist behaviors. The positive image of tourists to the destination will follow their desires to revisit and stay longer in the destination. Moreover, since recommendation is an important information source in forming an image of a particular destination, the positive influence of overall image on recommendations should be emphasized more than before. In this regard, in the market of tourism destination, favorable experiences to tourists and creating a positive images based on cognitive, unique, and effective components should be provided to increase return, attract new tourists, and improve success in the market.
Key words: Destination image, Image associations, Loyalty, Structural equation modeling, Tabriz

References (in Persian)

References (in English)


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