

Marketing Innovations for Sustainable Destinations

15 Effect of Controllable and Non-controllable Sources of Information on the Image of Turkey

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Design and setting by P.K. McBride

Introduction

The concept of image has been widely researched in the tourism literature, applied to the study of perceptions regarding countries as tourism destinations. Several of these investigations have been concerned with the image of developing countries in particular (Grosspietsch, 2006; Sönmez and Sirakaya, 2002; Tasci et al., 2007), concluding that the perceptions regarding these destinations are generally negative. However, some authors have pointed to the need to distinguish between the image of the country in general, and as a tourism destination. For example, Echtner (2002) determines that there is a difference between how individuals perceive Third World countries as virgin paradises, free from the damage derived from development, but also as insecure, poor and underdeveloped. In relation to Turkey, Öztürkmen (2005) proposes that there is a paradox between the favourable perceptions of this country as an attractive tourism destination due to its natural and historical resources, and its negative image from an economic, political and social perspective. These findings support the need to treat the image of the country and that of the tourism destination as two different constructs.

The literature has also followed this approach, and the image of the country and that of the tourism destination have been investigated as two different concepts, analyzed under different research areas (Nadeau et al., 2008). While the image of the country has mainly been investigated by international marketing researchers, the image of the destination has primarily been the concern of tourism investigators. However, according to the country of origin research (Han, 1990), the image of a country influences the way that its products, including tourism, are perceived. Therefore, these two concepts should be treated as different, although related, and analysed under the same perspective, in order to determine the effect of communication strategies directed at influencing the image of the country on the perceptions regarding the destination, and vice versa.

As a dynamic process, the formation of an image is influenced by sources of information, including those that cannot be controlled by managers, such as movies, printed press or news broadcasted in the mass media (Martin and Eroglu, 1993). The effect of uncontrollable sources of information on the image of a country, in particular, has not been sufficiently investigated (Sönmez and Sirakaya, 2002), and there are no studies that compare the effect of controllable and non-controllable information sources on the image of a country or a destination. Therefore, the aim of the research is to determine the influence of controllable versus non-controllable sources on image, while distinguishing between general country image and destination image. The study is applied in the context of the image of Turkey, as a developing country and a tourism destination, with the objective of analysing the varied effect of the sources of information on the two constructs under scrutiny. This analysis is carried out through an experiment that allows the researchers to separate the perceptions of the individual and establish causal relations.

Theoretical Background

The image of a place has been defined as the 'sum of beliefs and impressions people hold about places', which is formed when the individual simplifies all of the associations and pieces of information that are connected to that location (Kotler and Gertner, 2002). Similarly, destination image has been defined as 'the totality of impressions, beliefs, ideas, expectations and feelings accumulated towards a place over time' (Kim and Richardson, 2003). Both of these definitions coincide in their understanding of image

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