

The tourist Imagery, the Destination Image and the Brand Image

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Abstract

Given the current situation of the markets and of the tourist behaviour volatility, it is of utmost importance that one knows and understands the motivations of tourist demand, once, only in that way, one can answer more effectively in what regards to the wants and needs of those. The image of the tourist destinations is important, since it influences not only the choice of the destination by tourists but also their level of satisfaction. Often, destinations compete with each other through a little bit more than the image that they can create in the minds of potential travellers – the imagery. Therefore, tourist destination marketers' invest a great amount of resources to create a favourable and desirable image, which conquers potential travellers to visit or re-visit their destination. The objective of this study was to know the imagery that foreigner tourists have regarding the Oporto city and in which way this knowledge can help on the city's image and on the city's branding definition, which ultimately will influence its competitive positioning. One tried also, to understand the role that the attribute world heritage citydenomination plays in terms of imagery.

Keywords: Destination, Imagery, Image, Branding, Perception

Initial Considerations

The Oporto city while tourist destination can be considered basing ourselves in the thinking of Judd & Fainstein (1999), as a tourist-historic city, or be, «places that lay claim to a distinctive historic and/or cultural identity that tourists may experience and which forms a primary basis to their attraction. Some tourist-historic cities have been tourist destinations for centuries (such as Venice) whilst others have been transformed into tourist cities' through processes of active reconstruction or rediscovery of elements of their urban heritage (such as Boston). »

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Oporto has passed in the last few decades through a process of active reconstruction and in result, especially from 2001 but more deepened from 2004, the city of Oporto tourisfies itself. Here one understands tourisfication as the appropriation of urban space by tourists.

Tourism can be considered as an industry that sells fantasies and feeds upon the dreams, hopes, beliefs, expectations and of people's imagery, which in turn are transformed into consumer goods; into experiences. That is precisely, what the most diverse tourist organizations do when they try to appeal to that human capability that one designate as creative imagery, promoting exotic destinations and unique experiences through exciting symbols and narratives, that after people appropriate from and make them part of their life stories. The tourist imagery while a cohesive and idealized vision of the world and of the being intend to bring tourists to the destinations, transforming themselves in objects of desire. As Gastal (2003) said, «we do not travel to know the places but to confirm the imagery we had of them».

However, this raises a number of issues, including – What is the imagery and how it is constructed? In this paper, one will try to shed lights concerning the issues behind referred. This paper seeks to understand the imagery that foreigner tourists have constructed about Oporto city; how the reality has changed that imagery after being in the place and how expectations were or were not fulfilled; we also tried to understand if they were or were not satisfied with this destination, analysing for that purpose the strengths and weaknesses that they perceived in their visit, or be, the destination's attributes. The evaluation that one does here can then be helpful in making improvements on Oporto's product/service composite and on its marketing-mix design.

1. The Individual Tourist Imagery and its Construction

According with Lacan (in Vincent B. Leitch et al., 2001) the imagery works in tension with the symbolic and the real, it has to do with the perception of the coherence and with the whole's fragmentation. This is described very clearly in the description of the mirror's stage of development, in which an infant finds a picture of him in a mirror and interprets that image as being a whole, an ideal. This is the first time that the children recognize itself as a whole. Before this stage the infant only had experience a fragment reality.

A good example of Lacan's mirror stage is described in the book «Picture of Dorian Gray» by Oscar Wilde, when the main character realizes for the first time his portrait as an immaculate and idealized version of himself. Dorian Gray then tries to internalize his portrait as part of his identity, through which he enters into the symbolic order, or be, the moral and societal conventions are accepted by focusing entirely on the desire to incorporate his rival image in the portrait (mirror) as a part of himself

As Salemi & Salemi (2011:233) say, that portrait becomes the subject of self-admiration, where the «libido does not strive for some external object, but uses the ego as its object». In tourism, one can also find a kind of narcissistic (self-love) relationship, since the tourist seeks an utopian idealization of himself and of the destination, away from the constraints of their usual environment and of the rules of their origin's society, seeking for something more and better in life to include in its *I*. From this perspective, traveling offers an opportunity for strengthening their ego or self-recognition and simultaneously to meet the human desire for social interaction, love and esteem, leading to the creation of a fantasy world (Dann, G. M., 1977).

On the other hand, MacCannel (2002) stresses the importance of «models» (based on cultural images, past experiences, literature and others) as an idealized representation of a concept or of an aspect of life, which leads to embody an ideal that tourists seek to reflect or live up during their experiences. Then, the same author adds «that tourist attractions commercially successful are those that are modelled according to the structure of the ego, those who stage a narcissistic relationship between ego and attraction».

Rachid Amirou (2007:45) tells us, that above all the journey begins by being imagined. «Tourism expresses a more personal dimension of rupture compared to the usual way of life; he suggests the idea of a passage from a mental or social state to another one, more valued, and lived as "other" ... like other strong moments of life (marriage, promotions, etc.).» This author speaks to us therefore of rites of passage, rituals that give to the individual a different status. Thus, these rites have «three sequences that should be experienced by the initiate: one of separation, other of isolation and a final of aggregation to the group; three initiation times corresponding to the three ritualized journey times: departure, stay in the place and the return».

But, Amirou (2007) goes further by stating that, «as more adventurous is the journey, greater is the imagination labour before departure: more than the discovery, the journey is the pursuit of a dream, the promise to literally change the world, returning garnished and different; it is the promise of a new birth».

2. Destination Image

Kotler e Gertner (2004) define the destination image as «the sum of beliefs and impressions people hold about place. Images represent a simplification of a larger number of associations and pieces of information connected to a place. They are a product of the mind trying to process and pick out essential information from huge amounts of data about a place».

However, one can say that the image concept remains still complex and ill-defined in its nature once in the image formation process, images differ depending on the proximity or distance from the destination. There's no general consensus in what refers do the destination construct. However, «in the destination image formation process, researchers have also found that images differ in accuracy depending on proximity or distance to the destination. This means that potential travellers who are closer in distance from a destination, tend to have a more accurate and realistic image of the destination, and tend to be more knowledgeable about the destination. Thus, the greater the distance, the more unrealistic and inaccurate the image becomes (Stepchenkova et al., 2010).

One can say, that tourists will therefore measure the degree of attractiveness based on the distance and in the knowledge they have or think to have on the attributes a destination can or may supply and so, here the denomination of World Heritage City can play an extremely important role because, the knowledge degree on the destination will increase considerably. Destination image has the power to influence the decision making process of the tourist. If the tourist constructs a favourable destination image on their mind then it is probable that they will visit the desired tourist place (Beerli& Martins, 2004; Bonn et al, 2005).

According to Hall& O'Sullivan (1996), there are three essential factors that help to build a destination. First of all, the word-of-mouth,if tourists spread positive word of mouth, then it will be easy to build a strong image of a destination. Secondly, image making of media and lastly policies and interest taken by the destinations' governments.

Destination images influence tourists' travel decision making and their behaviour towards a destination, as well as, it influences the satisfaction levels and recollection of the experience. Therefore, perceived images are the basis of the evaluation or selection process and thus provide the link between motivations and destination selection (O'Leary, & Deegan, 2003).

Destinations with recognizable images (World Heritage Sites/ cities) and tourists' positive perceptions have more probability of being chosen. Images can be explained as representing «a simplification of a large number of associations and pieces of information connected with the place. They are the product of the mind trying to process and essentialize huge amounts of data about a place» (Pike et al., 2004:334). «It has been suggested that images held by potential travellers are so important in the destination selection process that they can affect the very viability of the destination» (Pike et al., 2004:334). So, one can say that the «World Heritage City» classification can simplify the image that potential tourists have on a given destination, and so, that makes it easier to them to choose such a destination.

3. Destination Branding

The destination branding, results from adapting branding techniques specifically to tourist destinations. In this sense, tourist destinations constituted themselves as the major brands of the tourism industry, translating and signalling nuclear and unique properties (the essence) of a territory, thereby generating a value proposition that involves a set of functional, emotional and intangible benefits.

According to Blain, Levy & Ritchie (2005:337), destination branding is the set of marketing activities that (1) support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that readily identifies and differentiates a destination; that (2) consistently convey the expectation of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; that (3) serve to consolidate and reinforce the emotional connection between the visitor and the destination; and that (4) reduce consumer search costs and perceived risk.

Collectively, these activities serve to create a destination image that positively influences consumer destination choice (Blain et al., 2005:337). From this definition, it becomes evident the two major dimensions of a destination brand, identity and image, from which develops a set of evaluative judgments between tourist organizations and consumers.

Destinations differentiate themselves according to this through its identity; they position themselves and are positioned according to the images that communicate and how these are perceived by the potential consumers. The Destination Branding objective consists, precisely, to achieve a positive and highly differentiated image in the minds of consumers/ tourists, emphasizing strengths and the favourable and unique aspects of a destination, that is, influencing the associations that individuals attach to brands.

In this domain Keller (1998) classifies the brand associations into three categories: attitudes, which describe the brand features, benefits in the form of functional or symbolic experiential values and attitudes, which represent the favourable or unfavourable evaluation of the brand. Regarding the attitudes', Pike (2004) divides them in cognitive components (sum of all that is known about the destination), affective (emotions and feelings towards the brand) and conative or behavioural (intention or probability to visit a destination).

The very complex and abstract nature of the destinations as brands, poses several obstacles that hinder the implementation of the entire strategic process. Tourist destinations are large entities that comprise a heterogeneous mix of people, culture, history and a varied landscape, having under its jurisdiction a range of public and private sub-brands (Qu et al., 2011). For the same reasons, the tourist destinations have less flexibility in modifying their products, this apart of, representing the interests of various stakeholders. In regarding to this, Giannopoulos et al. (2011) recommends a coordinated action between the various stakeholders of the tourism industry under the form of a cohesive and coherent umbrella destination brand, allowing the creation of synergies in relation to marketing actions directed in the same direction. That's a measure which provides guarantees, glamor or status to products and services marketed under an umbrella destination brand.

The World Heritage appears as a particular case of a world-known and established umbrella brand with a great valued by those who are familiar with it (King et al., 2012). However and according to the same authors, the majority of the management administrations of these destinations fail to use this brand in its full potential, presenting them in an inconsistent way, which turns harder the perception of its attributes by tourists.

The Lake District World Heritage Project report (2009) states that the brand «World Heritage» is synonymous of quality, conferring a special image to historical destinations due to the compliance of several stringent criteria originating from the World Heritage Foundation. If properly managed, this brand will deliver what the same report refers to the twelve areas of impact (positive), including increased promotion; construction of a powerful new/ improved identity; preservation of Unique Selling Point of heritage; strategic coordination of investment; higher quality in infrastructure; development of the business sector, among others, which of course will bring considerable benefits at the destination image level.

4. Methodology

This study is framed in a qualitative research paradigm (Van der Maren, 1996). In the author's terminology (*ibidem*), we opted for a study of highly descriptive and interpretive nature, to the extent that it is intended to describe a reality to make it intelligible. In this context, we adopted for our study the conception of Quivy and Campenhoudt (2008:104) who tell us, that the problem is the theoretical approach or perspective that one decides to adopt to address the problem placed for the starting question. It is a way of interrogating the studied phenomena. Constructing the problem means answering the question «how will i approach this phenomenon?» Thus, it is presented as core question of the study the following: What images come to mind when you think about Oporto as a tourist destination. Has secondary question, one asked, if the world heritage citydenomination played any role in the destination's choice. However, many other questions were raised during the conversations. The general idea was to find the attributes that tourists consider satisfactory and those less satisfactory.

According to Neves (2008), from an exploratory method one may carried out a survey of possibilities and understandings on a phenomenon, enriching like so all knowledge. «The perspective adopted by each researcher will also dictate the construction of knowledge, so it is required from the beginning, the ability of one to put ourselves in the perspective of the other without ever putting into question the rigor in the knowledge extraction»(Almeida & Freire, 2003).

So and according to Flick (2005:17), the qualitative research will have to operate according to three key perspectives: symbolic interactionism, concerned with the subjective meaning and the individual attributions of meaning; ethnomethodology, interested in the routines of everyday life and of its creation and the structuralism or psychoanalytic positions that explore the processes of unconscious social psychological.

Thus, in this case in particular, onesat down in the symbolic interactionism and in ethnomethodology for the construction of a social reality.

5. Results and Discussion

In this research were conducted 30 unstructured in-depth interviews in several places (inside the world heritage area) with foreigner tourists visiting Oporto over the age of 18, during the months of April to the ends of August 2014.

The questions made, were related with the following themes: imagery, perceptions, expectations and satisfaction. The interviews lasted around 60 minutes each and were tape recorded. Segmentation was previously made regarding the tourists' origin based in the Oporto's official tourist statistics. All questions were made in four languages, English, French, Spanish and Portuguese.

From the total of 30 interviews conducted, one can highlight several clues regarding some of the tourists' social demographic characteristics: the majority were women (56,66%), men were 44,33% of total; their ages ranged from 20 to 76 years old being that the most representative gap was situated between 25-35 years old and the less representative was situated between 65-76; the main tourists' countries of origin were, in decreasing order, France, Spain, Brazil and Italy (those meant 52% of the total) and with marginal contributions, Poland, China, South Korea, Mexico, Colombia, Israel, Russia, Czech Republic, Croatia, Holland, Ireland, Turkey and Malaysia; the vast majority is officially single, although, one must point out that most of the interviewees were couples (not married), with no children. Meanwhile, it became clearly that the level of educational qualifications identified was rather high, divided between Bachelor's degree (43,3%), Master's degree (30%), with Bachelor's degree frequency (10%), with PhD (10%) and (6.6%) without any college degree or college frequency.

For 86,6% Oporto was the first choice as destination; for 1/3 of the respondents the visit will include complementary destinations, being that the most common of those are: Lisbon and Guimaraes. Almost all respondents said that the denomination world heritage was important, many have chosen Guimaraes and Lisbon as second destinations because, they are world heritage cities and they are not far from Oporto. In terms of how they gathered information regarding the destination, 2/3 have consulted the internet, 40% have consulted specialized tour guides, 20% trusted in the word-of-mouth and to 10% this was not their first visit. For almost of the respondents the stay had an average duration of 2 to 3 days.

Regarding the process of the destination's image construction at the country of origin, the results have indicated several contributive factors in this matter, namely: if people travel in group, length of stay, motivation, familiarity with the destination (first time visit or re-visitation), source of information, the way the visit was planned and organized, and the consideration of alternative and/or complementary destinations.

In spite of each and every aspect mentioned here playing a key role in its own way, in reality they are interdependent and interrelated, constituting and influencing the destination image. First of all, from what was observed in the course of conversations, one can intuit up, that the composition of the travelling group will greatly influence destination choice in terms of the activities and attributes that tourists expect to find in the destination. On the other hand, the answers given by couples suggest the prevalence of a dominant element that organizes and plans the trip, whose expectations will reflect on his/her companion.

Table 1 – Oporto's attributes

Attribute	Satisfactory	Non Satisfactory
Beautiful views	x	
Good climate	x	x
Interesting cultural attractions	x	
Local Shopping		x
local Gastronomy (F&B)	x	x
Transportation infrastructure		x
Good nightlife and entertainm	x	
Interesting and friendly peopl	x	
World Heritage	x	
Unique and Different	x	

Respondents were asked during the conversation to say which attributes they consider most satisfactory and less satisfactory according to their perceptions about the city, about the tourist destination. The attributes present in table 1 reflect the answers given; afterwards they were aggregated having in consideration the existent literature on the subject. Some of the destinations' attributes were considered satisfactory to many but at the same time unsatisfactory for many others.

So and according to what was extrapolated from the content analysis of the interviews made, one can say that Oporto is seen as a city with great views, as being a monumental city, a place where people are very friendly, that as a good nightlife and entertainment (here the younger respondents consider it an extremely important factor in the moment of choosing a destination) and finally unique and different. The World Heritage Domination was mentioned by all of the respondents as being one of the main reasons to choose this destination.

Strangely to us, the attribute «good food and beverage», especially because the Oporto wine was seen by all the respondents as being the most differential element of Oporto as a tourist destination (all have or were to visit the Oporto wine cellars) had mixed-feelings. In this point the problem to many was that even that the wine and the Oporto wine were to them fantastic, however the restaurants were too tourist, and they had the perception that have not «tasted» the real Oporto's and Portuguese traditional food. Relatively to the «climate», the spring and summer of 2014 were not normal in what regards to the climate.

The spring was very rainy and the summer was instable. In the summer, days of extreme hotness were followed by days with rain and with temperatures that sometimes dropped ten degrees comparing to the previous days. So, in the end these mix-feelings that we found here should not be so surprising. In what concern the «local shopping», the great problem expressed by foreign tourists was that the lack of language skills. What in the end made the purchases complicate. In terms of the attribute «public transportation», the problem found, was that tourists did not have a concrete idea about the schedules of the different transports, and in general they did not know that there was tickets for 3 and 7 days. Those that know about it thought they were too expensive in comparison with other European cities.

6. Limitations and Future Research

According to the generality of authors that lean on qualitative research, this has several strengths among which, one can highlight: it helps to study cases in depth, it's useful to describe complex phenomena and the main reason why one choose qualitative research in this imagery study, or be, it provides an understanding of people personal experiences and allows the identification of contextual and setting factors as they relate to the phenomenon of interest. But, it has also some downsides, especially because the knowledge produced is difficult to generalize and could even be unique. In this context, one must remember what Hollinshead (2004:73) has pointed out, «almost all qualitative analyses can only ever be partial, and therefore open-ended, forms of inquiry; many researchers believe they can only ever yield “findings” tentatively held, and never “results” firmly concluded.»

Having in mind the imagery thematic, future research must be design aiming to the cognitive component of the destination image through the attributes which were revealed in the present study, and this should be done using a structured questionnaire (Jenkins, 1999).

One other and perhaps the greatest limitation of this study is that it is not possible to generalize its results, once it's a qualitative research with a convenience sample and furthermore it was done in a particular season.

Final Considerations

This research intended to understand the perception «in situ», because this is a key moment in the tourists' experience, since it contrasts with what they have imagined previously. Tourists never arrive with a null perception: they have a previous image of the place that will be confirmed or not. So one tried to understand if the attributes that the foreign tourists had of Oporto's were or were not confirmed and what attributes were those. In result, a number of significant insights came out from this study; however, it also raised several questions that should in the future be subject of further research, namely of quantitative character.

This research suggests implications at the destination marketing level, as the results confirm that affect is crucial for increasing loyalty, and consequently for the development of a strong relationship between the tourists and the destination.

This implies that marketing strategies in the destination must have in account the affective component, in order to develop adequate images and to build an unique positioning.

From this research, one can extrapolate that all the attributes that tourists connect to Oporto could be used separately, but preferably in combination to create a communication platform for Oporto as a tourist destination. It has to be remembered that the positioning must be valid, believable, and simple, have an appeal and be distinctive (Gertner&Kotler, 2004).

In general, people «create» their own image of a destination, thanks to their general knowledge and feeling, or from an external influence, such as friends and relatives, the advertisements, the intermediaries, or, also, through their own past experiences. In this way, the image projected by tourist destinations through the promotional activities, as well as, all sources of information available to their potential tourists is a topic of crucial interest to tourist destination administrations.

Therefore, in conclusion, one can say basing ourselves in Beerli& Martin (2004) that destination image depends on the previous experience thattravellers have of a specific destination, the degree of familiarity he or she has, his or her geographic origin, social and cultural background and most importantly the expectations one has about that tourist destination.

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