

Factors Influencing Destination Image in Distant Culture Countries: The Role of Corporate Image

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The present work aims to explain more deeply the theory of the image of tourist destination and its process of formation, specifically regarding the factors that influence the above-mentioned process. For this purpose, the knowledge of two fields of study, the image of the tourist destination and the corporate image, is combined in order to analyse their possible interdependent relationship. To explore the possible relations between both elements, a theoretical model has been developed and confirmed using a survey carried out on a sample of 307 Korean citizens. The results reveal that the degree of familiarity of the Spanish companies in South Korea can be considered to be a more influential factor in the image of Spain as a tourist destination. This fact might have important economic implications, since tourism is turning into a key driver of socio-economic progress.

Keywords: tourism, destination image, corporate image, culture, distant destination

Introduction

Tourism has become one of the most important employment- and economic income-generating instruments globally, and as a result, it is difficult to find any region of the world that does not need to stimulate the tourist sector as the basis of its economic politics.

According to UNWTO (2017, p. 4):

Tourism has grown faster than world trade over the past four years. As a worldwide export category, tourism ranks third after fuels and chemicals and ahead of food and automotive products. As one of the major players in international commerce, tourism ranks as the first exports sector in many developing countries. This global spread of tourism in industrialised and developed states has produced economic and employment benefits in many related sectors - from construction to agriculture or telecommunications. International tourism now represents 7% of the world's exports in goods and services, up from 6% in 2014. In 2015, international tourism generated US\$ 1.5 trillion in export earnings.

Nevertheless, the tourist industry is turning into a sector with a level of fierce competition. This is due, among other factors, to the globalization of the markets, to the increase in the competitive pressure among destinations, and to changes in the expectations and habits of tourists.

In order to be able to compete in this sector and to do so effectively, the tourist destinations must be able to design and implement strategies and marketing initiatives addressed to achieve the desired product positioning in target markets (Hawkes & Kwortnik, 2006). Each destination should differ from its competitors, increase its

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ability to attract new tourists and be able to support and cultivate the loyalty of the tourists who have already visited the destination (Alegre & Cladera, 2006).

The situation described justifies the extremely relevant position of the image perceived today of tourist destinations. Since image, seen as a mental picture formed by a set of attributes that define the destination in its various dimensions, exercises a strong influence on consumer behavior in the tourism sector. First, and based on the fact that tourists usually have a limited knowledge of tourists destinations they have not previously visited, image fulfils an important function insofar as destinations with strong, positive, discriminatory and recognizable images have more probability of being chosen by the tourists (Hunt, 1975; Goodrich, 1978; Pearce, 1982; Woodside & Lysons, 1989).

According to Crompton, Fakeye, and Lue (1992), knowledge of all the factors that influence the formation of the image of a destination will help the institutions responsible for promoting tourist destinations to project an image adapted to the market across a selection of the most appropriate promotional mix.

A review of the literature reveals the existence of a set of factors that influence the formation of the image of a tourist destination that involves both information obtained from different sources and the characteristics of the individual.

Previous investigations have taken into account information culled from such sources as promotional pamphlets, other people's opinions, and mass media in general.

That notwithstanding, there is a glaring dearth of references and/or theoretical contributions which take into consideration the corporate image of the country of destination and its possible influence on the image of the destination as a tourist destination. This paper will attempt to analyse the influence of this corporate image on the image of tourist destinations and its process of choice.

Theoretical Framework

Destination Image

Moutinho (1987) defined the tourist destination image as the subjective interpretation of the reality generated by the tourist, establishing the bases for later studies (Baloglu, 2001; Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Baloglu & Love, 2005; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martín, 2004a, 2004b; Bigné, M. I. Sánchez, & J. Sánchez, 2001; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997; San Martín & Del Bosque, 2008).

These studies tend to consider image as a concept formed by the consumer's reasoned and emotional interpretation as the consequence of two nearby and interrelated components: (1) the perceptive or cognitive evaluations referring to the beliefs and personal knowledge about the object; and (2) the affective approximation relating to the individual feelings towards the object.

Once the tourist destination image has been conceptualized, it is necessary to put the emphasis on the importance of understanding what forces or factors influence the process of destination image formation. Goodall (1990) indicated that knowledge and comprehension of these factors might help to identify target markets and to determine what image should be promoted and communicated to attract the above-mentioned segments.

Baloglu and McCleary (1999) and Ruiz, Castro, and Armario (2007) proposed a general theoretical model of image formation factors that distinguishes between stimulus factors and personal factors. The stimulus factors refer to a physical object, experience or external stimulus (information sources and previous experience), whereas the personal factors correspond with psychological (values, motivations, personality) and social (age, education, marital status, etc.) characteristics.

Numerous authors have developed investigations concerning these factors, nevertheless there have never been any studies carried out to analyse the corporate image as a moderating variable in the formation of a tourist destination image.

Corporate Image

The corporate image has acquired increasing importance in the strategic policies of companies, due to the changes that have taken place in the market: the appearance of new technologies, new businesses that require restructuring, diversification and extension of lines of products or services.

To confront these changes successfully, companies must modify the form in which they are perceived by consumers. They must express in a clear, coherent and effective form an image that should reflect their purpose, their aims and their strategies; an image that allows them to differ and to be managed in a competitive, demanding and dynamic market.

In the marketing literature, there is a first group of authors whose definitions place emphasis on the role of an organization in the creation of its corporate image (Dichter, 1985; Dowling, 1994).

The second group of authors presents the corporate image as perceptions, (mental) pictures or impressions of an organization that reside in the public's mind (Grönroos, 1984; Johnson & Zinkhan, 2015; Balmer, 1995; Gray & Balmer, 1998; Balmer & Gray, 2000; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Balmer & Greyser, 2002).

One of the most complete definitions was produced by Carrió Sala (2013). He defined the corporate image as a set of meanings, beliefs and feelings that a person associates with an organization, the ideas used to describe it or to remember it, including the iconic visual aspects and external signs that visualize its personality.

Nevertheless, scholars in recent years have extended this view by incorporating the multiple interactions that form corporate image. Experiences, impressions, beliefs, feelings and knowledge about an organization are all sources that shape corporate image (Dowling, 1986; Van Riel, 1995; Markwick & Fill, 1997; Melewar, 2003).

Distant Destination

To a large extent, culture can account for many of the behaviours and preferences held by tourists (You, O'leary, Morrison, & Hong, 2000; Reisinger & Turner, 2002). Countless investigations have demonstrated how one's national culture holds sway over numerous aspects, among others, it is worth noting: the decision-making process (Singhapakdi, Vitell, & Leelakulthanit, 1994; Swaidan & Hayes, 2005); sensitivity to ethical problems (Swaidan & Hayes, 2005); trade (Heide, 1994); consumer behaviour (Dawar, Parker, & Price, 1996; De Mooij & Hofstede, 2002); development of compensation and incentive strategies (Welbourne & Gómez-Mejía, 1991); human resource practices (Aycan, Kanungo, Mendonca, Yu, Deller, Stahl, & Kurshid, 2000). Likewise, from within this body of research, it is incumbent to acknowledge those authors who have uncovered a significant relationship between the perceived image of the destination and the potential tourist's country of origin, namely: Ahmed (1991); Beerli and Martín (2004a; 2004b); Calantone, Di Benedetto, Hakam, and Bojanic (1989); Chen and Kerstetter (1999). Finally, it is absolutely necessary to establish a definition of "cultural distance". According to Shenkar (2001), the "cultural distance" present between two nations mirrors the existing differences in their particular values, norms and behavioural patterns. Ultimately, these differences play a major role in drawing as well as framing all the conclusions reached by this study.

Hypothesis

In accordance with the general aim of this investigation, it is intended to analyse the influence that corporate image has on the image of a tourist destination. The existing literature has never related both concepts (corporate image vs. image of a tourist destination).

Investigations carried out by Gotsi, Lopez, and Andriopoulos (2011) proposed that the influence of corporate image on a country's image can be moderated by four elements (familiarity with the country, familiarity with the company, brand image and corporate/country image) and two variables related to the corporate level (international visibility and market visibility).

Therefore, if the corporate image can influence the image of a country, we might suppose that as it increases the level of knowledge and therefore the familiarity of any company, it concerns the familiarity of the country as a tourist destination.

The process of choosing a destination begins with a "set of initial considerations" formed by the universe of possible tourist destinations. The places that are known will be those that shape the "set of final considerations", which is the reason for the importance of the reputation of the countries and of the tourist destinations.

On the basis of the above, we design the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): The degree of familiarity of the companies in a distant destination, depending on the number of companies known, significantly influences the opinion about it.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): The degree of familiarity of the companies in a distant destination significantly influences the tourist destination's image.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): The more positive the corporate image in a distant destination is, the more positive the image of Spain will be as a tourist destination.

Research Design and Methodology

The principal aim of the study is the analysis of the possible influence corporate image has on the process of destination image formation.

Despite increasing acknowledgement of both constructs (destination image and corporate image), the relation between both variables has been under-researched.

To this end, the integration of the constructs of tourist destination image and corporate image in the same model is evaluated empirically for the first time.

After an in-depth review of the literature, a series of hypotheses have been set out. This research has been carried out through an empirical investigation of both a qualitative and a quantitative nature. To check the validity of the content of the scale, five experts involved either professionally or academically with the business or tourist industry were interviewed, and in accordance with their opinions, it was possible to ensure that the scales covered the whole of the studied content.

In the quantitative part, a structured questionnaire was administered to 307 Korean citizens, and in order to facilitate their comprehension, it was translated into Korean.

The choice of South Korea is mainly due to the fact that our present situation calls for the establishment of new relationships. The tourist industry must push beyond the European market, wherein Spain already boasts a commanding presence, in order to capitalize on emerging countries which, while perhaps at a greater remove

culturally, are quickly closing the gap economically. East Asia is one of the most important outbound tourist markets in the world. In 2014 alone, approximately 109 million Chinese tourists, 17 million Japanese tourists and 15 million South Korean tourists travelled abroad, albeit principally to Asian destinations.

Regarding the specifics of the sample taken, 52.1% are male while 47.9% are female. In addition, 49.2% of those surveyed fall in the age bracket from 18 to 24; 29% fall into the bracket from 25 to 44; the remaining 21.8% of those surveyed are over 45.

Amongst those surveyed, the overwhelming majority have a university education (94.1%); 60.3% are single; and regarding employment, 44.6% hold active employment while 54.4% are students.

To more thoroughly examine the corporate image of Spanish companies operating within culturally distant countries, the focus here will be to take into close consideration their renown as well as their image (see Figure 1).

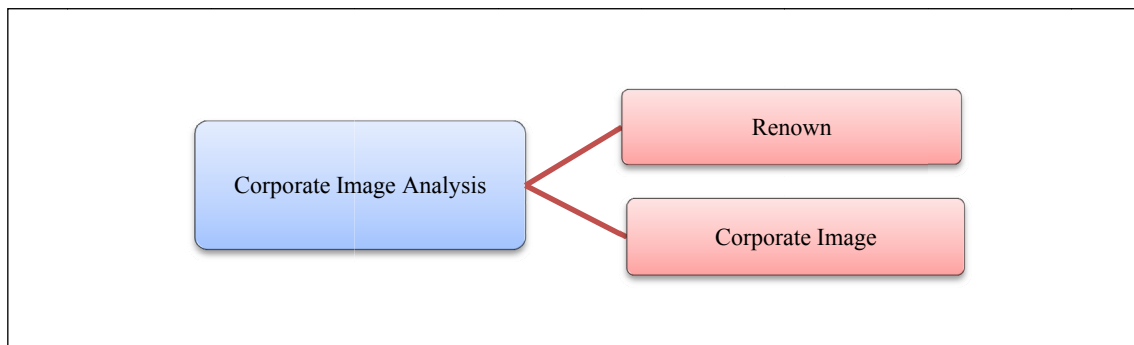


Figure 1. Aspects to be studied in the analysis of the corporate image.

Renown

Renown is understood by the extent of familiarity the general public has with an organization and, in this case, with business organizations present in culturally distant countries. It is imperative to analyse what renown is; for without renown, there can be no image. In order to measure the said “renown”, those surveyed were asked to identify three Spanish companies.

Corporate Image

The corporate image measures up across a structured methodology, there being included in the questionnaire the corporate attributes of image that stem from a review of the wide and recent literature (Capriotti, 2013).

In this case, and due to the fact that the questionnaires were filled out by consumers, a scale that includes 11 attributes was developed. Specifically, the method used to measure the corporate image was a 7-point Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 (total disagreement) to 7 (total agreement), and following the outline proposed by Capriotti (2013), 11 characteristics were included (trustworthy, young, creative, dynamic, innovative, socially responsible, good after-sales, technologically advanced service, worried about environment, high-quality products and good quality-price relation).

A question that refers to general opinion about Spanish companies was also included. General opinion was assessed using a 5-point, single-item Likert-type scale that ranged from “very positive” to “very negative”.

Regarding the scale of the tourist destination's image, as with the corporate image mentioned above, an extensive review of recent studies was carried out. These studies reveal two prominent methods when it comes to measuring the image of any given tourist destination, namely: a structured and non-structured methodology. The present study employs both methods so as to be better equipped to portray all the varying components comprising the image of the tourist destination (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; 1993).

Non-structured Method

This method is rooted in the premise of writing the survey in such a way that the questions asked therein are open-ended in nature. The questions, therefore, steer those surveyed to answer freely and spontaneously with the aim of obtaining and comprehending the scope, characteristics and attributes which the potential tourists consider relevant with respect to the image they have of said tourist destination.

Structured Method

The measure of the destination image is based on a list of the image's attributes. There are two basic options: (1) asking individuals to evaluate the image according to several attributes; and/or (2) asking individuals to provide a relative weighting for each of these attributes. Most studies have followed a multi-attribute approach in which the "global image" is assessed as being the average of all attributes (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). Nevertheless, the present study chose a multi-attribute battery of 22 items including cognitive and affective aspects.

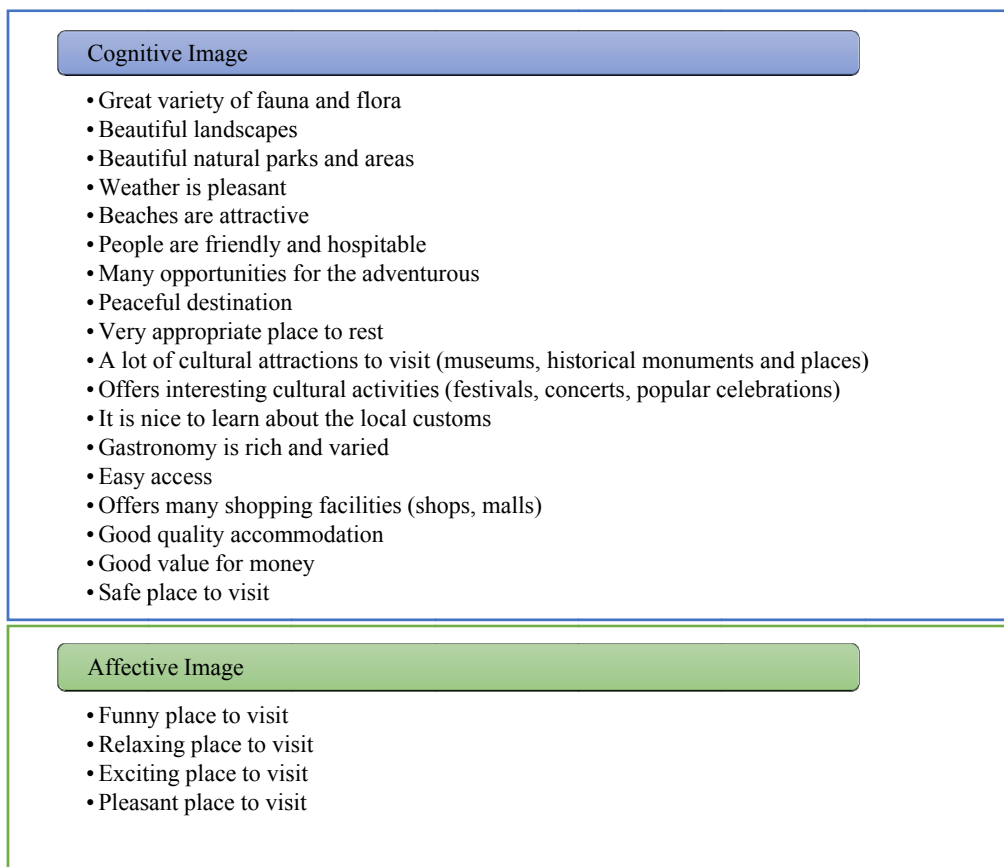


Figure 2. Attributes of the cognitive and affective component of the destination image.

The measurement tool was developed from proposals provided by Gutiérrez and Del Bosque (2010) (see Figure 2 above):

(1) Cognitive image: to measure the cognitive component of the image, a Likert-type scale (1 = total disagreement; 7 = total agreement) was developed along with 18 items from the review of other scales to measure the image of the tourist destinations. These 18 items were selected initially based on the fact that they appear more frequently in the checked works;

(2) Affective image: to measure this component of the image, a 7-point semantic differential scale was used (four items: Spain is a safe place to visit, Spain is a funny place to visit, Spain is a relaxing place to visit and Spain is an exciting place to visit).

Results

Before checking the hypothesis set out in this work, a brief descriptive analysis is going to be conducted.

Of the total number of respondents, 67.8% did not know any Spanish company (only 99 persons knew at least one Spanish company). There was a clear difference between the levels of knowledge of Spanish companies related to the sectors of activity they belong to. The Spanish companies most known and recognized by the respondents belong to the textile and fashion sector.

Having analysed the reputation of the Spanish companies, we move on to eliciting their opinion. More than 67% have a neutral opinion.

Nevertheless, among the respondents who affirm knowing some Spanish companies, the majority have a positive opinion of these. Only 4.6% declare having a negative or a very negative opinion of Spanish companies.

To be able to determine the competitive advantages of Spanish companies, the most valued attributes are related to their personality: young (4.28), creative (4.17), and dynamic (4.41). The characteristic that the respondents identify least with Spanish companies is advanced technology (3.78).

Having analysed certain aspects related to the corporate image of the Spanish companies in Korea, a descriptive analysis of the image of the tourist destination is carried out.

The attributes of the image of Spain as a tourist destination can be split into three groups. The first group has the most valued attributes: “landscape beauty”, “attractive beaches”, “exciting tourist destination” and “relaxing tourist destination”. In all these cases, the average is higher than 5.

The second group has attributes valued with a low average, i.e., 4. Among them, we should mention “great diversity of flora and fauna”, “accessible destination” and “shopping facilities”. The third group has attributes valued at 4.50 (the rest of the attributes).

To check the hypotheses of the investigation:

First, the influence that the level of knowledge of the Spanish companies has on their opinion about them is analysed (using analysis of variance, ANOVA).

The two dependent variables are the mean opinion of Spanish companies and the degree of familiarity thereof.

The results of the model are shown in Table 1.

P -value = 0.011 < 0.05. There are significant differences. H1 is therefore accepted. We can conclude that significant differences exist in the opinions about the Spanish companies due to the level of knowledge of these. In other words, respondents who know one or more Spanish companies have a more positive opinion than those who do not know any company.

Table 1

Influence of Level of Knowledge of Spanish Companies on Their Opinion (ANOVA)

	Sum of square	Degrees of freedom	Mean square	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Corrected model	2,058.035 ^a	1	2,058.035	6.522	0.011
Intersection	7,407.533	1	7,407.533	23.476	0.000
Level of knowledge	2,058.035	1	2,058.035	6.522	0.011
Error	96,237.607	305	315.533		
Total	110,241.000	307			
Corrected total	98,295.642	306			

Note. ^a: $R^2 = 0.021$ (corrected $R^2 = 0.018$).

On the other hand, we have analyzed whether this knowledge or lack of knowledge of Spanish companies influences the image of the destination (see Table 2). The ANOVA model was applied for this (see Table 3).

Table 2

Mean of Overall Image According to the Level of Knowledge of Spanish Companies

Variable	Level of knowledge	<i>N</i>	Mean	SD	Standard error of the average
<i>Overall_image</i>	He/she does not know any company	206	4.4367	0.97059	0.06762
	He/she knows at least one company	98	4.9620	0.86132	0.08701

Table 3

Influence of Level of Knowledge of Spanish Companies on Overall Image (ANOVA)

	Sum of square	Degrees of freedom	Mean square	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Corrected model	18.324 ^a	1	18.324	20.876	0.000
Intersection	5,866.103	1	5,866.103	6,683.135	0.000
Level of knowledge	18.324	1	18.324	20.876	0.000
Error	265.080	302	0.878		
Total	6,732.866	304			
Corrected total	283.404	303			

Note. ^a: $R^2 = 0.065$ (corrected $R^2 = 0.062$).

In this case, the dependent variable is the mean of the tourist destination's image, whereas the independent variable is constituted by the degree of familiarity with Spanish companies in culturally distant countries (see Tables 2 and 3).

Similarly, significant differences are detected. Those citizens who know at least one Spanish company have a more positive image of Spain as a tourist destination than those who do not know any. Thus, H2 is accepted.

Posited as one of the principal objectives of the present study was the need to substantiate whether the image of companies present in culturally distant countries influenced, in any way, the image of Spain as a tourist destination.

What is clearly demonstrated above, i.e., that familiarity with a given Spanish company does indeed hold sway over the image of Spain as a tourist destination, is a patent indicator that we are on the right path. In effect, the relation between both variables comes clearly into view; to further corroborate this point, Pearson's coefficient correlation will be used.

Finally, and attending to the third hypothesis, the relationship between the corporate image and the tourist destination image is analysed (Pearson's correlation) (see Table 4).

Table 4

Correlations

Variable		Corporate image	Tourist destination image
Corporate image	Pearson correlation	1	0.536**
	<i>p</i> -value		0.000
	<i>N</i>	290	289
Tourist destination image	Pearson correlation	0.536**	1
	<i>p</i> -value	0.000	
	<i>N</i>	289	304

Note. **: The correlation is significant at the 0.01.

Due to the fact that the *P*-value = 0.000, there is a positive correlation between both variables. Thus, H3 is accepted.

Conclusions

From an academic point of view, this research has attempted to provide a conceptual framework that permits continued advances in the development of destination image in order to allow a greater understanding of the process of destination image formation.

An aspect not previously contemplated by the literature on destination image, the corporate image, appears to be an influential factor.

From the analysis of the results, the following conclusions have been drawn:

With respect to a culturally distant country's degree of familiarity with Spanish companies, it is abundantly clear that these companies do not enjoy a very prominent level of recognition in countries such as South Korea.

This may well be owing to two prime reasons: (1) A large part of the companies operating in South Korea are intermediaries, in other words, they do not sell directly to the end-consumer; and (2) Their communication efforts are not specifically aimed at linking them to Spain, that is to say, not much of an effort is made to draw attention to their "Made in" or "Country of Origin" labels.

Nonetheless, it can be confirmed that those people who are familiar with at least one Spanish company have a more positive opinion of them than those surveyed who are familiar with none.

Addressing the main objective of this research, the evidence demonstrates that those citizens who are familiar with at least one Spanish company have a more positive image of Spain as a tourist destination. Considering this newly revealed relationship, it should be seen as wholly necessary to attach it to the corporate image as an incentivising factor that would add to the creation of the image of a tourist destination. Such a notion, moreover, is fully backed by another analysis wherein both variables are clearly seen to correlate positively.

The results of this work emphasize a set of managerial implications concerning the promotion and communication of the tourist destinations as well as their companies.

Governments must, more than ever before, focus on managing the image of their companies to enable differentiation and increase tourism.

If, as has been demonstrated, the corporate image influences the image of a tourist destination in distant culture countries, it is necessary to give special care to the international communication of the companies, so that they project an identity not only adapted to their reality and interests as an organization, but also adapted to the image of the destination that wants to be transmitted. It needs to be a faithful image, which as far as possible reflects the attributes that the potential tourist values at the moment of choosing a destination, and that in turn generates synergies.

A better understanding of the reasons why people travel will enable managers, practitioners and policy makers to formulate more effective marketing strategies, taking into account this relationship, in order to achieve increasing export revenues.

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