

Advances in Tourism Image and Branding

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1. Introduction

Tourism destination image is recognized as a relevant factor that influences both the decision making around selecting a destination [1] and the competitiveness of destinations [2,3]. This is why it has been the subject of extensive research over the past several decades. Researchers have sought to conceptually understand the influence of tourism image perception on the attitudes, motivations and satisfaction of tourists [2], as well as the role of various agents [4,5] and factors that contribute to the formation of a destination's image [6] and how destinations can effectively manage and control their image to gain a sustainable competitive advantage [7].

In this context, the importance of branding for destinations has become increasingly apparent in recent years [8]. Destinations have understood the value of establishing strong brands that contribute to forming a favorable perception of the destination [9]. This not only increases awareness of the destination in the minds of tourists, but also helps to reduce perceived risks and highlight emotional appeal [9]. Therefore, branding helps destinations to differentiate themselves from their competitors, making them more attractive to potential visitors [8].

For this reason, it is essential to continue advancing the research in this area. Technological advances in recent years have extensively changed established paradigms. The rise of social media, for example, has led to great changes in the methods used to disseminate and influence the perception of tourism image [10], and the dissolution of the borders between the role of the tourist as generator and perceiver of the tourist image has also emerged [5]. Furthermore, technology and the digitalization of the global tourism sector bring new opportunities, such as virtual tourism. In this context, this Special Issue aims to provide new perspectives on the study of the tourist image and branding that allow us to deepen this knowledge and provide new approaches.

2. Overview of Papers in This Special Issue

The Special Issue is composed of seven articles that suggest new approaches to the study of image and branding of tourism destinations. All of them contribute to this knowledge in a particular way from three different thematic axes: (a) prospects and methods, (b) branding and communication tools, and (c) destination image perception.

The first axis, "Prospects and methods", is composed of two different articles. Chu, Bao and Sun, authors of "Progress and Prospects of Destination Image research in the Last Decade" [11], developed a literature review of 151 articles published in six major academic journals on tourism to evaluate the latest advances in destination image research. The findings of this paper show that papers in the last decade have been focused on four main areas: (1) the structure of the destination image; (2) the measurement and branding of the destination image, (3) the influencing factors of the destination image; and (4) the influence of the destination image on tourists' behavioral intentions. In addition, this paper finds that the research methods used to explore destination image are becoming more diversified. In the end, this study provides an extensive proposal of how destination image could be studied in the near future in order to fill some existing gaps. In particular, authors highlight the importance of focusing on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The



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second article of this axis is authored by Gierczak-Korzeniowska, Stopa and Szpara [12] and focuses on the application of a cyclical research approach, being a new approach to study destination image. The study involves a comparison between the desired image embodied in the strategic documents and the perceived image by tourists. The findings suggest that potential tourists perceive the online information about tourist assets differently from the image presented in the strategic documents of the destinations.

The second axis, “Branding and communication tools”, also includes two articles, which focus on the use of different tools to promote a tourism destination. Li and Cheng [13] are the authors of “Creating Sustainable Development of the Destination with Tea Public Version Packaging Design by Obtaining Relational Space Concept”. This article aims to analyze the influence of tea packaging on the image of the tourism destination. Their findings reveal that the use of destination images and geographical symbols on the tea packages is positive for the further promotion of the destination image. Additionally, they found that destination brand and private brands are complementary and can benefit from each other to ensure the sustainability of the tourism industry. In the second article of this axis, Hua, Jittithavorn, Lee and Chen [14] focus on mass media in order to develop their article titled “Contribution of TV Dramas and Movies in Strengthening Sustainable Tourism”. This study aims to determine the role of mass media on destination choices, focusing on three different aspects: motivation, destination image and the decision-making process. The findings reveal that, indeed, TV dramas and movies influence the image of the destination and the tourist’s decision-making process.

Finally, the third axis, “Destination image perception”, includes three articles, all of them focusing on specific variables and their effects on image perception and using innovative perspectives. Tsai [15] aims to analyze the sense of presence on the holistic destination image in the article “Factors That Influence Virtual Tourism Holistic Image: The Moderating Role of Sense of Presence”. The author of this article uses a non-immersive virtual reality experience to determine its effects on holistic image. Findings suggest that the sense of presence positively mediates the relationships between holistic images and cognitive, affective and conative components. The second article of this axis by Szubert, Warcholik and Żemła [16] bridges a particular gap in the academic literature by focusing not only on familiarity as a whole, but by decomposing this concept into three elements: (1) tangible tourism attractions, (2) events, and (3) traditional cuisine and dishes. The authors aim to determine how the three types of familiarity impact the perceived attractiveness of a city destination using four Polish tourism cities as case studies. The findings reveal that the familiarity of tangible tourism attractions is related to the perceived attractiveness of the destination, whereas the other two factors do not influence the destination’s perceived attractiveness. The third article, “Exploring the Sustainable Development of Archaized Block Tourist Destination Based on Communicative Image and Perceptive Image” [17], reconceptualizes the concept of the archaized block for tourism destinations and includes an analysis of communicative and perceptive image using the means-end chain method. Results show that the function of an archaized block in a city is not only a space for tourists, but also a network information center that combines local residents, local knowledge and local cultural resources.

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