Qualitative Projective Methods and Holistic Components of Destination Image. The Use of Photo-Association and Sentence Completion to Analyse the Holistic Components of Destination Image.

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Abstract

Destination image plays an important role in the measurement, marketing and management of tourist destinations. In particular, it is important in the decision-making process for tourists as it is the (subjective) construct that allows them to make sense of the myriad of information that they receive on any given destination (and destinations more broadly). Tourists' images of destinations are based on both the individual attributes of a destination as well as more generic, holistic impressions and several techniques have been employed by researchers to explore this complex construct. Many of these techniques are quantitative and highly structured in their approach, while a relatively small number take a more qualitative, 'unstructured' approach or a combination of both a structured and unstructured approach.

Unstructured/qualitative approaches are most commonly used to explore the nature of the holistic aspects of destination image as holistic images are more complex than the attribution-based images. To date both the study of holistic images and qualitative techniques used to explore them, remain relatively narrowly focussed and in many instances, quite unsophisticated, despite the fact that several techniques exist outside of tourism that could be applied. In particular, 'projective' techniques have been employed by psychologists and marketers to explore equally complex constructs such as identity and self, perceptions of others and most importantly for this study; brand personality and brand image.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the application of projective techniques to analyse the holistic components of destination image. This thesis argues that projective techniques could provide a useful insight into holistic images of destinations. Projective techniques include a range of qualitative techniques where the subject is presented with stimuli and asked to discuss the object of study. This might include stimuli that are directly related to the object of study (e.g. sentence completion) or which, on the face of it, bear no relationship at all (e.g. photo-association). Projective techniques have been identified as a useful way to encourage participants to express their private feelings and, more importantly, their unconscious beliefs and perceptions about the object of study and they can therefore help uncover perspectives that might not have been immediately apparent to the respondent. A computer-aided design for the application of the technique is also introduced and some conclusions are drawn about its effectiveness. The projective techniques are then applied to analyse the destination image of Auckland, Queenstown and Timaru.

New Zealand resident's images and perceptions of Auckland, Queenstown and Timaru as a destination are insightful, with themes emerging from various aspects of destination image. Results conclude that both sentence completion and photo-association are useful methods for gaining an insight into the more holistic components of destination image, however some attribute based components were identifiable. A range of possibilities and recommendations for future research are

pertained from the research and include; to methodologically refine the photo-technique and sentence completion technique to specifically suit destination image studies or be used in other forms of research; to apply the research to other New Zealand/International destinations; to further investigate the viable use of other projective techniques being applied to tourism research and lastly developing a mixed method approach using projective techniques within the destination image context. As a result the implications of the research provide a new methodological approach for destination marketers to analyse the holistic components of destinations, which consequently will help marketers gain a better comprehensive picture of a destination and its image.