Image Formation and its Contribution to Tourism Development in Canada’s Northwest Territories: Past and Present.

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Abstract
Tourism research has traditionally focused on the demand side of tourist motivation and behavioural patterns to discover why tourists visit particular destinations. This thesis explored from a supply side perspective, how image and language are used by tourism suppliers/operators to promote destinations and how such images change over time in response to consumer demand.

The study focused on the representation of natural and cultural heritage in the region of Northwest Territories Canada. It compared visual and oral components of the region’s heritage, history, and early literature with contemporary travel literature. Interviews with tourism suppliers and tour operators revealed their motivation in using such components to promote their products. Literary representations of destinations motivate travellers to travel, however, the same representations evoke imagery that may not be confirmed by the actual travel experience. In order to examine tourists’ experiences, the related concepts of image and authenticity were studied. Any gap between imagery and experience may impact on the traveller’s sense of authenticity. It may be that a strong sense of authenticity in travel experience turns on ‘perceptions of possibility’ evoked by pre-travel image formation.

Image is a dynamic concept and it was hoped that by comparing historical and contemporary travel literature, patterns would emerge of how such changes have affected tourism development in NWT. It was discovered that unique auras of destination image formation have developed over time through creative use of language and imagery. Tourism suppliers use such imagery to differentiate product and invoke existential desire in the mind of the potential visitor.

The diversity of tourism products today means destinations must cater to a wider array of interests, constantly repackaging and re-imaging the products they offer. This study revealed that NWT tourism imagery has moved from promoting a natural heritage base to promoting a cultural heritage base. Matching the perceptions of tourists with the perceptions of travel providers leads to more effective consumer-centred marketing and confirms the important role images play in providing an authentic visitor experience.