

A MODEL OF DESTINATION IMAGE PROMOTION WITH A CASE STUDY OF NANJING, P. R. CHINA

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Abstract: Destination image has long been a popular research topic in tourism studies. However, methods used to integrate image in real marketing practice and evaluating the market performance in a systematic way are still puzzling to practitioners. A destination image promotion model is proposed in this paper as an effort to solve the problem. The roles of some major factors such as image identification, image communication vehicles, and image promotion tools, are discussed. In order to test the model's applicability, the city of Nanjing, China is used as a study case. Some observation and survey results on Nanjing's image promotion practices are introduced and analyzed, including data collected in a large-scale image measurement questionnaire survey conducted during the Fall of 2000.

Introduction

The unprecedented growth in the tourism industry during the last several decades has created major challenges in destination marketing (Li, 2001). More and more nations, regions, and cities are involved in tourism competition with the aim of benefiting from local tourism development. While tourists are glad to enjoy a myriad of destination choices, destination marketing organizations (DMOs) find it increasingly difficult to differentiate their destinations from neighboring or foreign competitors. Thus, establishing a unique identity, or image, becomes a major concern of not only the tourism scholars, but also the industry practitioners and destination marketers. In fact, the widely recognized importance of destination image has made it "one of the most pervasive topics in the tourism literature" (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991, p.10) (e.g., Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Bramwell & Rawding, 1996; Chen & Hsu, 2000; Chon, 1990; Crompton, 1979; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Gartner & Hunt, 1987; Li, 1999; Mackay & Fesenmaier, 1997; Morgan & Pritchard, 1998).

It is generally recognized that accurately assessing the destination image is of vital importance to a successful imaging strategy (Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001; Reilly, 1990; Walmsley & Young, 1998). Numerous research papers have been published on destination image measurement (e.g., Baloglu, 2001; Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001; Chen, 2001; Chen & Hsu, 2000; Chen & Kerstetter, 1999; Choi, Chan, & Wu, 1999; Coshall, 2000; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Embacher & Buttle, 1989; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Gartner, 1989; MacKay & Fesenmaier,

2000; Milman & Pizam, 1995; Oppermann, 1996; Reilly, 1990; Schneider & Sonmez, 1999). Although it is widely accepted that image is one of the most effective tools in tourist destination marketing, how to integrate image in real marketing practice, and how to evaluate the market performance in a systematic way are still puzzling issues, especially in developing countries like China. Therefore, in this paper, a destination image promotion model is proposed as an attempt to solve these problems.

Despite its importance and interest to scholars, destination image studies are still considered as atheoretical and lacking in conceptual frameworks (Baloglu, 1996; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). This is also reflected by its widely employed yet loose and subjective definitions. Almost every researcher has his/her own definition of image. In this paper, Crompton's (1979) definition is recommended, which is "The sum of beliefs, impressions, ideas, and perceptions that people hold of objects, behaviors, and events".

"Destination image promotion" is defined, in this paper, as a strategy to enhance a destination's competitive position through the identification and promotion of its image. Destination image promotion is an important strategy in place marketing and promotion.

Different Understandings of Destination Image

As noted, a variety of understandings exist over destination image. Figure 1 introduces five different perspectives to conceive destination image: one focus is on the functional aspect of image, and understanding it as "the presentation of functional attributes of a destination product". From "the pictorial and conceptual summary", "the sum of differentiated implication and association", to "an expression of a destination's individuality", it is steadily realized that destination image is far more than simply a slogan or some pictures. An image is a communication channel and a way of expression. We propose to consider image as "A perspective and methodology in destination management". Thus, image becomes a tool of destination management, and image promotion is an indispensable part of the destination marketing.

Destination Image Promotion

In their review on image studies between 1971 and 1999, Gallarza, Saura, and Garcia (2002) grouped most studies into eight topics, with image promotion categorized under the topic of "destination image management policies". Although the majority of researchers agree that image plays a significant role in destination marketing, only a handful of works can be found about the practical methods of marketing and promotion destination image (e.g., Bramwell & Rawding, 1996; Kotler, Heider, & Rein, 1993; Li, 1999; Morgan & Pritchard, 1998). Even fewer provide a framework to evaluate the promotion performance of destination tourism organization.

Kotler et al. (1993) pointed out that destination image marketing is one of the four place marketing strategies (the

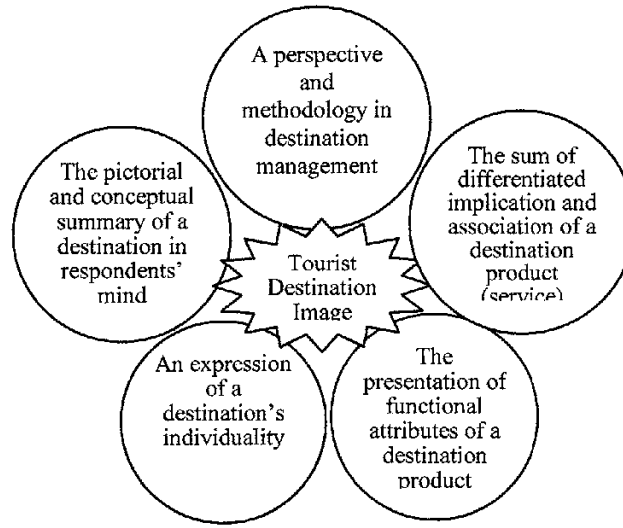


Fig. 1. Different understanding of destination image

other three are attraction marketing, infrastructure marketing, and people marketing). They further indicated that there are three image vehicles, which are slogan, theme, and positioning; visual symbols; and tourist events. Yang, Guo, and Wang (1999) put forward that a successful destination image marketing strategy is made up of three parts – image projection, image transmission (which is, in other words, image promotion), and image reception. And they designed a model of “destination image marketing process”. There are several studies on place marketing introducing major image promotion tools, such as traditional advertisements (Li, 1999), promotion materials (Briggs, 1997), public relations (Morgan & Pritchard, 1998), attending / hosting exhibitions, travel and tourism conventions (Ahmed, 1991), and the Internet (Marcussen, 1997; Wu, 2000). Most studies suggest that a major part of destinations’ marketing efforts should be directed to the creation and management of a positive image. These studies try to identify image strengths and weaknesses of different destinations. Some use specific places as study cases and design the imaging strategy for these destinations from a marketing perspective.

A Proposed Model

The entire image promotion process (Figure 2) is designed from the perspective of a destination tourism organization (DTO). It starts with two pilot steps: DTO internal assessment and destination image building and projection. An internal assessment of the tourism organization helps to identify who is responsible for the promotion process, with what responsibilities, and how the work is being done. Image building and projection is the establishment of a specific image of one destination. It makes the promotion of a destination image possible. Following the image promotion process is the feedback process. When image

information reaches the potential market, the audience will decide whether they like it or not. If favorable, there will follow a decision-making process, which may ultimately lead to a trip to the destination. On the contrary, if the image is considered as negative, the concerning information will be discarded. In either way, feedback will be directed to the DTO, and helps to improve future image building and projection.

The actual promotion process incorporates two parts as image identification and communication. Image identification, more widely known as image measurement, provides the basic knowledge about current image held by target markets. The use of “identification” is suggested here, rather than “measurement”, as the former tends to be taken in a flexible manner, while the later is more strictly and academically defined. With all the information collected about the destination image, the DTO could create a promotion plan, which bridges image identification and communication. Also it provides feedback for future image design. In image communication, tourism organizations send the appropriate image message to the target market(s). Effective image communication is actualized by selecting and using the right image vehicles and tools. Image vehicles make the abstract destination image identifiable and accessible, while promotion tools bring the image information to the tourists. Image promotion tools can be basically categorized into five kinds. Traditional advertisement are advertising tools such as TV, radio, printing and outdoor media. Promotion materials are advertisements distributed by tourism organizations, rather than paid media. It includes printings such as brochures, maps, posters, albums etc. With the development of modern technology, CD-ROMs, DVDs, slides, videotapes are also widely used. Public relations may be the most creative and effective method to promote

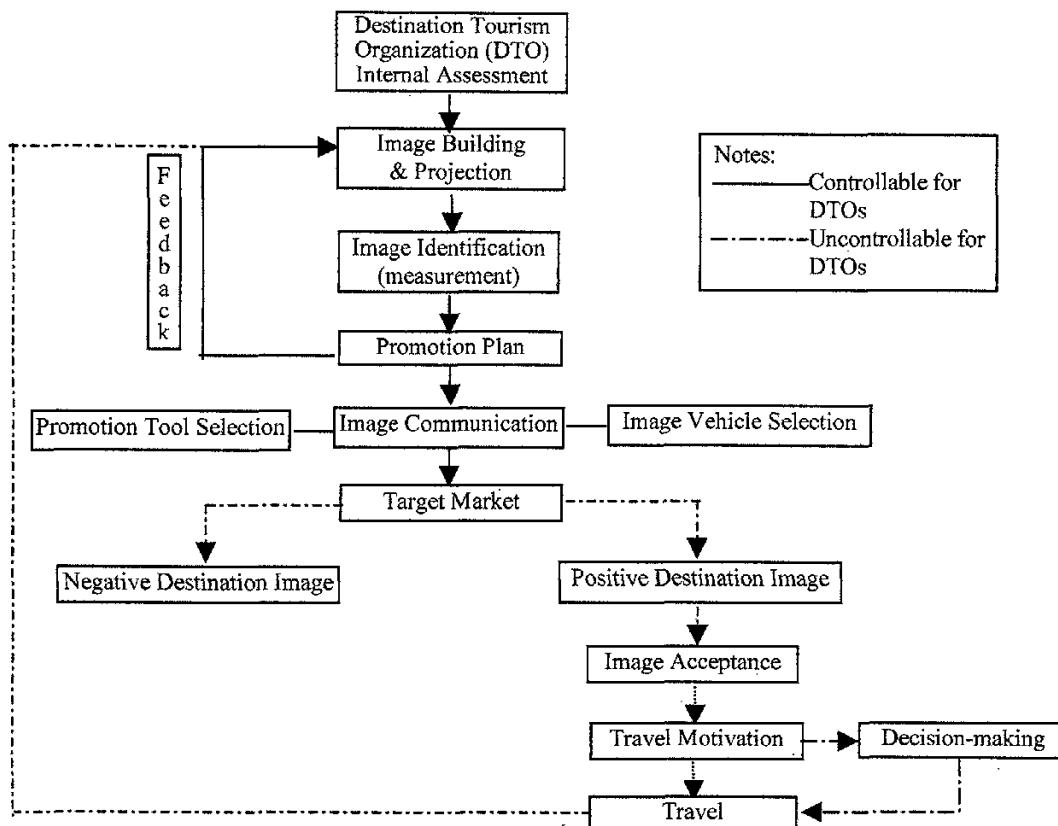


Fig. 2 Destination Image Promotion Model

destination image. Major strategies in destination public relations include hosting press conference, art or sports events, family trips, etc. Travel agents are the opinion leaders, who have the most influential power in tourists' travel decisions. Attending or hosting travel marts and conventions are good opportunities for DTOs to introduce their destination products to the agents. The Internet is a new promotion tool, which can reach the target market directly and efficiently, with a low cost. All these tools can be integrated into a systematic promotion strategy, which cooperates with the image vehicle in communicating destination image to the target market. This paper will focus on how image identification and communication are mutually affected in the image promotion practices of Nanjing.

The case city

In this project, Nanjing, a Chinese tourist city is chosen as our case destination. Nanjing is the capital of Jiangsu, one of the most prosperous provinces of the country. It is located at the eastern part of China, about 3 hours drive to Shanghai. It has a population of about 5.5 million, covering an area of nearly 6.6 thousand square kilometres. In history, Nanjing used to be the capital of 10 Chinese dynasties, and hence becomes one of China's most famous ancient

capitals. Nanjing is among the first group of Chinese cities open to foreign visitors. In 1999, Nanjing hosted a total of 379 thousand foreign tourists, and 13.4 million domestic tourists.

From Oct. 2000 to March 2001, a questionnaire survey on Nanjing's image was taken among foreign and domestic tourists. To sample foreign tourists, questionnaires were distributed to major local hotels and international travel services. 228 English-speaking tourists from Europe, North America, and Australia participated in the survey, with a response rate of 76%. 15,536 questionnaires were collected from domestic tourists (including 5,641 local citizens) at Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Mausoleum during Oct 1-6, 2000. Tourists filled in the questionnaires with the help of research staff, and everyone received a small gift as an incentive. This contributed to a 100 percent response rate. The questionnaires investigate Nanjing's image through open-ended questions about Nanjing's representative objects, and frequent descriptors. Tables 1 & 2 provide a summary of the responses to these inquiries. Other questions include the respondents' communication channels of the image information, Nanjing's city grading and respondents' own demographic characteristics.

Table 1. Nanjing's Representative Objects

Nanjing's Representative Objects (foreign tourists)	(domestic tourists)
Yangtze River Bridge, Yangtze River, Pearl, Dr. Sun Yatsen's Mausoleum, Citizens, Dr. Sun Yat-sen, Trees, Nanjing Museum, Hotels, Zhonghua Gate Citadel, Universities and schools, City Wall, Plum Blossom Festival, Scenery	Dr. Sun Yatsen's Mausoleum, Rain Flower Stone, Salty Duck, Confucius Temple, Xuanwu Lake, Rain Flower Terrace, The Presidential Palace, Nanjing Pressed Duck, Yangtze River Bridge, "Nanjing Massacre" Memorial Hall, Xinjiekou (the downtown area), Ming Tomb of Emperor Hongwu

Table 2. Frequent Descriptors about Nanjing

Frequent descriptors (foreign tourists)	(domestic tourists)
Friendly (12.28%), Clean(7.02%), History(7.02%), Beautiful(7.02%), Modern (5.26%), Combination of history and modernization, Development, Spacious, Mature	Ancient capital (68.83%), Green(64.01%), Clean(57.61%), Beautiful (0.84%), Crowded (0.75%), Prosperous, Convenient, Good environment, Modern, Lively

According to the survey, both domestic and foreign tourists agree that tourist attractions occupy a majority of the representative objects to Nanjing's image, although their opinions vary in which one are most representative. Dr. Sun Yatsen's Mausoleum and Yangtze River Bridge are the only overlapped parts in their answers. As for the top descriptors of Nanjing by domestic tourists, around 60% of respondents use "ancient", "green" and "clean" to describe this city, which is a significantly high percentage for so large a sample size. Meanwhile, there is a surprisingly sharp decline between the top three answers and other descriptors. In contrast, the descriptors used by foreign tourists tend to be more diversely and even distributed.

Butler's "destination life cycle" theory (1980) can help to explain the difference. As a tourist destination, Nanjing's image is in a different phase of life cycle in domestic and international market. A highly agreed usage of descriptors implies that a uniform image (featured by "ancient capital", "green", and "clean") has already been established in domestic tourists' mind (i.e., in "Consolidation" or "Stagnation" period). However, for most foreign tourists, Nanjing is a new and fairly unknown tourist destination (i.e., in "Involvement" or "Development" period). Its image is still obscure with a lack of uniqueness to other Chinese cities.

Nanjing Municipal Tourism Bureau is the local governmental authority responsible for city image promotion. Its Market Development Department supervises the actual marketing practices. It is observed that Nanjing's image communication efforts are trying to be consistent with the above survey results, although not in a purposeful manner. The city has achieved some successes in the use of image vehicles, i.e., tourist events, slogan, theme, and positioning, and visual symbols. Some city tourist events have built a nation-wide reputation, such as the International Plum Blossom Festival. The festival is a celebration of the coming of spring and the blooming of plum blossoms, which is the city flower. It has been successfully held annually since 1996, boasting an

increasing scale and growing fame. The event has done a good job in integrating the city image and tourist resources. However, it is yet to be incorporated into the city image promotion strategy, and needs to demonstrate a more direct connection with Nanjing's city image. In addition, its over-reliance on government sponsorship and a lack of economic concern, constrain itself from further development.

Slogan, theme, and positioning are a weak point of Nanjing's image strategy. It is surprising to find that the city doesn't have a fixed official slogan as yet. In the past several years, a few slogans were used either for annual city promotion or major events. However, most are changed without even obtaining market feedback. The problem is partly the result of a debate on the cultural and historic feature (theme) of Nanjing. In the 10th Five Year Plan of Nanjing Tourism Industry (2001-2005), a new slogan as "Nanjing: City of Culture, City of Green ('Lvsegudu, Wenhuazhicheng' in Chinese)" was proposed. Although it is far from the end point of the search for a city slogan, this slogan is undoubtedly a constructive trial to combine the main features of the city. Regretfully, the slogan hasn't an official English translation (the current one is done by authors), which is rare for a city trying to involve itself in international tourism competition.

Visual symbols can be understood as a system of image visual factors, such as destination logo, mascot, advertisement, welcome center, vehicle and so on (Li, 1999). A spatial structure of Nanjing's visual image (Table 3) shows that some areas directly influencing tourists' image are just the representative objects of the city. However, few areas successfully impress the tourists with the right image information the city wants to promote. More image messages should be incorporated in the future planning of these areas, such as adding ancient Chinese style in future architectural design, stop the erosion of modern facilities to the city green lands, and building a welcome center or tourism map board. Details like the dress and language of the staff shall also be improved in

Table 3. Spatial Structure of Nanjing's Visual Image

First Impression Area: (entrance)	Lukou Airport, Railway Station, Nanjing Port, Gateway areas of tourist attractions, hotel building
Last Impression Area: Same as above	(exit)
"Corona Effect" Area: (impressive)	Xinjiekou, Dr. Sun Yatsen's Mausoleum, Confucius Temple, Hunan Road
Landmark Area: (unique)	Dr. Sun Yatsen's Mausoleum, Confucius Temple

order to create an atmosphere connected with Nanjing's "ancient, green and clean" image.

In the city's unsophisticated use of promotion tools, the image message selection has been proved to be highly related with promotion effectiveness. In this regard, the "standard snapshots" of Nanjing can be a good example of how to design pictorial image messages in advertisements. The most widely used pictures of Nanjing in its promotion materials are about Confucius's Temple, Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Mausoleum, the Ming Tomb of Emperor Hongwu, and Xuanwu Lake, all of which are famous tourist attractions of the city. These pictures successfully combine the features of "ancient", "green" and "clean", as well as the representative objects themselves. All these successfully present the uniqueness of the city. In some other materials trying to focus on the city's hospitality services or shopping convenience as a modern metropolis, foreign managed hotels and shopping centers were shown. But the city finds this can hardly be a successful promotion theme, as they conflict with Nanjing's impression in tourists' mind.

Conclusion

While work on measuring and promoting Nanjing's image is still underway, some conclusions can be reached from the above observations. These include:

1. Tourist destinations in development period (Like Nanjing in international market) should focus their marketing efforts on image promotion., these destinations should first establish a unique image, making itself differentiate from other destinations. Then, most promotion work should centered on communicating the image to the target market.
2. Image identification plays a vital role in successful destination image promotion. It is necessary to investigate how tourists hold destinations in mind. Practically, the image identification process will figure out the most representative objects and descriptors of the destination, which has the most marketing potential.
3. Image vehicles and promotion tool strategies should be consistent with established positive images. Potential tourists build their images from different information resources. When reading promotion materials, or taking a trip, they will compare their image to what they actually see. They expect to find something already in mind. If so, the image will be enhanced. In Nanjing's case, promoting

the "ancient", "green" and "clean" features will obviously be more effective than promoting the city as a "shopping paradise".

4. Image promotion strategy should vary in different market segmentation. Different markets may possess different images on a single destination. This may be based on cultural or social difference. Also, the image's life cycle period could also contribute to these differences. When Nanjing promotes and other destinations promote their images, strategie should differentiate between domestic and international markets.

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