



Contemporary Research on Tourism Destination Images

Tourism has evolved as one of the most important sectors in the global economy (Ferreira, Rial and Varela, 2009) in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) contribution, employment generation etc. Though it has been sailing as a paramount sector, its sustainable growth was questioned at various testing moments such as the global recession in 2009 and the pandemic in 2020. Economic sustainability could be achieved by leveraging on the destination image, as it emerges to be the most important aspect of a tourist destination and also the deciding factor for the success and failure of tourism business management. Hence, the destination image being the decisive factor needs to be researched thoroughly using various developmental and innovation strategies. The analysis could be supported by multivariate techniques and methodologies in order to identify the important characteristics of the destination image.

Tourism is closely associated with experiential consumption and this could be pervaded completely through imagery process (MacInnis & Price, 1987). Marketers and researchers also showed great interest in the concept of destination image as it directly linked with decision-making and the sales of tourism products and services. *The current issue of Atna presents “Contemporary Research on Tourism Destination Images” contributed by academicians and researchers on various aspects of destination images by providing many insightful outcomes such as identifying Asian destinations’ quality, recovery strategies of destinations, factors influencing attractiveness of a destination, social media destination marketing etc.* Subsequently, tourism destinations, being the cornerstone of the tourism sector, needs to be given special attention for sustenance amidst a multifaceted pool of challenges and difficulties.

Destination image is a collaboration of impressions, imagination, knowledge and emotional thoughts possessed by people towards a particular place. It is a blueprint or perception of a place an individual perceives in the mind (Lawson & Baud Bovy, 1977). Destination image comprises multiple components such as

cognitive, affective, and conative elements (Gartner, 1994). Images play a vital role in various aspects of cognitive and emotional decision in choosing a destination. The destination image influences directly or indirectly the tourist's travel decision-making in visiting destinations (Mayo, 1973). It is also associated with one's cognition, behavioral attitude, experiences, nostalgic memories, and satisfaction level of that particular destination. Destination images emerge as a paramount element for a tourist destination such as influencing potential tourists (Crompton, 1979), enhancing the satisfaction level of their experiences (Chon, 1992) and creates a strong impact on the tourists to revisit the tourism destination (Zeithaml et al., 1996)

The destination image could be measured by a range of factors such as attractive elements, information, resources, experiences, etc. Information plays a vital role in upgrading or degrading the image of a destination. The information from DMOs, websites, UGC and other reliable sources are used for analyzing the image of the destination. However, studies have identified that there exist dissimilarities among the sources (Choi et al., 2007). Destination information turns out to be dynamic when compared with various online sources (Tang & Jang, 2009). Social media marketing beats conventional marketing strategies. The user generated content of a tourism destination gets more credibility than other sources and eventually influences the image of tourism destinations.

Destination attractiveness influences the destination image and they are categorized into scenery, accessibility, amenities and locals (Elbaz et al., 2021). The experiences created at the destination, the availability of amenities, the accessibility features emerge to be qualifying factors of destination image and hence contributes to destination attractiveness. The destination attractiveness has two basic elements namely demand and supply. The tourist market turns out to be the focal point of demand factor while the tourist destination arises to be the focal point of supply factor (Hallman, 2015).

A plethora of previous works have endorsed that a stronger destination image would make a destination stand ahead of its peer competitors (Lim & O' Cass, 2001). Thus, a tourism destination with a stronger optimistic image has a better chance of getting chosen

over others. (Bigné, Sánchez & Sánchez, 2001; Sönmez & Sirakaya , 2002).

The current issue of Atna: Journal of Tourism Studies presents the state-of-the-art research works on tourism destination images and how it influences travel decision making, customer satisfaction, revisit intention of a destination and much more.

Khaki et al. assesses the impact of destination image and the mediating role of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) in choosing a tourist destination. The study tried to draw a relationship between the destination image and the decision-making process of choosing a destination and analyzed the same through the mediating role of 'electronic' word of mouth. The Kashmir valley was studied to test the theory and the outcome was sustained with the help of various statistical tools. The authors brought a strong association between traveler's perception towards a destination image and the decision in visiting that destination.

Venkat et al. conducted a case study on the significance and unique features of accessible tourism with reference to the pilgrims visiting the pilgrim destinations of Andhra Pradesh. Pilgrimage tourism emerges to be an important segment in tourism as it encourages high foreign exchange earnings, employment opportunities, and additional income flow within the country. The authors identified various prime behavioral factors of accessible tourism and examined their impacts against the pilgrimage tourism satisfaction. The main objective of the study was to provide tourism products equally for all irrespective of the physical inability or any other concerns. The authors highlighted the challenges and devised the guidelines in establishing a proactive and accessible pilgrimage destination.

Raj et al. conducted a systematic literature network analysis to highlight the existing research gaps between the hospitality education and industrial practice. The authors categorized the various themes and evolving research in the hospitality industry and explained how they are impacting the field as a whole. The study aims to bring down the significance of industry-academic collaboration which constitutes industrial development to a greater extent.

Mhango & Dias did a systematic literature review on the quality attributes of the Asian destinations. They examined the quality of Asian tourism destinations and also focused on the recovery strategies developed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The study raises an alarming situation in revamping the destination management practices and guidelines with respect to the post pandemic scenario. The destination management and performance in the post-pandemic scenario was examined and strategies were highlighted to cope up with the situation.

Roy et al. carried out a review study on the attributes of destination attractiveness and examined the transformative behavior with respect to the post-pandemic scenario. The review identified a major shift in the characteristics of the attractive elements of a tourism destination. The study emphasized the significance of the attractiveness of a destination and their attributes contributing to the massive growth of the tourism sector. The research was aimed to analyze the current scenario and provide recommendations and useful insights to the stakeholders, the policy makers and marketers to restart tourism with a wonderful comeback after the pandemic.

Kumar et al. conducted a study on the dining service of the National Highway 44 (NH44) restaurants to analyze the major factors impacting customer satisfaction. Service quality being one of the prime focuses of the restaurant was studied extensively along the influential factors which contribute to the customer satisfaction. The authors examined various literature works and service models to provide useful insights to the service holders in order to leverage the service quality and customer satisfaction of the national highway restaurants. The study also recommends various steps to create wonderful dining experiences for the customers.

Sibi & Unnikrishnan executed a comparative study on the destination image which are projected by Destination Management Organizations (DMO) and perceived through User Generated Contents (UGC). Nowadays, travelers need authentic information before, after and during the trip that are provided by source providers such as websites, DMOs, word of mouth, UGCs etc. This information in turn influences the travel decisions of the travelers. The authors have understood the credibility of the sources and conducted a comparative content analysis between DMO and UGC

to understand the disparity and unity created in the mind of the tourists with respect to Kerala's tourism destinations. The outcome of the study offers strong social media marketing strategies to tourism stakeholders to uplift the destination image of tourism destinations of Kerala.

In conclusion, I welcome the readers to have a serious read of works included in this issue since it highlights valuable findings on tourism destinations. I hope that the summary of their works would instigate the readers to go through their articles and help to attain intriguing insights from their wonderful contributions. Their works indeed provides a wide perspective on tourism destination images, their role in deciding the success and failure rate of a tourism destination, and the strategies to revamp the tourism destinations in the post-pandemic era.

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