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Filareti Kotsi

Steven Pike

Vesselina Tossan

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ABSTRACT

In the first forty years of destination marketing literature there has been little research published in relation to stopover destination image. While destination image represents an important and popular research stream, most studies to date have not been context-specific. That is to say the image of a destination has commonly been measured without reference to the travel situation. The aim of this research was to identify attributes of destinations deemed salient to consumers when considering a stopover during long haul travel. Underpinned by Personal Construct Theory, the study used the Repertory Test in personal interviews with French consumers. The findings are then compared to attributes elicited from Australian consumers to identify any differences in attribute salience between these northern hemisphere and southern hemisphere travellers. The commonality of stopover destination attribute salience between the two samples will enable the development of a questionnaire to measure stopover destination image. A number of stopover destination attributes were identified that have not been commonly used in generic destination image studies. The study highlights the value of engaging with the consumer in the questionnaire design stage, and goes some way to support the proposition that due to the short stay nature of stopovers during long haul travel destination attribute salience might differ to that for other travel situations.
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KEY WORDS

Destination image; Stopovers; Personal Construct Theory; Repertory Test; travel context; travel situation; long haul travel

INTRODUCTION

Long haul air travel is a major component of international passenger movements, accounting for an estimated 17% of global international visitor arrivals in 2014 according to a recent ITB world travel trends report (see IPK International, 2015). Of interest in this project is long haul air travel between Europe and Australasia, and due to resources the focus of this study is narrowed to outbound travel from France. In the 20-year period between 1995 and 2014 the number of international departures by the French in a calendar year increased by 50% from 18.7 million in 1995 to 28.2 million in 2014 (World Bank, 2016). France is an important market for long haul destinations in the southern hemisphere. In Australia, for example, during the year ended 31 July 2016 there were just over 120,000 French visitor arrivals, ranking France as the 15th largest source of visitors (see Tourism Australia, 2016). In New Zealand, France was ranked 13th in terms of visitor numbers for the year ended August 2016, with 36,360 arrivals.

A major research project by Tourism Australia (2014) into how international consumers perceive Australia found while Australia was then the 22nd most visited country by French nationals in 2012, it was the third most preferred long haul destination for future travel, behind Canada and the USA. However, key obstacles preventing French consumers from planning a visit to Australia were identified as: expensive airfares, high cost of living expenses, and long flight time. Flying time between Europe and Australia ranges upwards from 20+ hours and necessitates transiting one or more countries en route. Depending on the specific airfare rules, such transits enable passengers to consider a stopover in each direction of at least one night to break the long journey.

The traditional stopover destinations between France and Australasia are in the eastern hemisphere. France provides the second highest number of European visitors to Hong Kong. (Hong Kong Tourism Board, 2016), and the third highest number of European visitors to Singapore (Singapore Tourism Board, 2016). The average length of stay for international visitors to Hong Kong is four nights (Hong Kong Tourist Board, 2015) and in Singapore is three days (Singapore Tourism Board, 2014), which highlights the transient nature of visitation to the two strategically placed destinations. This main route from Europe to Australasia via the eastern hemisphere has been traditionally known as the *Kangaroo route*. The first flight on this route from Brisbane to London by Qantas was in 1935 and featured at least 10 stopovers, including Paris (Sutton, 2016). Qantas' first use of the term, which has

been trade-marked by the airline, was the 1947 launch of a Sydney to London flight, where the main overnight stopover became Singapore. In recent years a number of new stopover destinations for long haul travel between Europe and Australasia have emerged in competition to Singapore and Hong Kong, most noticeably Dubai and Abu Dhabi through the growth of United Arab Emirates carriers Etihad and Emirates. *Traveller* magazine recently described the 2013 alliance between Qantas and Emirates as "one of Australian travel's biggest shakeups", opening up Dubai as a new stopover destination in competition to Singapore (Traveller.com, 2013). Major stopover options in the eastern hemisphere now include: Singapore, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Tokyo, Dubai, and Abu Dhabi. Key stopover destinations when travelling via the longer western hemisphere route include New York and Los Angeles.

In general there has been a lack of published research into the phenomenon of stopovers during long haul travel. There is a lack of an accepted definition of what constitutes a stopover, and a lack of insights into stopover preferences and consumer behaviour. Given the increasing range of stopover destinations available to consumers worldwide, one important research gap is understanding what features of a destination appeal for a stopover, during long haul travel, of at least one night. While the topic of destination image has been one of the most popular in the first 40 years of destination marketing literature (Pike & Page, 2014), there has been little published in the context of stopover destinations. The aim of this study was to identify those attributes of stopover destinations deemed salient to French consumers when considering long haul travel to Australasia, and to compare these to the findings from a similar study in Australia; to facilitate the development of a context-specific questionnaire to measure stopover destination image.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Destination image

Destination image was one of the first topics to be published in the destination marketing academic literature (see for example, Mayo 1973, Matejka 1973, Gearing, Swart & Var 1974), and has since been established as one of the pillars of destination marketing research (Pike & Page, 2014). This sustained academic interest supports Hunt's (1975) assertion that perceptions of destinations by travellers are so important in the destination selection process

they can affect the viability of the destination. In other words, destination image is as important as tangible destination features. This is based on the marketing axiom that *perception is reality*, meaning what an individual believes to be true will influence their actions (see Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p. 572 in Patton 2002).

Major reviews of the destination image literature have been undertaken by Chon (1990), Gallarza et. al. (2002), Pike (2002, 2007), Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil (2007), Stepchenkova and Mills (2010), Zhang, Fu, Cai and Lu (2014), and Josiassen, Assaf, Wook and Kock (2015). A recurring theme in these reviews is acknowledgement the majority of studies adopt a quantitative approach using questionnaires with destination attribute rating scales. However, there has been a noticeable lack of attention towards the influence of travel context on destination image. That is, many destination image studies have been undertaken without a specific travel situation in mind. The concern here is the proposition that an individual might consider different destination attributes for different travel situations (see Barich & Kotler 1991, Crompton 1992). Destination attractiveness is assumed to vary according to the travel context. Therefore, if attribute importance differs between travel situations, such as between a family summer holiday, a weekend short break, and a honeymoon for example, the destination image questionnaire should be tailored to reflect this. Examples of context-specific destination image studies have included conventions (Chacko & Fenich 2000), short breaks (McLennan 1998), skiing (Hudson & Shephard (1998), winter longstay (Crompton, Fakeye & Lue (1992), and spring breaks (Dillon, Domzal & Madden, 1986) for example. However, the majority of the hundreds destination image studies to date have been undertaken without advising participants to think of a given travel situation. To date there has been a lack of attention towards the context of stopover destination image, and this remains an important gap in the destination marketing literature. Given the short stay nature of stopovers during long haul travel, it is proposed that destination attribute salience might differ to that for other travel situations.

Long haul travel and stopovers
While the preferences of long haul travellers can differ to those for shorter trips (see McKercher & Lew 2003, McKercher, Chan, & Lam 2008, Yan 2011, Ho & McKercher 2012), there is a lack of a widely accepted definition of long haul travel (Bianchi, Pike & Lings, 2014). Long haul air trips have been defined by distance, such as 3,700 kilometres (see

Smith & Rodger, 2009) and also by flying time, which has ranged between four and eight hours (see Boerjan 1995, Medlik 1996, Ferrari, Chevallier, Chapelier, & Baudouy 1999, Scur, Machin, Bailey-King, Mackie, McDonald & Smith, 2001). By both types of measures, flying from Europe to Australasia is representative of long haul travel.

There is also no accepted definition of the term *stopover* in the tourism literature. The International Air Transport Association has defined a stopover as being at least 24 hours at an intermediary port (see Beaver, 2005). A stop lasting less than 24 hours is generally regarded as an airport transit or layover. For the purpose of this study we define a stopover as a stay of between one and four nights, while en route to an onward long haul destination. This is also the length of stay for short break holidays.

Destination attribute salience

The majority of destination image studies have used a questionnaire with Likert-type rating scales for a battery of cognitive attributes (destination features). However, despite over 40 years of research in this field there is not yet an accepted destination image scale index. The aim should be to present survey participants with a battery of attributes that are likely to be *salient*, and therefore relevant, for a given travel situation, in their destination decision process. While there is likely to be a large range of attributes that will be important to consumers, many of these are not considered in decision making and are therefore not salient during decision making (see Myers & Alpert 1968, Mayo & Jarvis 1981). Salience concerns the order in which the mind considers different attributes in decision making, and the most salient of important attributes will be those that are top of mind during travel planning. While there will be a commonality of salience of some destination attributes across different travel situations, the lack of research attention to stopover destination image means the literature cannot necessarily be relied on as a source for attribute selection for a stopover destination image questionnaire. As mentioned, the vast majority of destination image studies have not specified a travel situation to survey participants. While the wealth of literature is a valuable resource for identifying important destination image attributes, what is also required is a qualitative method to engage with consumers to identify features deemed salient when considering a stopover during long haul travel.

Personal Construct Theory and the Repertory Test

Personal Construct Theory (Kelly, 1955) adopts the perspective of individuals as being akin to scientists, who go through life making predictions about outcomes of choice options for decision making. We all have a repertoire on constructs that we continually use and test and alter, to enhance our predictive efforts. Our individual construct system is the only one we use to guide our behaviour (Jankowicz, 1987). Constructs represent the basis on which we differentiate the choice options in any given decision, and are continuously developed and refined based on experience over a lifetime. Experience consists of a cycle of five phases: anticipation, investment, encounter, confirmation or disconfirmation, and revision (Kelly, 1970). Our construct systems are uniquely individual, based on our own experiences, and consist of a finite number of dichotomous choices (eg good versus bad), where we have a choice between the two poles, in favour of the alternative that best meets our anticipation of an event. Thus our future travel goals are likely to be based on previous experiences (Botteril & Crompton, 1996). Our individuality does not rule out a commonality of similar interpretations of experiences with other individuals, such as our perceptions of destinations. Kelly (1955) devised the Repertory Test as a technique for eliciting an individual's repertoire of personal constructs that are *salient* for a given situation. This construct elicitation enables us to understand the basis by which individuals differentiate a category of objects; in this case salient attributes of stopover destinations. The use of the Repertory Test with a group of individuals enables the identification of common constructs, the aim of which in this project are salient attributes of stopover destinations.

The Repertory Test is a rare example of a research technique designed specifically to operationalise a theory, is indicative of strong face validity. While Kelly designed the technique for use in his field of clinical psychology, marketing researchers were the first business sector to apply it (Stewart & Stewart, 1981). A key appeal in marketing research is the structured nature of the technique in eliciting salient attributes in the language of the consumer. The Repertory Test has been applied in a relatively small number of destination image studies, including the following travel contexts: seaside resorts (Riley & Palmer, 1975), domestic destinations (Walmsley & Jenkins, 1993), short break destinations (Pike, 2003), business destinations (Hankinson, 2005), and historical districts (Naoi, Yamada, Iijima & Kumazawa, 2011). Recently, the technique was applied by the authors in an investigation of Australian consumers' stopover destination attribute salience, and so a second aim of this

current study is to compare and contrast the findings between the French and Australian samples.

METHOD

Qualitative research requires information-rich participants, and so it was important to recruit French consumers who had previously travelled internationally by air, and/or intended to do so in the near future. A convenience sample frame of staff, students, and their friends, at a tertiary educational institute in Paris was used. An invitation to participate in the study was distributed by internal email in November 2016 by one of the research team. A total of 18 interviews were held in Paris during December 2016. The convenience sample consisted of a mix of university management, administration staff, academic staff, students, friends of staff, and consisted of 10 females and 8 males. Of these, 10 were aged under 45 years and 8 were over 45. None of the participants were actively involved in researching or studying tourism. All had previously travelled long haul internationally by air and intended to do so again within the next five years. In terms of the sample size, the aim with qualitative methods is keep interviewing new participants until a point of data saturation is reached, where the addition of any new participants would fail to elicit new data that had not been mentioned in previous interviews. As with previous applications of the technique by one of the researchers, data saturation was becoming apparent after the first 8-10 interviews. Apart from a few idiosyncratic responses, the final participants were repeating key themes elicited from earlier interviews. The sample size and characteristics were similar to the Australian study.

A construct is "a way in which things are construed as being alike and yet different from others" (Kelly, 1955, p. 105). To elicit constructs, Kelly used triad sorts of three elements at a time. In this way the elements, in this case destination names, were presented to participants in sequential sets of three individually numbered white cards. The pool of elements should broadly represent the realistic choice set, and so nine elements were supplied by the researchers: 1) Abu Dhabi, 2) Bangkok, 3) Dubai, 4) Hong Kong, 5) Kuala Lumpur, 6) Los Angeles, 7) New York, 8) Singapore, and 9) Tokyo.

All interviews took place on campus and all but two of the interviews were conducted in English. For one participant, two interviewers used a mix of English and French. For each interview a practise example using automobile brand names was used to familiarise

participants with the technique, following Embacher and Buttle (1989). A balanced incomplete block design, developed by Burton and Nerlove (1976, p. 252-253) was used to reduce the number of possible triad combinations from 84 to a more manageable 24:

3,7,2   4,8,2,   5,9,2   6,1,2   4,5,1   3,5,6   4,6,7   5,7,8   6,8,9   7,9,1   3,8,1   3,4,9

3,4,5   3,6,9   3,8,2   3,7,1   6,7,8   4,7,2   4,6,1   4,8,9   9,1,2   5,8,1   5,7,9   5,6,2

The structured nature of the Repertory Test procedure necessitates the same question being asked, upon the presentation of each triad to the participant: "When thinking about a stopover of at least one night, when travelling to Australasia….in what *important* way are two of the destinations alike, but different to the third"? Participants were assured that it did not matter if they had not visited any particular destination, as of interest was their perceptions. They were also advised that the answers given could not be repeated when presented with other triads, and so the interview would terminate when they could think of no new similarity/difference statements. When each interview reached this stage, participants were asked if there were any other features of stopover destinations that were important but had not been mentioned. Kelly designed the Repertory Test to elicited similarity/difference statements that reflected negative/positive semantic poles. This list would then be presented back to the participant in the form of semantic differential scales, to develop a Repertory Grid. However, it has been common for marketing researchers to simply record the positive pole of the similarity/difference statement when seeking to elicit items for use in Likert-type scales. In this case the aim was to identify cognitive attributes, and so if a participant mentioned a benefit (eg relaxing), the laddering technique was used by asking the participant to explain what was it about the destination that made it relaxing (eg good beaches). When negative similarity/difference statements were made, the positive pole was recorded.

FINDINGS

The mean interview time was 16 minutes. A total of 238 similarity/difference statements were elicited from the 18 participants, giving a mean of 13 per interview. The mean number of triads used per interview was 7, with the most used by any participant being 19. This highlights the value of the no-repeat rule. The elicited statements were recorded on a spreadsheet. Interpreting the data involved grouping the statements into themes based on common wording. For example, responses such as 'More to see and do that is different',

'Haven't been there yet, so new experiences' and 'Can see things we don't have at home' were grouped by a simple cut and paste method into the theme 'New experiences'. In this way the total 238 statements elicited from participants were reduced to 20 themes that had been mentioned by at least five of the 18 participants. The 20 themes are listed in Table 1, where it can be seen that the most common theme was 'Interesting culture', which was elicited by 15 of the 18 participants. The reliability of this process was verified by two co-researchers who were asked to follow Guba's (1978) guidelines, where themes should feature internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. Due to the simplicity of responses elicited by the Repertory Test with one researcher's data can be interpreted quickly by another as "there is very little waffle" (Stewart and Stewart 1981, p. 27).

Table 1 – Stopover destination attribute themes

French sample	Rank	n
Interesting culture	1	15
Lots to see and do	2	14
Attractive city	3	13
New experiences	4	11
Safe	4	11
Historic places	4	11
Friendly people	4	11
Easy to get around	8	10
Good food	8	10
Good weather	10	9
Good accommodation	11	8
English spoken	12	7
Not expensive	12	7
Good flight options	12	7
Outdoor activities	12	7
All people treated with respect	17	6
Good airport	18	5
Good beaches	18	5
Good shopping	18	5
Interesting architecture	18	5

In Table 2 these 20 themes are compared to the 21 that elicited from Australian consumers in an identical process, and also with key themes from the general destination image literature

that were summarized from an extensive literature review by Pike (2003). Due to the scale of the destination image literature there has not been a more comprehensive classification of key attribute themes since then. As can be seen there are more similarities than differences between the Paris and Brisbane samples in the context of stopover destination image. There were 17 common themes. However, there were more differences between the two samples and the wider destination image literature.

In terms of differences between the two samples, there were three attributes elicited from the Paris participants that were not salient in the Brisbane study: 'attractive city', 'outdoor activities' and 'good beaches'. Four attributes from the Brisbane study were not salient to at least five participants in the Paris sample: 'entertainment and nightlife', 'big city', 'familiar to me' and 'clean'. It is suggested these are a function of the environment in which the participants reside. Paris is a much more densely populated city than the sprawling Brisbane, with a number of French participants commenting on the need to escape to places that are less congested and don't seem like another urban jungle. The urban congestion, along with the temperate climate accounting for an interest in outdoor activities and beaches. Residents of sub-tropical Brisbane, by comparison, are spoilt by choice of beaches and outdoor activities within a short drive, all year round.

Table 2 – Comparison of key themes

French sample	Rank	n	Australian sample	Rank	n	Rank in destination image literature
Interesting culture	1	15	Interesting culture	1	16	2
Lots to see and do	2	14	Lots to see and do	6	13	8
Attractive city	3	13	-			-
New experiences	4	11	New experience	11	9	-
Safe	4	11	Safe	19	7	4
Historic places	4	11	Historic sites	16	8	14
Friendly people	4	11	Friendly people	11	9	3
Easy to get around	8	10	Easy to get around	3	14	11
Good food	8	10	Great food	3	14	7
Good weather	10	9	Pleasant climate	20	6	6
Good accommodation	11	8	Suitable accommodation	9	11	13

English spoken	12	7	English spoken	9	11	-
Not expensive	12	7	Not expensive	21	5	5
Good flight options	12	7	Comfortable flight	2	15	-
Outdoor activities	12	7	-	-	3	-
All people treated with respect	17	6	Women are treated with respect	11	9	-
Good airport	18	5	Nice airport	16	8	-
Good beaches	18	5	-	-	1	17
Good shopping	18	5	Great shopping	8	12	12
Interesting architecture	18	5	Interesting architecture	11	9	-
	-	4	Entertainment and nightlife	3	14	10
	-	2	Big city	13	13	-
	-	1	Familiar to me	11	9	-
	-	2	Clean	16	8	-
	-	3	Nature/scenery	-	0	1
	-	1	Infrastructure	-	2	9
	-	1	Adventure activities	-	1	15
	-	1	Water sports	-	0	16
	-	0	Sports activities	-	0	18
	-	0	Snow sports	-	0	19

With regard to the differences between the two samples with the wider destination image literature, there were five attributes from the wider destination image literature that were not salient to the Paris and Brisbane samples: 'nature/scenery', 'infrastructure', 'adventure activities', 'water sports', 'sports activities', and 'snow sports'. In particular, it is interesting the most popular attribute, 'nature/scenery' in the wider destination image literature was not a commonly elicited theme in either of the Paris or Brisbane samples. These differences are perhaps not surprising, given the short term nature of a stopover, in relation to other travel situations where these attributes would have broader appeal. This highlights both the importance of bringing the consumer into the destination image questionnaire design stage, and the consideration of the travel situation. As discussed, the majority of published destination image studies have i) selected the list of attributes from previous studies in the literature without engaging with consumers in a qualitative stage, and ii) have not specified a particular travel situation.

CONCLUSION

Destination image has consistently been the most popular topic within the destination marketing literature since the field commenced in the early 1970s. This line of research has been underpinned by the proposition that an individual's perceptions of a destination will be more influential than actual tangible features of the place; based on the marketing axiom that *perception is reality*. Most studies of destination image have used a questionnaire with rating scales of a battery of cognitive destination attributes. The majority of these have not asked the participants to rate the destination(s) across the battery of attributes with a specific travel situation in mind. Furthermore, many studies have selected the attribute list from previous studies in the literature without any qualitative stage engaging consumers.

The main aim of this study was to identify attributes of destinations deemed salient to French consumers in the context of a stopover during long haul travel. The second aim was to compare the findings with those from an identical investigation of Australian consumers. The third aim was to then compare these context specific attributes with attributes commonly used in the wider destination image literature, to enhance the future development of a questionnaire to measure stopover destination image.

This project attempts a contribution to the destination marketing literature in two ways. Firstly, this paper reports the application of a replication study, where an identical procedure was used, but with a different sample. There has been a lack of replication studies in the tourism literature, with most studies having been a snapshot at one point in time. That there were many similarities, and a few distinct differences between the Paris and Brisbane samples highlighted the reliability of the Repertory Test technique and the importance of engaging with consumers in the questionnaire design stage. Secondly, that there were many more differences between the two samples, in the context of stopovers, with the general destination image literature, goes some way to support the proposition that destination preferences and attractiveness might differ depending on the travel situation.

The findings provide emerging destinations such as Dubai with some insights into how travel context might influence destination attractiveness. This has implications for marketing communications in terms of distinguishing the focus of messages for different segments. One message does not necessarily fit all markets, since what appeals in one travel situation might

not be attractive in other contexts. For this reason, an enhanced understanding of stopover preferences also has practical implications for suppliers throughout the travel distribution system, such as travel trade intermediaries at source markets and service providers at stop over destinations. One limitation of the findings is that due to the qualitative approach the results are not generalizable to the wider populations of France and Australia.

Long haul travel constitutes almost 20% of international travel. Therefore consumer preferences for stopover destinations during long haul travel warrants more research attention. This is particularly important on the Europe/Australasia route given increasing competition faced by traditional stopover destinations such as Singapore and on Hong Kong by emerging places such as Dubai and Abu Dhabi. More research is required to enhance understanding of how travellers define a *stopover* during long haul travel, how they spend their time on such a visit, and how stopover destinations such as Dubai are positioned, relative to competing places, in the minds of travellers. Regarding the latter, it is proposed the salient attributes elicited from the research participants in Paris and Brisbane, could be combined with attributes from the destination image literature to develop a scale index to measure stopover destination attractiveness.

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