

# Location image “halo effect” on museum image: an exploratory survey on British Museum visitors\*

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## Abstract

**Objectives.** *This paper explores museum image formation process, with particular mention to the case of the British Museum in London. Put specifically, the research aims to analyze whether between the different variables, traditionally identified by literature on this issue (motivations, expectations, satisfaction, sources of information etc.), it is possible to identify a "halo effect" of London's image which influences visitors' museum image formation*

**Methodology.** *Considering the exploratory nature of the study, a non-probabilistic sampling procedure was chosen. Data were collected through structured questionnaire, and interviewees were selected through not probability sampling procedure. Data analysis involved multivariate regression, performed through SPSS software*

**Findings.** *Data collected provide a preliminary response to the main research question posed by this paper: the existence of a halo effect of London image may play a role in developing visitors' image of the museum*

**Research limits.** *Due to the sample size of visitors, the research has a mainly exploratory value, and intends to represent a pilot study on this issue*

**Practical implications.** *The existence of a halo effect on the image of London's British Museum is a factor to be considered for the identification of museum marketing strategies, developed specifically for visitors who appear sensitive to this effect*

**Originality of the study.** *Compared to the literature so far produced on museum marketing, this paper differs in focusing on the relationship between museum image and their location*

**Key words:** *halo effect; London image; British Museum image; exploratory survey*

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\* Although the views and ideas expressed in this paper are those of Alfonso Siano, Mario Siglioccolo, Maddalena della Volpe, and Felice Addeo, the sections “Introduction” and “Conclusions” are attributed to Alfonso Siano, the sections “Literature review” and “Implications for museum and place marketing” are attributed to Mario Siglioccolo, the sections “Aim of the paper and research hypothesis” and “Research limits, and indications for further research” are attributed to Maddalena della Volpe, and the section “Methodology” (“Research design”, “Concept map”, “Sampling and data collection”, “Data analysis”) are attributed to Felice Addeo.

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## 1. Introduction

The importance of analyzing museum visitors' perception through field surveys has gradually asserted in recent years (Yucelt, 2000; Reussner, 2003). However, although the centrality of research on visitors is now widely accepted in both academic and practical terms, literature has so far neglected the relationship between the appeal of museums and the attractiveness the place in which they are located.

This paper explores the connection between museum and location, and aims to identify a "halo effect" of location's image which influences visitors' museum image formation, with particular reference to the case of the British Museum in London.

Although the halo effect is one of the oldest and most widely known psychological phenomena (Nisbett and DeCamp Wilson, 1977), surprisingly little is known about its application to museums and their locations. This seems such a lacuna, considered that museums are location-based institutions, and they may not be separated from their territorial contest. Museums succeed not only as economic development engines but also as one distinctive form of attraction within tourist destinations, as they are deeply rooted in their territory of reference, and this is one of their main features.

Halo effect related to the country of origin may be defined as any influence that the country of manufacture has on a consumer's positive or negative perception of a product (Cateora and Graham, 1999). Studies in industrial purchasing have found halo effect to be a salient cue of quality in buyers perception, and it has been recognized that inferences may alter (correctly or incorrectly) the judgement of consumer (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). For example, a person whose bias suggests that German cars inspire safety and are durable, might infer that since an Audi is a German car, an Audi is a safe and durable car.

Consumer behaviour can be seriously impacted by halo effect in many distinct ways: buyers may simply use the country of origin as one of the many attributes employed to engage in product evaluation (Johansson *et al.*, 1985), and the country of origin may create a halo effect whereby consumers' attention and evaluation of other product dimensions are affected (Han, 1989). Various studies reveal that a product's country of origin can affect its evaluation, and, like price, may serve as a proxy variable when information is lacking (Bilkey and Nes, 1982; Huber and McCann, 1982). The issue considered in this study assumes even more importance considering that image has a direct effect on visitor satisfaction (Chon, 1990; Pearce, 1997).

As these examples indicate, outside variables may have inferential effects on product beliefs. With specific regard to museum institutions and their country of location effect, little work seems to have been done in this area.

## 2. Literature review

In modern times, museums serve the functions of collection, research and exhibition, as well as education and recreation, and have gradually acquired visitor-based roles instead of museum-based roles. Thus, the need for visitor studies has emerged (Weil, 2000), and has obtained a full recognition both on the academic and the operational side (Solima, 1999). These rationale leads museums to conduct visitor studies and acquire knowledge about visitors, and apply it to planning and decision-making, in order to offer exhibitions and services suitable for visitors (Liu, 2008). The growing interest of the scientific community about this area of analysis was indeed accompanied by a progressive attention from museum members.

Although museums in recent years have given serious consideration to attracting tourists, there is very little understanding of the image formation process of a museum (Gil and Ritchie, 2009; Harrison, 1997), and its relation with the place where museum is located. This lack is due in part to the fact that museums and their locations of reference have been regarded as two separate issues during most of the past century, and museums have been considered as organizations where

marketing concepts could be applied regardless of the place where they are located. Although a symbiotic relationship between museums and the communities they serve has been described previously (DiMaggio, 1991; Janes, 1997, 1999), no contribution has focused explicitly on the link between location image and its relapse on museum image.

Image is of great importance to the tourist industry and has been extensively analyzed in the tourism literature (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991). In conceptual terms, image is an overall mental picture formed from the mass of information available to the visitor, both about the specific museum and about museums in general (Vaughan, 2001). The first reported work in the literature concerning museum image stressed that residents tend to have positive images of the local museum (Rosenberg *et al.*, 1960). Recent interesting studies analyze, among other things, the image of a destination that tourists have prior to visiting a local museum (Harrison, 1997), and the nature of the images residents held of a museum, and to check the relationship between previous experience and image (Vaughan, 2001).

Although there is a tendency to define image using the perceptual or cognitive approach, the latest studies tend to view image as a combined concept, that results from both the consumer's logical interpretation (cognitive) and emotional (affective) interpretation of the destination. These two elements of image form an overall or holistic image that may reflect either a positive or a negative evaluation of the product or service (Kawashima, 1999). A differentiation between the cognitive and affective evaluations leads to a greater understanding of how an individual's values affect image formation: while the cognitive component reflects knowledge of the product's features, the affective component refers the emotional response to the product. The importance of the emotional component of image is such that it may exercise a greater influence on visitors' behaviour than the attributes that constitute the cognitive component of image (Russell and Snodgrass, 1987).

The formation of museum image is an ongoing process (Vaughan, 2001), and although a museum's image is difficult to change (Kawashima, 1999), a review of the literature on tourist image reveals the existence of a set of factors that influence the process of image formation. It is found that sources of information and visitor motivations are key elements in that process (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Stern and Krakover, 1993). The information sources, also called image formation agents (Gartner, 1993) and stimulus factors (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999), are the forces that influence the formation of perceptions and evaluations. The different sources of information that affect image formation may be primary (previous experience in visiting a museum), and secondary, which involve information acquired without firsthand visitation to a museum (e.g. advertising, information about the company diffused by mass media, word-of-mouth etc.) (Phelps 1986). Motivations, or reasons for visiting museums, are one of the most popular research topics for museums (Kawashima, 1999). Motivations are internal factors defined as the benefits and advantages sought by individuals when they decide to visit a museum (Um and Crompton, 1992). A number of Scholars has identified a variety of motivations for visiting museums, such as to be entertained, to learn, because they are on holidays, visiting a particular exhibition, being with people and enjoying social interaction, doing something worthwhile, feeling comfortable with the surroundings, enjoying the challenge of a new or unusual experience, having a learning opportunity, and participating actively (Jansen-Verbeke and Rekom, 1996; Kotler and Kotler, 2001; Prentice *et al.*, 1998). Motivations are internal factors defined as the benefits and advantages sought by individuals when they decide to visit a museum, and as such, they constitute a factor that influences the processes of image formation.

Although these studies have the merit of identifying the variables determining museum image, none of the contribution on museum image formation has analyzed to date the existence and the relevance of a location halo effect on museum visitors image formation process. Research on halo errors in rating can be traced back to the early part of this century (Thorndike, 1920; Wells, 1907). Such a phenomenon could best be described as a deduction from an implicit personality theory holding that “nice people tend to have nice attributes and less nice people have less nice attributes”. Thorndike (1920) phrased the term “halo effect” to describe the tendency of a judge to rate

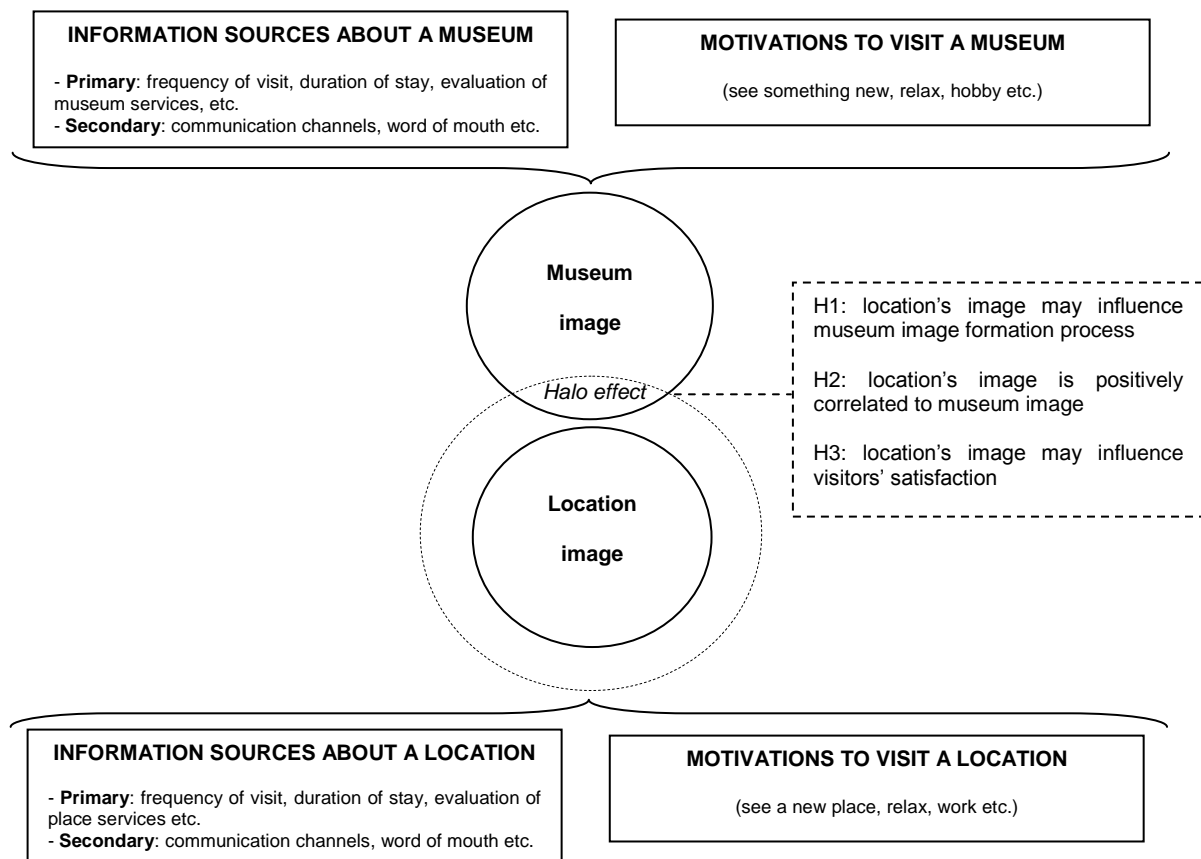
individual traits according to the rater's general impression of the object that is being rated. Subsequently, the ratings of single traits may be either systematically inflated or deflated, depending on whether the rater's overall impression or attitude toward the object is positive or negative. For instance, if the overall attitude is positive, the inflated ratings of individual attributes may mislead the user of the rating information to falsely conclude that the object of the evaluation owns greater superiority on all attributes than is actually the case.

Although there are a number of different conceptual and operational definitions of halo effect (Balzer and Sulsky, 1992; Saal *et al.*, 1980), the occurrence of halo effect seems to be common (Casco, 1991; Feldman, 1986) and ubiquitous (Cooper, 1981). This consideration leads to analyse its pertinence to museums, which are linked to their location of reference.

### 3. Aim of the paper and research hypothesis

The aim of the exploratory survey in this paper is to examine and explore the role of location image in the museum image formation process. Put specifically, the research analyzes whether between the different variables, traditionally identified by literature on this issue (motivations, expectations, satisfaction, sources of information etc.) (Kim *et al.*, 1996; Rekom, 1994; Thyne, 2001), it is possible to identify a "halo effect" of location's image which influences visitors' museum image formation. In particular, the case of the image formation process of the visitors of the British Museum was considered for the aim of study. The choice of British museum is justified by its ability to attract tourist flows representing different countries and cultures. In addition, the image of London is going to be measured in this study, and it gives a first impression to be good, as it refers to one the most visited cities in the world.

Fig. 1: The proposed framework: the factors determining museum image and the potential role of location image halo effect



Source: our elaboration

Based on the conceptual and empirical perspectives gained from the literature, the hypotheses proposed in this study are the following (see figure 1):

- location’s image may influence museum image formation process (H1);
- location’s image is positively correlated to museum image (H2):
- the higher are the values of all the independent variables (location image, visitor satisfaction, expectations etc.) the more visitors’ perception of museum shifts toward a positive image (H3).

The next sections focus on the methodology used for this study, and the implications for museum marketing activities developed depending on the role of location image halo effect in museum image formation process.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Research design

The theoretical framework presented in the previous pages inspired an exploratory empirical research on the British Museum. Main research goal was to explore the connection between the museum and its location, hypothesizing the presence of the “halo effect” of the latter on the former. Put specifically, the main hypothesis is that, among the other variables, the perceived image of London could positively influence the perceived image of the British Museum.

Stating these premises, and considering the research goal and its methodological implications, a quantitative approach was adopted: data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to the visitors of the British Museum, interviewees were selected through not probability sampling procedure, and data analysis, performed through SPSS software, involved multivariate regression.

### 4.2 Concept Map

First research step was the choice of the conceptual dimensions considered by research team to be at the core of the empirical research: starting from a concept map representing research dimensions and, for each of them, the indicators to be operationally defined into the items of our questionnaire<sup>1</sup>.

As shown in figure 2, main research dimensions are:

- socio-graphic (gender, age, qualification, nationality, residence, occupation, annual income);
- museum: sub-articulated Experience, Evaluation, Satisfaction;
- London: sub-articulated Experience, Evaluation, Satisfaction;
- museum vs. London: to evaluate if a visitor is driven by driven by British Museum or London in his decision of visiting the Museum.

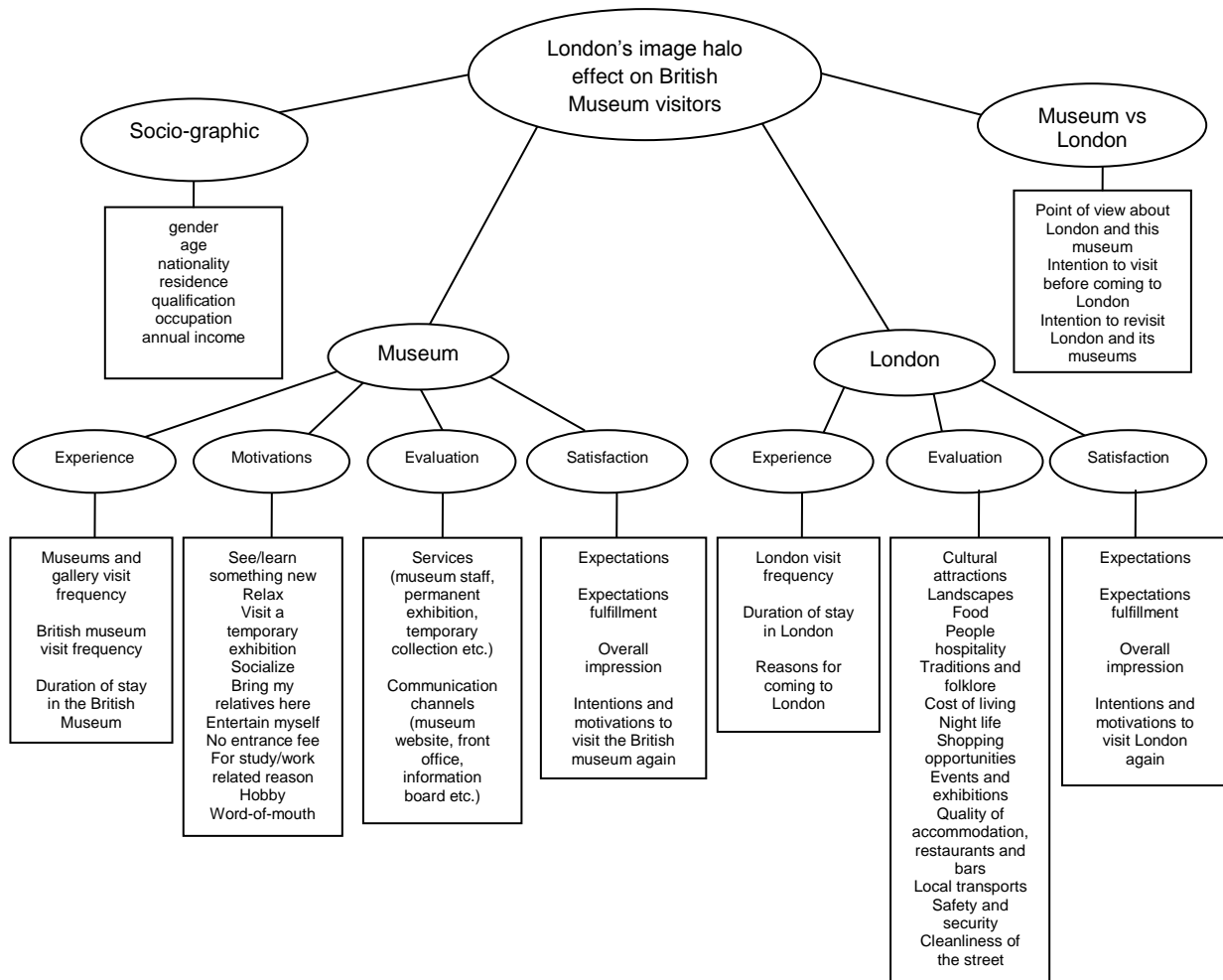
Table 1 shows the indicators chosen for each dimension, their operational definition and the measurement. The indicators shown in table 1 were operationally defined in the items of a structured questionnaire, according to the different type of measurement chosen.

### 4.3 Sampling and data collection

Unit of analysis is made up of British Museum visitors. Considering the exploratory nature of the research, a non-probabilistic sampling procedure was chosen, so interviewees were randomly selected among those people visiting the Museum during the month of October 2009. Data were collected by administering the structured questionnaire to tourists: final sample is composed of 120 individuals.

<sup>1</sup> Concept map may be defined as a taxonomic structure in which all relevant dimensions and concepts of a theoretical research model are presented and related. Concept maps are helpful to researchers in clarifying, according to their research goals, what and how many research dimensions should be considered to create a fruitful research track. Operationally, it could be also helpful to identify measurable concepts and possible relations among variables (Marradi, 2007, pp. 203-204). Ovals in figure 2 represent conceptual dimensions too general to be operationally defined, while in the boxes are shown the indicators that were empirically observed

Fig. 2: Concept Map: London's image halo effect on British Museum visitors



Source: our elaboration

#### 4.4 Data analysis

Data analysis was performed in four sequential steps: first, data quality control procedures were carried out to prevent errors in data analysis; then univariate analysis (mean, standard deviation etc.) was performed to have a general overview of the distribution of the variables and to obtain essential information for the next research step: building indexes to synthesize a set of variables. Thus, combining respondent's answers to two batteries of items measuring different aspects under the evaluation dimension, two indexes were created: the first measuring the satisfaction for the British Museum communication (ComSat), the second measuring the satisfaction for the core services for the British Museum (CoSeSat).

Finally, a multiple regression analysis - a multivariate technique through which one can analyze the relationship between a dependent variable and a set of independent variables (Ho, 2006, p. 246) - was carried out in order to test main research.

In our model, the dependent variable is British Museum image, this variable was operationally defined through an eleven point Cantril Scale aimed at measure Tourists perception of Museum's image. Independent variables are: overall impression of London (i.e. the "halo effect"); expectations prior the visit of the British museum (both variables were measured with an eleven point Cantril Scale); overall Communication Satisfaction Index (ComSat) and overall Core Services Satisfaction Index (CoSeSat). Table 2 shows the results of multiple regression analysis.

Tab. 1: Research dimensions, Indicators’ operational definition and measurement

Research dimensions	Variables	Operational definition	Measurement	
Socio-graphic	gender	Sex	Dichotomy	
	age	Years	Open question	
	qualification	Higher qualification obtained by interviewees	Multinomial	
	nationality	Interviewees’ Nationality		
	residence	City in which an interviewee lives		
	occupation	Current occupation of interviewees		
	annual income	Current annual income of interviewees		
<b>Museum</b>				
Experience	Museum/Galleries visit frequency	How often do you go to museums and galleries?	Multinomial	
	British Museum visit frequency	Your visit to this museum was		
	Duration of stay in British Museum	How long have you been in this museum?		
Evaluation	<i>Services</i>	<i>Communication</i>	satisfaction level with each item	1-10 Cantril Scale
	Museum staff	Museum Website		
	Permanent collections	Front office		
	Temporary exhibitions	General Guides		
	Accessibility	Tourist Guides		
	Museum Catering	Museum Guides		
	Museum Shops	Audio/Multimedia Guides		
	Museum Toilets	Descriptions		
	Other facilities	Brochures		
	Signage			
Satisfaction	Expectations	satisfaction level with each item	1-10 Cantril Scale	
	Expectations fulfilment			
	Overall Impression			
	Intention to visit British Museum again	Are you going to visit British Museum again?	Multinomial	
	Motivations to visit British Museum again	Are you going to visit British Museum again because:	Multinomial	
<b>London</b>				
Experience	London visit frequency	How many times have you been to London?	Multinomial	
	Duration of stay in London	How long are you staying in London?		
	Reasons for coming to London	Your reasons for coming to London		
Evaluation	Cultural attractions	satisfaction level with each item	1-10 Cantril Scale	
	Landscapes			
	Food			
	People’s hospitality			
	Traditions and folklore			
	Cost of living			
	Night life			
	Shopping opportunities			
	Specific events and exhibitions			
	Quality of restaurants and bars			
	Quality of accommodation			
	Local transport facilities			
	Safety and Security			
Cleanliness of the streets				
Satisfaction	Expectations	satisfaction level with each item	1-10 Cantril Scale	
	Expectations fulfilment			
	Overall Impression			
	Intention to visit London Again	Are you going to visit London again?	Multinomial	
	Motivations to visit London again	Are you going to visit London again because:	Multinomial	
<b>Museum vs. London</b>				
Museum vs. London propensity	<i>4 items evaluating if visitors were mainly driven by British Museum or London</i>		Multinomial	
	Point of view about London and this museum	Which of these sentences best describes your point of view about London and this museum		
	Point of view about the location of the museum	Which of these sentences better correspond to your point of view about the location of the museum		
	Intention before coming to London in relation to the British Museum	Which of these sentences best describes your intention to revisit London and its museums		
	Intention to revisit London and its museums	Which of these sentences best describes your intention		

Source: our elaboration

Tab. 2: Multiple Regression Analysis: Model Summary and Coefficients

**Model Summary**

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
,788	,621	,602	,952

**Coefficients**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
(Constant)	1,084	,777		-,417	,167
CoSeSat	,426	,083	,447	-,417	,000
Expectations	,217	,073	,238	3,140	,004
Halo effect	,244	,085	,221	4,754	,005
ComSat	,205	,115	,136	2,211	,080

Source: our elaboration

According to the reported value of R-square, the set of independent variables explains more than 60% of the variance of the dependent variable; in other words, as R squared quantifies the goodness of fit, thus it could be said that the model fits the data well (H1 and H2 confirmed).

The direction and the size of the beta weight coefficients shed light on the nature of these relationships: Beta coefficients' directions are all positive: this means that the higher are the values of all the independent variables, the more tourists' perception of British Museum shifts toward a positive image (H3 confirmed). Considering the size of beta weight, CoSeSat has the strongest influence (.447) on British Museum image, followed by Expectations (.238) and the halo effect (.221), while ComSat turns to be not statistically significant.

## 5. Implications for museum and place marketing

Efforts to measure visitors' perceptions of service performance and levels of satisfaction are made in the belief that they enable managers to monitor how well they are performing, and to identify where adjustments need to be made in order to raise the quality of offerings and experience that visitors receive (Tomas *et al.*, 2003). The results of the research encourage to consider museums and their location as a "global product", which comprises museum and place services. Museum visitors (be they foreign or resident) now seek a total experience, including leisure, culture, education, and social interaction.

These considerations lead to combine two complementary approaches - museum marketing and place marketing - in the management of museum and location image. Recent developments in contributions of management show that the assessment of esteem and credibility, socially shared, based on past actions and performance of an organization (especially in terms of ability to satisfy the expectations of stakeholder groups) is increasingly critical for engendering competitive advantage (Bennett and Kottasz, 2000; Fombrun and van Riel, 2004). A similar consideration also applies to locations: because of its strategic value, developing a good location image is a fundamental objective of tourism and vacation/destination marketing and of place marketing and communication activities, as it ensures several positive effects, including among others the attraction of potential travellers, tourists and investors and their loyalty (Siano *et al.*, 2008; Siano *et al.*, 2009; Confetto *et al.*, 2009).



Hence, what may British Museum managers do to benefit from the positive image of their location? The British Museum is located in London, together with the most visited museums in U.K. (twelve out of the twenty top museums); the high competitiveness of this location represents a good starting point for the valorisation of the image of the analysed museum. These museums are privileged from being located in this favourable conditions: in order to take advantage of the positive halo effect of their location, museums could enhance their brand awareness by stipulating partnership and co-marketing activities with local institutions and government.

Among others, the transfer of positive association may be developed matching the brand of the museum with that of the location (co-branding) (Blackett and Boad, 1999; Kumar, 2005; Shawn, 2000). The technique of co-branding involves cooperation and coordination between museums and government authorities and agencies, in order to enhance the value both of museum brand and location brand (Dredge and Jenkins 2003; Thomas and Long 2000).

Cross-sector collaboration is another marketing opportunity: managers might collaborate with local government, providing recommendations to enhance place offers, and encourage local tourist organizations (hotels, bars, restaurants etc) to promote their services, and become jointly involved in place marketing activities.

Cooperative advertising between museum and their location is another interactive action that may easily be developed. This activity, which usually involves two members in a manufacturer-retailer supply chain (Li *et al.*, 2002; Yue *et al.*, 2006), may be used from museums and local institutions to advertise together their activities, with strong savings in investment in communication.

The association of brands may also be made online, by means of cooperative e-advertising activities and online virtual museum: virtual museum refers to a collection of digitally recorded images, sound files, text documents, and other data of historical, scientific, or cultural interest that are accessed through electronic media (Bernier, 2002). Virtual on-line exhibitions may act as a promoter of real museums and simultaneously promote the location (Bowen, Bennett and Johnson, 1998).

Museums and their locations can offer mutual support in terms of marketing (Siano *et al.*, 2010; Siano and Siglioccolo, 2008); the full exploitation of this opportunity depends, however, on the ability of museum managers to cooperate with local governments and agencies for the coordination of promotional programs and activities (such as tour operators) (Siglioccolo *et al.*, 2009). Thus, both museum management and destination competitiveness can be seen as part of a coherent and likely synergistic whole, and marketing cooperation seems to be mandatory.

## 6. Research limits, and indications for further research

It seemed appropriate to dedicate an apposite section to the limits of the study. Due to the sample size of visitors, the research has a mainly exploratory value, and intends to represent a pilot study on this issue. The findings are limited to unidirectional influences among the variables in the model (a recursive causal model) because reciprocal relationships among the variables have not been studied. Future research can develop and test a model with bidirectional influences between variables. Findings are also limited to the British Museum, located in London; future research should be carried out to validate the findings of this study in different locations to assess the validity of the findings, or with relation to cluster of museums. Nonetheless, the imminent exit of the visitors from the British Museum could have invalidated the judgement of the respondents, with answers given immediately, or without thinking too much tired after visiting the museum, exhaust for walking much etc.).

The findings are also limited to the variables selected for the study. There may be other factors influencing the image formation process for a museum (e.g., psychographic variables, such as values, attitude towards the art etc.); future research might expand the model by integrating such variables.

Future contributions to this topic could identify and examine the barriers to the implementation of the suggestions proposed here, which may focus not only on marketing, but also involve the use of internal (and entrenched) policies, practices and organisational culture. Further primary research on visitors' behaviour could explain in detail any causal links between the popularity of museums and their particular locations.

## 7. Conclusions

A critical examination of previous museum image studies has revealed that researchers have not been successful in completely conceptualising and operationalising museum image. By providing a framework for the measurement of museum image, this paper hopes to draw attention to the need to address all components of museum image, both in future research and in managerial decision making.

This paper endeavoured to provide a more thorough understanding of the concept of museum image, and the variables occurring in its process of formation. Unlike most related research on museums, this study analyzed the process of image formation in an integrative path analytic framework by integrating information sources, experience, and motivations, as well as location's image halo effect, and the effect of image on satisfaction.

From an academic point of view, this work has attempted to contribute a conceptual framework that supports continued progress in developing a better understanding of the process of image formation regarding museums. Given the limited empirical evidence on this topic to date, preliminary results seem to be helpful.

In this article, a general model has been developed and empirically validated so as to provide a more in-depth understanding of the museum image formation process, and the relationship between the different dimensions of image, motivations, and information sources. Moreover, it has been shown empirically that a museum's image may be influenced by the halo effect of the image of the location where it is located.

For practitioners, the findings of the exploratory survey provide evidence of the need for an overall image management program for museums in destinations. Furthermore, the results help to enhance museum managers' understanding of visitor image and its different components as well as of the other external factors (including halo effect) that influence that image. In this regard, we believe that museums should be more concerned about location image, and which attributes of the latter may be associated to museum image.

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