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ABSTRACT

The purposes of the study were 1) to determine the perceived image of India as a travel destination; 2) to identify the recreational and leisure needs of travelers to India; and, 3) to investigate the relationships between perceived destination image and recreational needs. A quantitative survey research design was employed to answer the research questions. The target population comprised of travelers visiting India, who were residing in the United States. A convenience sampling method was employed due to the potential difficulty in locating potential travelers. Participants were randomly selected from the travelers going to India on the survey days. A total of 358 travelers voluntarily participated in this study. Utilizing a questionnaire, participants' perceived image of India, their recreational and leisure needs and demographic information were collected. Results indicated that perceived image of India consisted of culture and heritage, tourism infrastructure, nature resources, social environment, entertainment services, and lodging services. Recreational needs of the travelers included need for sanitary and quality tourist services, entertainment, cultural activities, natural resources, and adventure activities. Results of multiple regression analyses revealed that dimensions of destination image explained limited variance of recreational needs. Findings of this study suggest that India needs to capitalize on its culture and heritage resources and package them with the array of existing natural attractions. In addition, it is necessary for India to improve its transportation network, tourist services, and social environment in order to create a favorable destination brand image, and position itself more advantageously in the global tourism market.

INTRODUCTION

Travel and tourism is one of the largest industries in the world. According to the World Tourism Organization (2006), the number of international arrivals was projected to reach 806 million in 2006 representing a growth rate of 4.5%. This increase indicates that the tourism industry is about to experience tremendous progress in the upcoming future, with opportunities for increased job creation and foreign exchange for countries. Most countries including India are trying to tap this industry for its economic significance. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) World Tourism Barometer (2006) estimated a fast growth rate of international tourism expenditures to India, i.e., $3.6 billion in 2003, $5.1 billion in 2004, and $5.8 billion in 2005 which represents a growth rate of 61% between 2003 and 2005. Much of the growth could be attributed to enhanced marketing efforts, product development, and the upsurge of business travelers due to globalized economy. India is forecasted to be one of the fastest growing countries for business travel between the years 2007-2016, and third in generating travel and tourism demand (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2006). The growth in tourist arrivals has been credited to recent economic development led by global software technology outsourcing. India remains the unquestioned leader for offshore development and as such is a well-known business destination for technology related travel (Nicholson & Sahay, 2001).

An important criterion in the selection of a particular destination is its destination image. Destination image has been defined as the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person holds of the place (Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993). The destination image framework of Baloglu and McCleary (1999) identified three major determinants that influence destination image: cognitive or perceptual evaluations (beliefs or knowledge of destination attributes), affective evaluations (feelings or attachments towards the destination attributes), and overall or global image formed as a result of both cognitive and affective evaluations of the destination. This model was extended by Beerli and Martin (2004), who stated that perceived image, was formed from the image projected by the destination in consort with the individual's own needs, motivations, prior knowledge, preferences, and other personal characteristics. They mentioned that the selection of attributes used in designing the destination image model primarily depended on the attractions of each destination, its positioning, and the objectives of the assessment of perceived image, which in turn determined whether general or specific attributes were to be chosen.

Limited destination knowledge and perceived negative images caused by political instability, poverty, and humanitarian conditions hinder growth of tourism for a particular destination (Grosspietsch, 2006). Thus, one of the major objectives of any destination positioning strategy is to reinforce positive images held by the visitors, and to correct negative images or create new ones (Pike & Ryan, 2004). The success or failure of any destination depends largely on how effectively the images of potential tourists are being managed by the local government and tourism planners (Sonmez & Sirakaya, 2002). Destinations make an effort to create and enhance images of existing resources and develop supply resources to match demand and to meet traveler's needs (Uysal, Chen, & Williams, 2000). Based on the studies conducted in the past three decades, it has been determined that the destination image has become the pivotal aspect of destination marketing strategy (Gallarza, Saura, & Garcia, 2002). Image creation has emerged as a crucial destination-marketing concept in the tourism industry, with the destination image impacting consumer's buying decision making ability (Kim & Richardson, 2003). Bigne, Sanchez, and Sanchez (2001) stated that the destination image is a key

factor for destination managers, as it provides information on the perceived quality and satisfaction (evaluation of stay), the intention to return, and recommend the destination (future behavior).   Hence, the process of image formation is important to determine the target market, branding, and market positioning of a destination. Planners and marketers must design specific techniques and strategies that will make a destination more attractive and competitive in target markets.   The destination needs to be viewed as a brand and has to be marketed strategically in order to keep up with the changes in tourism sector, competition among tourist destinations, and changes in tourists' expectations and habits (Beerli & Martin, 2003).

Although, the growth rate for Indian tourism has been impressive, the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) estimated that the share that India holds in terms of global tourist arrivals is quite lagging and has been merely around 0.5% of total international tourist arrivals and 2.4% of total Asia-Pacific international tourist arrivals (EIU, 2004). There could be several reasons for such a scenario. A review of literature indicates that the overall destination image of India as identified in several previous studies has been negative (Kale & Weir, 1986; Ahmed & Krohn, 1992; Chaudhary, 2000). This could be because most of the information available in North America about India emphasized on what it does not have rather than what it does have (Chaudhary, 1996). India had not done a good job of marketing itself in North America (Kale &Weir, 1986).   Scholars have recommended that the destination planners and Government of India needed to transition from selling services to marketing them (Ahmed & Krohn, 1992). The Ministry of Tourism of India acknowledges that there is a tremendous potential for developing and marketing the diverse products and experiences of India.   It is therefore, reasonable to assume that, as a starting point, the Government of India will need insight on current perceptions, needs, and issues influencing visitation by North American travelers in order to design effective strategies to shape the image of the destination favorably, thus necessitating the current research investigation. Accordingly, the current study attempts to fulfill the following three objectives: 1) to determine the perceived image of India as a travel destination; 2) to identify the recreational and leisure needs of travelers to India; and, 3) to investigate the relationships between perceived destination image and recreational needs.

RESEARCH METHODS

The target population of this study was travelers visiting India, who were residing in the United States, and were eighteen years or older. A convenience sampling method was employed due to difficulty in identifying and locating potential travelers. Participants were randomly selected from the travelers going to India on several days when the survey was conducted. A total of 385 travelers voluntarily participated in this study. The sample consisted of 286 males (74%) and 99 females (26%); 78% of the sample were between 30 to 55 years old; 58% were US citizens and 42% were non-US citizens but residing in the US. In terms of travel patterns, 50% indicated that India was their final destination and the other 50% also traveled to other countries; 74% of them had visited India one to two times before; and, 26% never visited India before. Since it is common for long haul travelers to fulfill multiple purposes and visit more than one city, the sum of purpose of travel and cities intended to visit was greater than the total number of participants. Sixty percent of the participants visited India for business purpose, and 43% visited for vacation purpose; and the main cities slated for visit during the trip were Delhi (52%), Bangalore (42%), and Mumbai (29%).

A questionnaire made up of three sections was developed for data collection. The first section contained 21 items focused on recreational needs of the travelers, for example, needs for

cultural activities, outdoor recreation, safety, etc. Each item was measured by a five-point Likert type scale to indicate the degree of importance while traveling to India.

Section two consisted of 27 items associated with the image of India. These items were adopted from Baloglu and McCleary's (1999) study of destination image formation. This section of the questionnaire measured the three constructs of destination image, i.e., cognitive image (24 items), affective image (2 items), and overall image (1 item). Cognitive image was defined as beliefs or knowledge of destination attributes. Operationally, it measured the perceived image of natural resources, attractions, culture and art, general infrastructure, tourist infrastructure, atmosphere, social and economic setting, and environment. The affective image was defined as feelings or attachments towards the destination attributes appraised by two attributes: relaxing place and boring and unattractive place. One item was used to measure the overall image of India. Each item was assessed by a five-point Likert type scale to indicate the degree of agreement to each item (strongly disagree = 1 point to strongly agree = 5 points). Scores of each dimension and construct were calculated by summing up the corresponding items and dividing them by the number of items in that dimension. A higher score represented a favorable image, and a lower score represented an unfavorable image. In addition, participants' demographic and travel information, for example, gender, age, nationality, city to visit, purpose of travel, length of stay, and number of prior visit to India were also collected in the third section.

Ten travelers were recruited to pilot test the research instrument at the San Francisco International Airport. The purpose was to determine the connotation of the items in the questionnaire and the validity of the instrument. Based on the feedback and suggestions from the pilot test participants, the questionnaire was finalized. Data collections were conducted at San Francisco International Airport because the majority of flights from the U.S. to India depart from here. Data were collected by personal interview around the check-in counters of five major airlines serving to India on several days. The completed questionnaires were coded and entered into computer for analyses via SPSS.

FINDINGS

Recreational Needs: The 21 recreational need items were factor analyzed by using principal component analysis with varimax rotation to determine the underlining concerns of recreational needs of travelers. The results showed a five-factor solution which explained 59.68% of the total variance (Table 1). The first factor was labeled as tourist services (Eigen value (EV) = 4.45, Reliability alpha (α) = 0.86), which explained 22.23% of the total variance. On a scale of 1 to 5, respondents rated tourist services as the most important recreational need factor (mean (M) = 3.93, standard deviation (SD) = 0.64) when traveling to India. Those nine items falling into this factor could be further grouped into two sub-dimensions, i.e., hygiene and safety (cleanliness and hygiene, quality of health services, safety and stability, and overcrowding and traffic congestion) and quality tourist infrastructure (quality of roads, airports, and ports, quality of telecommunications, quality of hotels and restaurants, and hospitality to tourists). For hygiene and safety, survey participants were concerned about cleanliness and hygiene (M = 4.21, SD = 0.89), safety and stability (M = 4.21, SD = 0.81). For quality tourist infrastructure, they were concerned about quality of hotels and restaurants (M = 4.13, SD = 0.90), and hospitality to tourists (M = 4.16, SD = 0.79).

Table 1: Results of factor analysis of recreation need items.

Recreational Need Items	Mean	Std. Dev.	TS[1]	EN[2]	CA[3]	NR[4]	AA[5]
Cleanliness and Hygiene	4.21	0.89	0.83				
Quality of roads, airports, and ports	3.82	0.93	0.80				
Quality of health services	3.86	0.92	0.75				
Safety and stability	4.21	0.81	0.70				
Quality of telecommunications	3.88	1.03	0.68				
Overcrowding and traffic congestion	3.71	1.00	0.64				
Quality of hotels and restaurants	4.13	0.90	0.59				
Language barriers	3.38	1.05	0.55				
Hospitality to tourists	4.16	0.79	0.50				
Casinos, theme parks	2.57	1.01		0.81			
Bars, discotheques, clubs	2.62	1.08		0.78			
Shopping	3.19	1.10		0.62			
Tourist information centers	3.29	1.00		0.52			
Rich culture	3.97	0.90			0.78		
Museums, heritage buildings, and monuments	3.81	0.91			0.78		
Variety of handicrafts	3.52	0.95			0.67		
Festivals and concerts	3.41	0.97			0.62		
Good beaches	3.69	0.97				0.76	
Natural scenery	4.15	0.77				0.65	
Adventure activities	3.39	1.08					0.67
Eigen value			4.45	2.41	2.39	1.57	1.11
Variance explained			22.23	12.06	11.97	7.87	5.55
Cronbach's reliability alpha			0.86	0.73	0.72	0.50	n.a.

Note: [1]–TS: tourist services, [2]–EN: entertainments, [3]–CA: cultural activities
        [4]–NR: natural resources, [5]–AA: adventure activities

The second factor was named as entertainment (EV = 2.41, α = 0.73), which includes four items.   Although this factor explained 12.06% of variance, which is the second highest among those five factors, respondents did not express higher need for tourist superstructures such as casinos and theme parks (M = 2.57, SD = 1.01) and bars, discotheques, and clubs (M = 2.62, SD = 1.08).

The third factor was named as cultural activities (EV = 2.39, α = 0.72), which includes four items and explains 11.97% of variance. The fourth factor was labeled as natural resources (EV = 1.57, α = 0.50), and the fifth factor as adventure activities (EV = 1.11, α not available because of single item).   Although natural resources explained only 7.87% of the variance of recreational need, in terms of recreational need, the respondents ranked this factor as the second highest one among those five factors (M = 3.92, SD = 0.72).

Destination Image: The 24 cognitive image items were factor analyzed. The results showed a six-factor solution which explained 65.61% of the variance (Table 2). Those six factors were labeled as: culture and heritage (EV = 3.62, α = 0.76), tourism infrastructure (EV = 2.04, α = 0.69), natural resources (EV = 1.33, α=0.63), social environment (EV = 1.24, α = 0.66), entertainment services (EV = 1.20, α = 0.62), and lodging services (EV = 1.07, α not available because of single item). Examining these six cognitive image factors retained from factor analysis, it was concluded that the travelers perceived that India has very rich cultural heritage (M = 4.41, SD = 0.55). Respondents moderately perceived that India has good entertainment services. However, they indicated that India needed to improve tourism infrastructure (M = 3.01, SD = 0.64). The respondents also perceived India with an adverse image pertaining to social environment (M = 3.74, SD = 0.73), i.e., poverty, overcrowded, and polluted.   In terms of affective image of India, the respondents moderately perceived India as a place for relaxing (M = 2.95, SD = 1.12), and did not agree that India is a boring and unattractive place (M = 1.66, SD = 0.73). Nevertheless, the overall image of India was a positive one (M = 3.40, SD = 0.87).

Table 2: Results of factor analysis of cognitive image items

Destination Image Items	Mean	Std. Dev.	CH[1]	TI[2]	NR[3]	SE[4]	ES[5]	LS[6]
India has rich cultural heritage	4.56	0.66	0.81					
India offers museums, historical sites	4.29	0.68	0.80					
India has art and handicrafts	4.38	0.67	0.79					
India has good transportation system	2.68	1.06		0.83				
India has quality health services	2.92	0.81		0.72				
India has good tourist information centers	2.97	0.83		0.60				
India has good telecommunications	3.48	0.84		0.52				
India has lots of scenic beauty	4.08	0.80			0.72			
India has good beaches	3.40	0.86			0.66			
India has adventure activities	3.16	0.79			0.64			
India is an exotic destination	4.07	0.81			0.63			
India is associated with poverty	3.68	0.85				0.87		
India is overcrowded and polluted	3.80	0.83				0.82		
India has good nightlife	2.96	0.68					0.86	
India has bars, clubs and discotheques.	3.18	0.62					0.74	
India has good deluxe hotels and restaurants	3.83	0.75						0.83
Eigen value			3.62	2.04	1.33	1.24	1.20	1.07
Variance explained			22.63	12.76	8.30	7.75	7.50	6.68
Cronbach's reliability Alpha			0.76	0.69	0.63	0.66	0.62	n.a.

Note: [1] –CH: culture and heritage, [2] –TI: tourism infrastructure, [3] –NR: nature resources
[4] –SE: social environment, [5] –ES: entertainment services, [6] –LS: lodging services

Destination Image and Recreational Needs: The third objective of this study was to examine the relationships between destination image and recreational needs.   To determine the causal

relationships between destination image and recreational needs, multiple regression analyses were conducted by using dimensions of cognitive image, affective image, and overall image as independent variables and dimensions of recreational need as independent variable. Table 3 presents the standardized regression coefficients, adjusted R^2, and F statistics. The results indicated that four out of five (except need for natural resources) dimensions of recreational needs could be explained by destination image, i.e., F-statistics were significant at $p < 0.05$. However, destination image could explain limited variance in recreational needs, where adjusted R^2 ranged from 0.10 to 0.03.   Among the eight independent variables, it was found that tourism infrastructure, social environment, entertainment services and overall image were not appropriate predictors for recreational needs, due to insignificant regression coefficients. Recreational needs could be predicted by perceived image of culture and heritage, natural resources, lodging services and affective image.   These findings were confirmed by further stepwise regression analyses.

Table 3: Summary of results of multiple regression analysis with dimensions of destination image as independent variables and dimensions of recreation need as dependent variables

	CH[1]	TI[2]	NR[3]	SE[4]	ES[5]	LS[6]	AI[7]	OI[8]	Adj. R^2	F
Tourist Services	0.19*	-0.03	-0.12*	-0.05	-0.11	0.10	0.25*	-0.12*	0.10	5.18[†]
Entertain-ments	0.16*	0.09	-0.09	-0.03	-0.15*	-0.04	0.21*	-0.02	0.06	3.85[†]
Cultural Activities	0.17*	0.09	0.08	0.01	0.02	0.11*	-0.03	0.02	0.08	5.01[†]
Natural Resources	0.15*	-0.01	0.09	-0.04	-0.10	0.10*	-0.08	-0.04	0.02	1.91
Adventure Activities	-0.05	-0.02	0.15*	-0.05	0.04	-0.07	0.13*	0.03	0.03	2.31[†]

Note: [1] –CH: culture and heritage, [2] –TI: tourism infrastructure, [3] –NR: nature resources
    [4] –SE: social environment, [5] –ES: entertainment services, [6] –LS: lodging services
    *--Standardized regression coefficient significant at $p < .05$., [†]--$p < .05$

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of the study indicated that the overall image of India as a tourist destination was positive. In terms of the recreational needs of travelers to India, five specific needs were identified. These included tourist services, entertainment, cultural activities, natural resources, and adventure activities, with tourist services being identified as the most important. The third purpose of the study was to examine the effect of destination image on recreational needs of travelers to India. Although the generalizability of the results was constrained by the sampling method and sample size, the multiple regression model provides a basis for understanding how destination image constructs were associated with recreational needs.

The findings of this study contribute in a significant manner to the literature. Results indicate that the perceived image of India has greatly improved from previous studies. This could be attributed to the recent increase in the number of Indian expatriates and business travelers visiting India and coming back to their home and sharing their good experiences via word of mouth.   Moreover, the findings support previously published studies that indicate that India has

already established itself very well as a historical and diverse cultural destination. Findings of this study also confirmed the multidimensional nature of destination image.   The image of India was largely determined by its cultural heritage and tourists' recreation needs were also affected by perceived image of India's cultural heritage.

The second important finding was that overall image was not a strong predictor of recreational needs of the traveler.   This may imply that the overall image of a destination maybe an important factor in travel decision making. However, for planning for recreational activities, more specific contents of the image of a destination are needed.

The relationship between destination image and recreational needs were confirmed in this study.   The small variance of recreational need which was explained by destination image may be attributed to the fact that participants of this study were largely business travelers.   To the business traveler, the primary purpose of travel is business with recreation taking on a secondary role.

This study contributed to the understanding of how the travelers perceive the destination, what their recreational needs are, and the interdependence among those constructs. Accordingly, effective marketing plans can be developed to increase the visitation and benefits from business and other tourist market segments. However, as Kale and Weir (1986) suggested the government of India needed to market itself to foreign travelers with a particular emphasis to those from North America. Tourism authority and the destination planners needed to transition from selling services to marketing them (Ahmed & Krohn, 1992). To achieve this goal, there is a need to package the array of attractions that India has to offer, improve the facilities, develop a clear destination brand image, and position India favorably in international markets. In the mean time, the transportation system needs to be developed to be able to sustain the increased influx of tourists.   Hamm (2007) also suggests that health services, tourist information centers, nightlife, poverty, cleanliness, pollution, and overcrowding have been identified as needing immediate attention.   Furthermore, India is not viewed as a relaxing destination.   To address this negative perception, the country could capitalize on its rich culture and heritage and market itself further as a spiritual revival destination, promoting yoga, *ayurveda (an ancient Indian health care system)*, spas, and health retreats.

This study was part of a larger study of tourism in India.   To improve the generalizability of the relationship between destination image and recreational needs, more resources on sampling more study sites and more subjects are needed to improve both internal and external validity of the proposed model. Based on the current findings, future research could investigate additional factors of the destination image model, including information sources and the motivation to travel.   Since participants of this study were predominantly business travelers, future studies could investigate the difference between business travelers and leisure travelers. Lastly, whether or not the relationship between destination image and recreational needs is recursive deserves further investigation.

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