

Developments in Marketing Science:
Proceedings of the Academy of Marketing Science

Colin L. Campbell *Editor*

Marketing in Transition: Scarcity, Globalism, & Sustainability

Proceedings of the 2009 World Marketing Congress



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Marketing in Transition: Scarcity, Globalism, & Sustainability

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Marketing in Transition: Scarcity, Globalism, & Sustainability

Proceedings of the 2009 World Marketing Congress



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Mark Rosenbaum	Northern Illinois University
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Keong Sam Min	University of New Orleans
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NORTH ATLANTIC ISLANDS' LOCATIONS IN TOURISTS' MINDS: ICELAND, GREENLAND, AND THE FAROE ISLANDS

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates what image travellers in Iceland during the summer months have of the country as a tourist destination, and whether positioning of Iceland, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland together in tourist markets as one area is possible or feasible. The article reports results of two surveys. The first survey (unstructured) measures the holistic image of Iceland. The results from this survey were coded with a qualitative methodology. The second survey (structured) measures the attribute image of Iceland in comparison with five other countries, Norway, Scotland, Greenland, Finland and the Faroe Islands.

Results from the unstructured survey indicate that travelers have the strongest holistic image of Iceland as a scenic nature destination. Results from the structured survey indicate that the tourists consider Iceland to be a safe place to visit, an opportunity for adventure, a friendly and hospitable destination, and a country of scenic and natural beauty. Results also indicate that people have strong and clear images of Iceland. The perceptual map results show Norway is Iceland's main competitor for tourists. According to the results, Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland seem to have a different image in tourists' minds. Two-country comparisons suggest Iceland and Greenland have more in common than Iceland and Faroe Island. Although these countries cannot be positioned together, these countries should consider working together to promote the area as a tourist region or cooperating together in their marketing activities.

INTRODUCTION

Effective image communications nationally and internationally are imperative to maintain a competitive advantage (Anholt, 2003; Ries and Trout, 2001). The destination's image influences both potential tourists' decision making behaviour (Jenkins, 1999) and the satisfaction level tourists experience at the destination (Chon, 1990). Images in potential visitors' minds effect the selection process and the destination's overall viability (Hunt, 1975). Internationally, destinations often only compete based on the images in potential visitors' minds. Therefore, tourism marketers spend money, time, and effort trying to create a favourable image to encourage visitors to visit or re-visit their destinations. Today's international tourism industry requires destination marketers and developers to understand tourists' images of both their destination and competing destinations (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999). Developing a destination's competitive position in tourists' minds requires creating and communicating favourable images to potential target markets (Calantone, Benedetto, Hakam and Bojanic, 1989; Gartner, 1993). Any destination positioning strategy must reinforce the target market's positive image, correct a negative image, or create a new image (Pike and Ryan, 2004).

Images of cities, states and countries as travel destinations have been studied extensively over the past thirty years (Pike, 2002; Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil, 2007). Surprisingly, little research has been conducted on Iceland's image as a destination (Prime Minister's Office, 2008). To address this shortcoming, this paper addresses the following questions. First, how do foreign travellers perceive Iceland? Also, how does Iceland compare to leading competitors? Finally, can Iceland, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland be positioned as one travel destination? To accomplish these goals, both unstructured survey and structured (quantitative) surveys were administered to tourists comparing Iceland to five other travel destinations, Norway, Scotland, the Faroe Islands, Finland and Greenland. The results suggest some strategies for promoting Iceland and possible synergies with other destinations.

THE IMAGE OF ICELAND AS A DESTINATION FOR TOURIST

Research on destination images began in the early 1970s with Gunn's research on how destination images are formed (Gunn, 1988), and Hunt's (1975) research on how destination images are measured (Gallarza, Gil and Calderón, 2002; Konecnik and Gartner, 2007; Nickerson and Moisey, 1999). Between 1973 and 2000 at least 142 published papers directly or indirectly investigate destination image topics (Pike, 2002). Over time, numerous definitions of destination image have been conceptualized (Gallarza, Gil and Calderón, 2002). Some authors examine how the literature defines destination image (e.g., Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; Gallarza, Gil and Calderón, 2002; Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil, 2007). Hunt (1975:1) defines image as: "perception held by potential visitors about an area." Crompton's definition is cited most commonly in other

academic articles: “the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination” (Jenkins, 1999). Several authors (e.g., Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; Fakeye and Crompton, 1991; Gartner, 1993) write about a limited conceptual framework for studying destination image. Several authors use destination image research components to cobble together a conceptual framework (e.g., Baloglu and McCleary 1999; Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; Gallarza, Gil and Calderón, 2002; Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil, 2007). Despite these efforts to unify destination image theory, no single approach is commonly accepted (Konecnik and Gartner, 2007). Still, many researchers agree that Echtner and Ritchie (1991, 1993) greatly contribute to framing destination image (Gallarza, Gil and Calderón, 2002; Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil, 2007). Their seminal study links the main destination image components in a useful and interactive way (Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil, 2007).

Research Method

The research used two measurement scales, one structured and one unstructured. The open ended questions were designed to find the holistic image of Iceland. A structured measurement scale was developed to uncover important attributes in Iceland’s image. The open ended questions allowed participants to describe their image of Iceland as a tourist destination. The questionnaire was based on three open ended questions designed by Echtner and Ritchie (1993) and three additional questions about participants’ gender and travel behavior. The three open ended questions were as follows.

1. What images or characteristics come to mind when you think of Iceland as a tourist destination?
2. How would you describe the atmosphere or mood that you would expect to experience while visiting Iceland?
3. Please list any distinctive or unique tourist attractions that you can think of in Iceland.

The first question inquires about Iceland’s holistic functional image. Question two queries respondents about Iceland’s psychological holistic image. Finally, question three examine whether or not Iceland has a unique destination image. Open ended questions were coded according to qualitative methodology.

The structured questionnaire consisted of 22 questions. The questionnaire measured respondents’ image of Iceland and the comparison countries based on twelve attributes: 1) Scenic and natural beauty, 2) Peaceful and quiet, 3) Good tourist facilities, 4) Friendly and hospitable, 5) Good food and drink, 6) Safe place to visit, 7) Good entertainment and nightlife, 8) Unique and different, 9) Opportunity for adventure, 10) Modern, 11) Wild, and 12) Good cultural experience. Respondents rated attributes on a nine-point scale (1= description fits badly; 9=description fits well). Additional questions included demographical information, experience and satisfaction travelling in Iceland, and destination loyalty

Survey implementation

The unstructured questionnaire was administered at Reykjavik’s Tourist Information Center (Visit Reykjavik, 2008) on June 5, 2008 (10am to 12pm). The structured questionnaire was pre-tested at two tourist destinations (Geysir on June 9 and Gullfoss on June 10). Final versions were administered at three sites, BSI (the Reykjavik main bus terminal), Gullfoss waterfall and Blaa Lonid, a geothermal lagoon.

A convenience sample was used to obtain participants for both surveys. Only people present during the survey’s administration have a chance to be part of the sample (Burns and Bush, 2006). Twenty-five tourists participated in the unstructured survey (15 males and 10 females). Seventeen tourists participated in the structured survey pre-test (8 males and 9 females). The final structured survey was answered by 394 participants (125 in BSI, 165 at Gullfoss and 104 in Blaa Lonid). Sixty responses were deemed unusable. The final sample consisted of 334 participants, 185 males (55.4%) and 149 females (44.6%).

Results for the Unstructured Survey

Three functional holistic groups emerged from the first question’s results. The biggest category is called “Nature and Scenery” (e.g., geysers, wild nature, volcano/lava, waterfalls, mountains, glaciers, and clean, cold skies). The second biggest category is called “Activities” (e.g., fishing, thermal pools, adventure, and horse riding). The third group is named “Culture and People” (e.g., woollen sweaters, interesting history, Björk, art, friendly, modern, environmental, unique, and quiet). From question two a number of atmosphere/mood image for Iceland emerged. The frequencies are shown in the brackets for frequent adjectives mentioned by the participants: Friendly (11), calm (5), relaxed (4), security/peace (3), alone (3), free/freedom (3). The third question’s results listed a number of unique places emerged as well as other places not considered unique to Iceland. The top places and their frequency in brackets include: Geysir (15), Blue Lagoon (13), and Gullfoss/waterfalls (9). Places not unique to Iceland but mentioned frequently include: Glaciers (5), whales (4), volcanoes (3), puffins (2), mountains (2) and museums (2).

Structured Survey Results

Figure 1 shows a perceptual map of the image actual visitors in Iceland during summer months have of Iceland and the comparison countries as tourist destinations. Iceland is located in the map's upper left corner. Located far from the middle indicates Iceland has a strong and clear image in peoples' minds. Iceland's most important attribute is "safe place to visit." Iceland's strong connections to other attributes also are apparent (e.g., friendly and hospitable, scenic and natural beauty, and opportunity for adventure).

The results show Norway is Iceland's closest competitor. Norway's map location suggests image is less clear to respondents. Respondents consider Norway to be modern and to offer a good cultural experience as a tourist destination. Norway's image also includes attributes such as good tourist facilities and good food and drink.

Scotland and Finland have similar positions in peoples' minds and can be considered competitors. Scotland's distance from the middle suggests respondents have a clear image of Scotland. Good entertainment and nightlife is Scotland's strongest attribute although the country's position is distant from that attribute. Opposite from Scotland is the attribute peaceful and quiet. This evidence supports Scotland's image as entertaining. Scotland also is positioned slightly in the opposite direction of the attributes wild and unique and different which suggests Scotland is not wild nor unique and different in peoples' minds when travelling to Iceland. Finland is not connected with any attribute; however, the country's position is opposite of Iceland. Apparently, Finland and Iceland are different destinations in respondents' minds since they share no similar attributes. Both Greenland and the Faroe Islands are not well positioned as tourist destinations. The Faroe Islands are positioned opposite of Norway. Respondents' image of the destination is not modern, not offering a good cultural experience, poor tourist facilities, and lacking good food and drink. Also, people do not associate the Faroe Islands with good entertainment and nightlife. Greenland's position suggests respondents have a clear image of the destination. The country is peaceful and quiet; however, it lacks good entertainment and nightlife. People perceive Greenland lacks good tourist facilities, good food and drink, and good cultural experiences. People do not consider Greenland to be a modern destination.

DISCUSSION

This study's objective is to understand actual visitors' images of Iceland as a tourist destination. What image do foreign travellers have of Iceland? The open-ended survey results suggest visitors have a strong holistic image of Iceland as a scenic nature destination. Iceland's is perceived as a destination of many activities and a country of interesting people and culture. Respondents believe the country is friendly, calm, relaxed and secure, and offers people the freedom to be alone. Results indicate Iceland offers something unique such as Geysir, the Blue Lagoon, and Gullfoss. Other non-differentiated offerings (e.g., whales, puffins, and museums) also are attractive attributes. Survey results suggest Iceland's image includes a safe place, adventurous, friendly and hospitable, and natural beauty.

How does Iceland compare to other countries as a tourist destination? The results indicate that Norway is Iceland's main tourism competitor. Iceland is perceived to be safer and more adventurous; Norway is perceived to offer better tourist facilities, food and drink, entertainment and nightlife, and cultural experience. To compete with Norway, Iceland needs to build the facilities up to higher standards.

Can Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland be positioned as one travel destination? According to the results, tourists have different images of Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland because they seem to offer different products. Comparing the destinations, Iceland and Greenland seem to have more in common than Iceland and the Faroe Islands. Although these countries cannot be positioned together, working together to promote the area helps both destinations.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Since a convenience sample was collected, the findings cannot be generalized to the population. The results do provide a starting point for understanding the image tourists have about Iceland as a tourist destination. The tourists' images while visiting Iceland could influence their perceptions compared to other countries. These tourists placed Iceland in their opportunity set and put the destination in their decision set. Iceland is a product worth buying, so to speak. In the structured survey, no attempt was made to determine whether the questionnaire's attribute set was used by tourist to define their image of Iceland. Possibly, other attributes better defined tourists' images. Additionally, other destinations may have been part of the respondents' choices. Perhaps distant destinations like New Zealand or Japan are alternative destinations when people consider travelling to Iceland?

Iceland's image as a tourist destination should be examined at three levels— pre-travel level, in situ, and post visit. To

examine these levels, the same attributes must be used. First, Iceland's target markets need to be defined. A combination of geographic, demographic, and lifestyle segmentation methods help identify visitor categories. In particular, lifestyle segments such as adventure seekers or nature lovers are promising segments to target. Next, these segments' preferred attributes need to be understood. These attributes vary depending on the target market being studied. Image is not a static measurement. Destination image studies need to be repeated over a long period of time. During visit level (in situ), further research can better define tourist subgroups such as samples of Germans or Americans only, or concentrate on a specific age group like young tourists. Differences in travelling style may yield interesting differences. A popular research topic in Australia is the image of backpackers. How are backpackers different to tourist segments in Iceland (e.g., package tours)? Finally, seasonal differences should be investigated. Do winter travelers have a different image of Iceland than those visiting during the summer?

Figure 1. Perceptual map for all participants

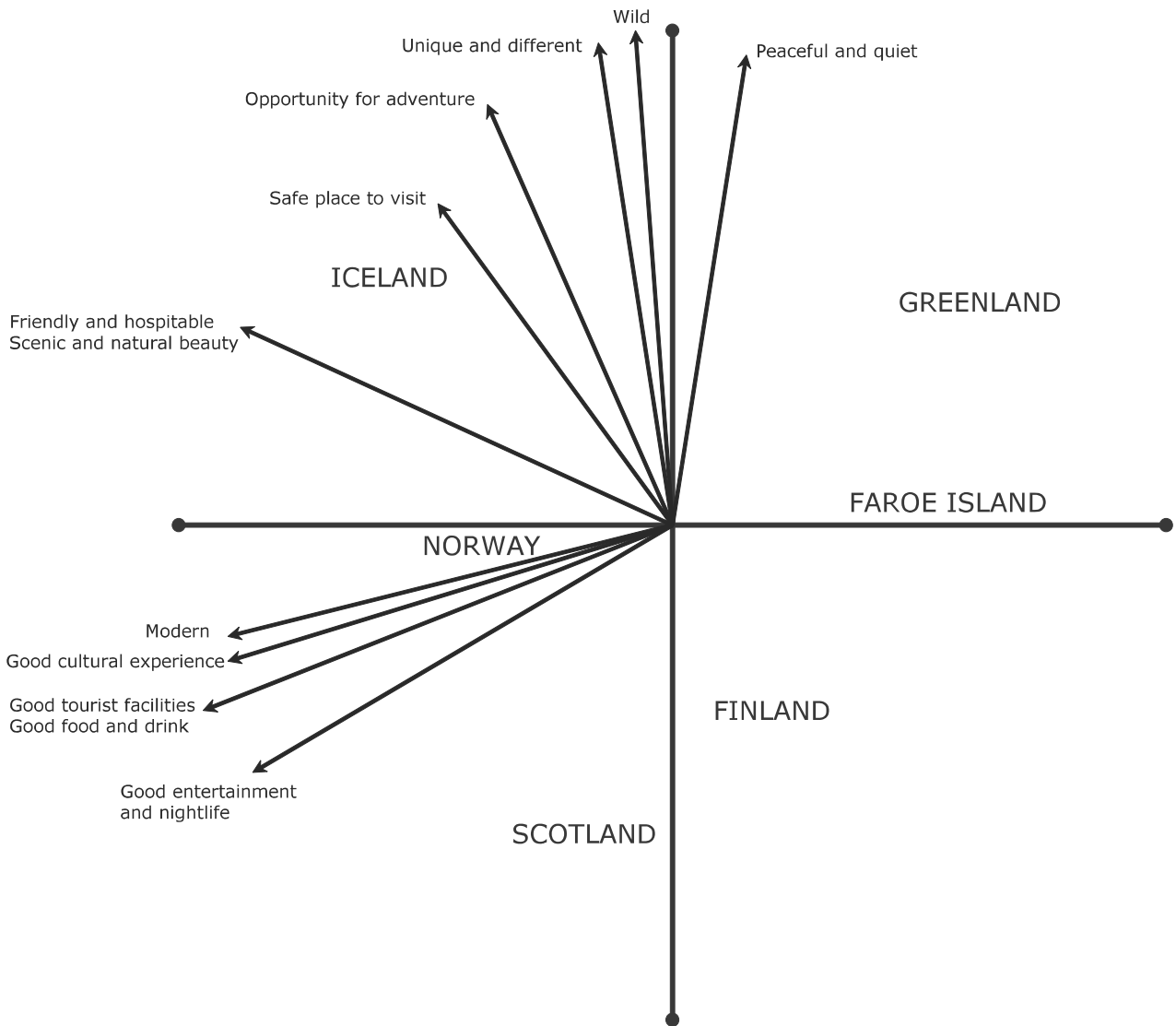


Figure 1. Perceptual map for all participants

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