VOLCANOS AND TOURISTS: ICELAND'S TEFLON IMAGE

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ABSTRACT
In this study, the authors evaluate whether the volcanic eruption occurring in Iceland in 2010 influenced the country's image among foreign tourists. The research is grounded on surveys from 2008, 2009 and 2014. All surveys measured 12 attribute images of Iceland compared to five other countries: Norway, Scotland, Finland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland. To examine the image effects, perceptual mapping technique was uses.

The outcomes reveal that Iceland's image in 2014 was comparable to what the image was in 2008 and 2009. Iceland had a strong connection to the same attributes as before, namely, scenic and natural beauty, a safe place to visit, friendly and hospitable and opportunity for adventure. We thus conclude that the volcanic eruption in 2010 had only insignificant influence on Iceland's image among visitors visiting the country in the summer of 2014. In fact, the eruption may have even strengthened the country's connection with nature and related attributes.

The research was conducted among visitors who had already decided to travel to Iceland and therefore reflects the effect of the volcanic eruption only among those tourists and not among other possible travelers. However, we conclude that a strong, positive and unique image is critical for the destination's brand, especially after major natural events like a volcanic eruption. By using longitudinal data, we empirically demonstrate that, based on the selected variables, major natural events may have only a marginal effect on a country's image, contradicting previous studies.

Keywords: Destination image, volcanic eruption, perceptual mapping

1. INTRODUCTION

For destination marketing, or place marketing, brand image is very (Nicoletta & Servidio, 2012). Image is also an important element in tourists' buying behaviour (Bigné, Sánchez, & Sánchez, 2001; Chen & Tsai, 2007), and one must keep in mind that image changes over time and is therefore not a fixed concept (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). Catastrophic happenings, such as volcano eruption, can have a major effects on the destination's brand and brand (Fetscherin, 2010), and in recent years, Iceland has experienced a collapse of its banking system in 2008 and a volcanic eruption in 2010. This eruption from the volcano Eyjafjallajökull severely affected people around the world; 95,000 flights were canceled, delaying more than five million travelers in reaching their destination. Both events received a substantial amount of global media coverage, which can have a sizeable influence on image formation (Govers, 2011) and word-of-mouth communication between individuals (Berry & Seltman, 2007). Brand image is composed of several factors, which certain events can affect either positively or harmfully. Considering this, we ask the following research question:

- **How has the image of Iceland among foreign tourists changed following the volcanic eruption in 2010?**

The paper is separated into four parts. The first part focuses on the literature review, the second part details the research method and data analysis, the third part presents the results, and finally, the findings are discussed, including limitations and research in the future.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Image has been defined as the "sum of beliefs, attitudes and impressions that a person or group has of an object" (Barich and Kotler, 1991). Image is an oversimplification of several ideas in the consumer's mind; it is complex as a concept and therefore not easily defined. (Kotler & Gertner, 2002; Nadeau, Heslop, O'Reilly, & Luk, 2008). Image is a personalized concept (Frías, Rodríguez, & Castañeda, 2008) as each person bases image on his or her perceptions (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Gartner, 1994). Many variables affect brand image (Hsieh, Pan, & Setiono, 2004), and customers can use image to differentiate between items, evaluate the quality of a product or brand and, reduce risk.

The literature suggests that for a places, image is a multi-dimensional concept (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martín, 2004; Frías et al., 2008; San Martín & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2008; Zhang, Fu, Cai, & Lu, 2014) and because of image complexity, the concept of image cannot be easily defined. Many researchers agree on two main components, cognitive and affective (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martín, 2004; Greaves & Skinner, 2010; Stern & Krakover, 1993), where the cognitive component consists of beliefs and knowledge about the destination, whereas the affective element refers to feelings about it (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Gartner, 1994; Walmsley & Jenkins, 1993).

In modern marketing, it is important to be unique and have a positive and strong image (Yilmaz, Yilmaz, İçigen, Ekin, & Utku, 2009). Successfully promoting a destination requires consistency between the projected image, that is, the brand identity, and the perceived image, namely, the brand image (Grosspietsch, 2006; Naidoo, Ramseook-Munhurrun, & Ladsawut, 2010; Qu et al., 2011). Tourism destination organizations often promote places with stereotypical symbols (Nicoletta & Servidio, 2012) that are not accurate and simplify the reality (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). It is crucial for marketers to measure the image being projected versus the image perceived by tourists before, during and after a visit as by doing so, they can then better understand how travelers perceive the destination at each stage and whether these perceptions align with the projected image (Molin, Gómez and Martín-Consuegra, 2010). Nicoletta and Servidio (2012) have noted that using travelers' opinions in selecting images for promotions could add value to the destination's brand. In addition, marketers can use such information to minimize variation between expectations and reality (Choi, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007; Greaves & Skinner, 2010; Qu et al., 2011).

Branding and image are related but different concepts (Cai, 2002; Kim, Boush, Marquardt and Kale, 2006). Branding requires identifying a consistent mix of brand elements that define and differentiate a destination, or place, through positive image building (Prebensen, 2007). Blain, Levy and Ritchie (2005) have argued that while most destination organizations understand the branding concept, some fail to offer a unique identity separating their destination from others. It is also common for destination marketing to rely on elements such as natural features and culture (Adeyinka-Ojo, Khoo-Lattimore, & Nair, 2014). Since competition in tourism is becoming stronger, it is important to find a unique attribute, which provides the opportunity for the destination to have a strong, positive and different perception among future guests (Morgan, Pritchard, & Piggott, 2002).

Research has demonstrated that branding in destination marketing can only be successful if it expresses a perception, which is strong, believable, accurate, fair and attractive. Because the brand must also reflect residents' wishes and beliefs (Anholt, 2009; Anholt, 2006; Anholt, 2010; Benoit, 1997; Kotler & Gertner, 2002), all tourist administrations should participate in the process of marketing, which should begin with an inward focus (Braun, 2011; Braun, Kavaratzis and Zenker, 2013; Klijn, Eshuis, & Braun, 2012; Pike, 2005; Trueman, Klemm, & Giroud, 2004; Vukic, Popovic, & Kuzmanovic, 2012). Kemp, Childers and Williams (2012) have noted that a positive attitude toward a brand among citizens results in a greater likelihood of them promoting the destination favorably through word-of-mouth and becoming advocates for the brand. In addition, Molina Gómez and Martín-Consuegra (2010) have suggested that the image perceived by those who have already visited the destination should be separated from the image held by those who have not visited. The actual experience of the destination has a substantial influence on a tourist's image as experience provides them with the opportunity to evaluate the destination based on their judgement rather than only through external sources (Buhalis, 2000; Caldiero, Taylor and Ungureanu, 2009; O'Leary & Deegan, 2005).

There are both informal and formal sources, which can influence perceptions about a place (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; Echtner and Ritchie, 2003; Naidoo, Remseook and Durbarry, 2012). The formal sources are what destination marketers promote (Beerli & Martín, 2004), whereas informal sources are becoming one of the main influential factors in image formation. However, destination marketers are increasingly losing control over the marketing process, especially since individuals share information through word-of-mouth and online. Travelers can offer information about the destination via blogs, travel review sites and social media (Govers, 2011; Pan, MacLaurin, & Crotts, 2007).

In addition to organic and formal marketing, major events can have a significant effect on a country's brand, in either the short or long term (Dinnie, 2008). These events can either accelerate or slow the process of a country's image change (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002). Every nation, every place, and every city has experienced tough times, which can affect tourism (Yeoman, Greenwood, & McMahon-Beattie, 2009) and even lead to a total termination of tourism (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999). These events can lead to a negative image, despite potentially arising from events outside a country's control, such as natural disasters, epidemics and terrorism (Kotler & Gertner, 2002).

In recent years, Iceland has dealt with two major events that had a negative effect on many persons. In 2008, Iceland's total collapse of the banking system saw all the major banks experiencing bankruptcy simultaneously. This event had a negative influence on the Icelandic economy and led to currency restrictions and large increases in the foreign exchange rate. In 2010, another major event rocked the country when a volcanic eruption occurred, stopping international flights throughout Europe. Jóhannesson and Huijbens (2010) investigate the relationship between tourism and crisis and aims at clarifying the consequences crisis has on tourism development in Iceland. They concluded that crisis would affect the ordering of Iceland as a destination. Saethorsdottir, Hall and Saarinen (2011) investigate the term wilderness and its association with high latitudes. The paper focuses on the historical and cultural processes that construct the wilderness idea in Iceland. The authors focus, however, was not on the effect of crisis on image as a comprehensive concept. In this paper, we investigate how these events, especially the volcano eruption, have modified the image of Iceland among foreign tourists. It is important for marketers to have information on potential changes on image of destination because of major events like volcano eruption and other similar events so they can modified marketing activities for the future.

3. METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

Data were collected in June and July 2014 from tourists in three popular tourist attraction Iceland and there were 370 valid answers. Around 50% of participants were male, 50% were younger than 35 years old, 32% were aged between 36-55 years old and 18% were 56 years of age or older. Around 85% were visiting the country for the first time and majority of participants were visiting the country for a holiday. Around 10% were visiting Iceland for the second time and around 5% had been to the country four times or often.

The questionnaire was administered in three different places: the flybus shuttles at Geysir, Haukadalur, which is a popular tourist attraction, and the central area of Reykjavik city. The questionnaire used in our survey was the same as used in the three earlier surveys. Two were administered in the summer of 2009 (Gudlaugsson, Eysteinsson and Sigurjónsdóttir, 2011) and one was conducted in 2008 (Gudlaugsson and Magnússon, 2012). The results of those surveys are used here as benchmarks.

The questionnaire consisted of 12 questions regarding Iceland's image attributes compared to five other countries: Norway, Scotland, Finland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland. These countries were evaluated in the benchmark research. Participants rated all the countries on the same attributes using a nine-point scale (1 = this attribute applies very badly to this country and 9 = this attribute applies very well to this country). The attributes were as follows: (1) scenic and natural beauty, (2) peace and quiet, (3) good tourist facilities, (4) friendliness and hospitality, (5) good food and drink, (6) a safe place to visit, (7) good entertainment and nightlife, (8) unique and different, (9) opportunity for adventure, (10) modern, (11) wild and (12) providing a good cultural experience. The same attributes were used in the research conducted before the volcanic eruption and are used here as a benchmark.

To analyze the data, the two data sets from the 2009 surveys were merged into one data set, and combined into one database along with the data from the 2008 and 2014 surveys. This approach created a very large data set with 89,200 elements (number of attributes x number of countries x number of valid answers). An ANOVA was used with a five percent level of significance to determine whether answers were statistically different. If a difference was detected, its effect was examined by calculating Eta squared. The data from 2014 were compared to the data from 2008 and 2009 using a perceptual mapping technique to examine Iceland's image before and after the volcanic eruption. There are many intuitive approaches that researchers use to develop an understanding of the competitive structure of their markets. The perceptual mapping methods provide formal mechanisms to depict the competitive structure of markets in a manner that facilitates differentiation and positioning decisions. The factors are presented as vertical and horizontal line and are based on those attributes with the highest velu of explained variance. Normally it show how products in a market are perceived on certain attributes and how it is seen from the customers' point of view. In this research the countries equal products or brands and the attributes are the images factors used in the research (for further information see e.g. Bijmolt and Wedel, 1999; Erickson, Johansson and Chao, 1984: Festervand, 2000; Gudlaugsson and Magnusson, 2012; Gwin, 2003; Lilien and Rangaswamy, 1993; Kohli and Leuthesser, 1993; Sharp and Romaniuk, 2000; Shugan, 2004; Sinclair and Stalling, 1990; Stanton and Lowenhar, 1977).

4. RESULTS

The results are presented in this chapter. First, the findings from the ANOVA are presented, followed by the perceptual maps.

Table 1 illustrates that there were significant differences in 6 of 12 attributes. These attributes are scenic and natural beauty, peaceful and quiet, good food and drink, good entertainment and nightlife, opportunity for adventure and good cultural experience.

TABLE 1: SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE ON IMAGE ATTRIBUTES

Image attribute	ANOVA	Sig. difference	Eta sq.
Scenic and natural beauty	$[F_{(2, 1484)}= 3.9, p =0.02]$	[2014 > 2009]	0.005
Peaceful and quiet	$[F_{(2, 1482)}= 11.2, p =0.00]$	[2014 > 2009]	0.015
Good tourist facilities	$[F_{(2, 1479)}= 2.2, p =0.11]$		
Friendly and hospitable	$[F_{(2, 1474)}= 3.7, p =0.03]$		
Good food and drink	$[F_{(2, 1474)}= 8.1, p =0.00]$	[2014 > 2008;2009]	0.011
Safe place to visit	$[F_{(2, 1478)}= 2.7, p =0.07]$		
Good entertainment and nightlife	$[F_{(2, 1414)}= 5.8, p =0.00]$	[2014 > 2009]	0.008
Unique and different	$[F_{(2, 1469)}= 0.6, p =0.56]$		
Opportunity for adventure	$[F_{(2, 1464)}= 9.6, p =0.00]$	[2014 > 2008;2009]	0.013
Modern	$[F_{(2, 1470)}= 3.5, p =0.03]$		
Wild	$[F_{(2, 1462)}= 3.5, p =0.03]$		
Good cultural experience	$[F_{(2, 1451)}= 14.4, p =0.00]$	[2014 > 2009]	0.019

The post-hoc comparison (Tukey) revealed no difference between the 2008 and 2009 data. However, in four cases, there was a difference between 2014 and 2009, where in all cases, 2014 had higher scores than 2009. Also, in two cases, there was a difference between 2014 and both 2008 and 2009. Here, 2014 also had higher scores than 2008 and 2009. The effect sizes of these differences were calculated using Eta squared. Based on Cohen definition (1988), 0.01 represents a small effect of the groups on the variance toward the attribute, 0.06 is a medium effect and 0.14 is a large effect. In all cases, the effect size was low, and in all cases, the Eta value was lower than 0.02, indicating that when there were differences between the surveys, less than 2% of the variance could be attributed to the year in which the survey was conducted. From these findings, we conclude that the volcanic eruption in 2010 had only a small effect on how participants evaluated Iceland on the various image attributes and when there was a difference, the score was always higher after the volcanic eruption than before.

The perceptual mapping methodology was used to examine the effects on Iceland's image. Perceptual maps for 2008, 2009 and 2014 were calculated, and the results for 2008 are provided in Figure 1.
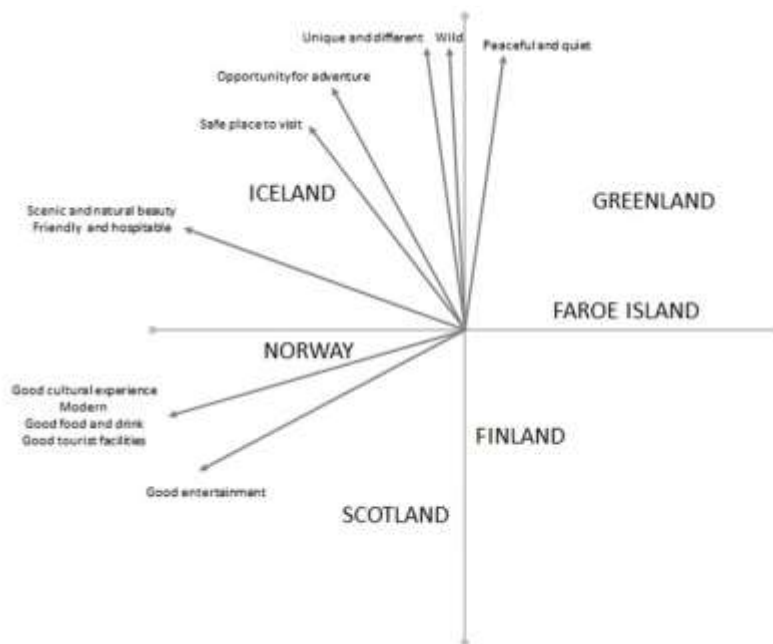
FIGURE 1: A POSITIONING MAP FOR 2008

Figure 1 demonstrates that Iceland was strongly connected with the attributes safe place to visit, opportunity for adventure, scenic and natural beauty, and friendly and hospitable. Iceland is also far away from other countries and therefore had a strong, positive and different perception based on the attributes mentioned above. The map indicates that the findings were robust since the attributes peaceful and quiet, and good entertainment are on opposite sides of the map. Attributes that have features in common should be grouped together, which is the case with the attributes modern, good cultural experience, good food and drink and good tourist facilities. This is also the case with the attributes unique and different, wild, and peaceful and quite. Findings also indicates that scenic and natural beauty and, friendly and hospitable do have something in common since these attributes are grouped together on the map.

As can be observed in figure 1, Norway had a strong association with the attributes good cultural experience, modern, good food and drink and, good tourist facilities. Norway is also not far away from Iceland and is therefore, from image perceptive, Iceland's main competitor. Greenland had a strong association with the attribute peaceful and quiet but week association with the attributes good cultural experience, modern, good food and drink and, good tourist facilities. Scotland had a moderate association with the attribute good entertainment but primarily week association with the attributes peaceful and quiet and, wild. Finland and Faroe Island are close to the center of the map, which indicate that those who participate in the survey does not have clear perception of these countries.

The results for 2009 are provided in Figure 2. The map is notably similar to the map for 2008, indicating that Iceland prompted a strong connection with the same attributes as it had that year that is safe place to visit, opportunity for adventure, scenic and natural beauty and friendly and hospitable. The map indicates that the findings are robust since the attributes peaceful and quiet and wild on the on hand and good entertainment on the other, are on opposite sides of the map. Peaceful and quiet and wild does have something in common and are grouped together on the map. This is also the case for the attributes good food and drink and good tourist facilities as well as the attributes good cultural experience and modern. Norway had a strong association with the attributes good food and drink and good tourist facilities. Finland is now closer to Scotland on the map but position for Greenland and Faroe Island are very similar as in 2008.
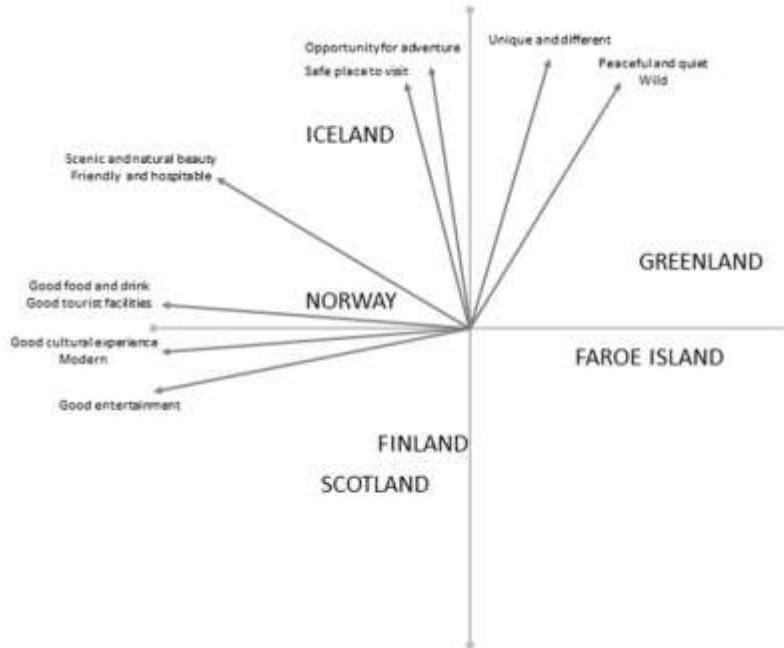
FIGURE 2: A POSITIONING MAP FOR 2009

Figure 3 presents the results for 2014. Again, the map is very similar to 2008 and 2009, that is, Iceland had a strong connection with the same image attributes as in previous years surveyed.
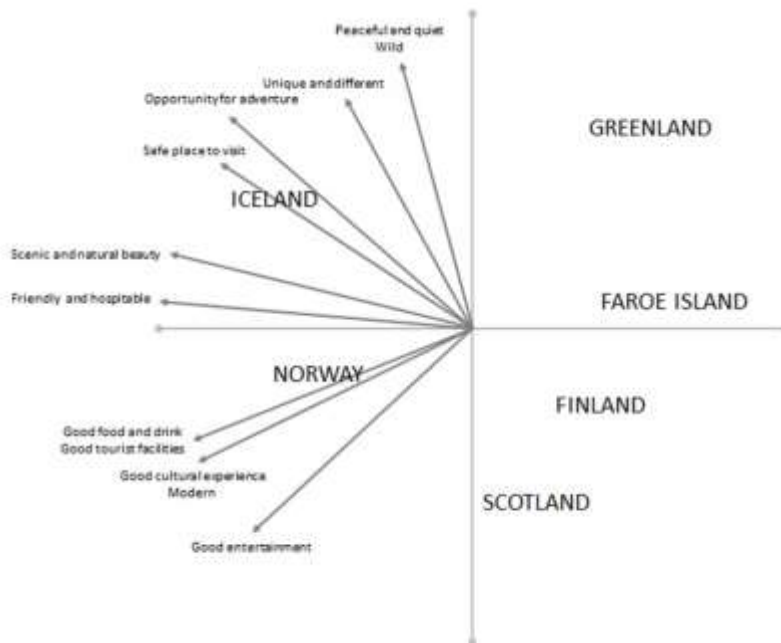

FIGURE 3: A POSITIONING MAP FOR 2014

Iceland is now considered as safe place to visit, offer opportunity for adventure and scenic and natural beauty. Norway, just like in 2008 and 2009, had strong association with the attributes good food and drink and, good tourist facilities and position for Scotland, Finland, Faroe Island and Greenland is very similar as in 2008 and 2009.

These findings demonstrate that the volcanic eruption did not have a negative effect on Iceland's image, as was expected. The country's image seems to be markedly similar as it was before the eruption, which if any, might have had a positive impact on Iceland's image since in most cases, the values for individual attributes were higher in 2014 than in 2008 and 2009, before the eruption.

5. DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper explores whether the volcanic eruption in 2010 had a significant effect on Iceland's image among foreign tourists in the summer of 2014.

The ANOVA results revealed differences in 6 of the 12 image attributes where most of the differences were observed between 2014 and 2009, and in all cases, the scores for 2014 were higher than for 2009. This finding is in line with arguments from Future brand (2014) stating that the volcanic eruption might have had a positive effect on Iceland's image and strengthened its connection to attributes such as natural beauty, peaceful and quiet, good food and drink, opportunity for adventure and good cultural experience. The findings from the perceptual maps support this argument since it seems that in 2014, Iceland had strong, positive and different perceptions among those who participated in the survey. Essentially, Iceland was, among those who participate in the survey, considered a land of natural beauty, as offering opportunities for adventure and that its people are friendly and hospitable.

The results also support earlier research regarding the country's image as strong since a major event, like the volcanic eruption, did not have any significant effect on the image among those who participated in the survey. To have a strong, positive and unique image is important when competing with other destinations (Hassan et al., 2010; Morgan et al.; Ritchie, 2004; 2002; Saunders, 2008; Yeoman et al.; Yilmaz et al., 2009).

However, note that this research was conducted among tourists who had already decided to travel to Iceland and therefore only considers the influence the volcanic eruption had on their perception of Iceland. This paper does not report on the image that other potential travelers may have. Nevertheless, reviews and recommendations from former travelers through word-of-mouth which strongly influences a potential tourist's decisions to visit, or not visit, a destination. Also, since this research was conducted four years after the volcanic eruption, the timing may have affected the results, as there is a possibility that the eruption had a negative effect on Iceland's image in the short term. For instance, the eruption caused inconvenience and portrayed the country as a hazardous place.

It might be interesting to replicate this research among travelers who have not yet decided to travel to Iceland and compare their perceived image to that of those who have already visited. It might also be interesting to explore whether the projected image of Iceland is comparable to its perceived image and examine whether such congruency can account for tourists having a consistent image of Iceland.

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