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Do Marketers Use Visual Representations of Destinations That Tourists Value?
Comparing Visitors' Image of a Destination with Marketer-Controlled Images Online

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Abstract

The study explores visitors' image of a destination using online visitor-generated photography and compares the findings with images of the same destination that marketers create and control on the Internet. The two studies are conducted with Taiwan as the context-destination. Online visitor-generated photography yielded over 100 photographs from visitors to Taiwan, and indicates that visitors' holistic image encompasses notions of Taiwanese uniqueness, ancientness, and authenticity through their perceptions of the natural landscapes, traditional local cuisine, and culture. The second study yielded 1526 visual image representations of Taiwan collected from a variety of website sources, and findings highlight the disparities between the holistic image construed by visitors to Taiwan and the image created by marketers on the Internet. The findings yield important implications for the effective positioning and promotion of tourism destinations as managers should consider visitors' holistic images in their attempt to create destination images through online visual representations.

Keywords: Destination Image, Taiwan, Online Visitor-Generated Photography, Online Visual Representations

1. Introduction

Numerous studies focus on the importance of destination image illustrating that tourist behavior is largely affected by perceptions of a destination. In particular, evidence suggests that consumers' image of a destination significantly affects travel choice, satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Chen and Tsai 2007; Lee 2009b; Woodside and Lysonski 1989). The importance of destination image is also evident in the supply-side since there are significant implications of image on positioning and promotion (Baloglu and McCleary 1999; Pike and Ryan 2004; Tasci and Gartner 2007). Marketers use destination image to position destinations vis-à-vis competing ones and to differentiate them in the minds of travelers. Destination image is thus used as a promotional tool to gain a competitive advantage over other destinations (Hosany, Ekinici and Uysal 2006; Morgan, Pritchard and Piggott 2002).

Previous literature has investigated Taiwan's tourism and destination image (e.g., Chen 2004; Chen and Tsai 2007; Lee 2009a and 2009b; Lin, Wu and Chang 2006; Min 2008). For example, Chen and Tsai (2007) examine destination image in relation to satisfaction and purchase intention, focusing specifically on visitors to the Kengtin region of Taiwan, while The Tourism Bureau of Taiwan (2011) suggests that local gourmet and natural scenery are the main features attracting tourists to Taiwan. Furthermore, Chen (2004) indicates that the most common cognitive images visitors hold about Taiwan are that of good food, friendly people and shopping convenience, while the affective feelings refer to crowdedness, pleasantness and excitement. Other studies on Taiwan's destination image focus mainly on one aspect rather than on a holistic view (e.g., Su, 2006; Wu, 2004). For example, research investigates food identity in Taiwan (e.g., Lin, Pearson and Cai 2011), foreign visitors' images and experiences of Taiwan's night markets (e.g., Lee et al. 2008), as well as the calendar effects that impact Taiwan's international tourism (e.g., Lin, Pearson and Cai 2011).

This stream of research focuses mostly on attribute-based components of Taiwan's image and hence does not capture the holistic image of the destination. Indeed, holistic image is important and is gaining more attention from destination image researchers (Echtner and Richie 2003). Although tourists might value different attributes in different ways, destination image portrays an overall 'mental picture' (Pearce 1988), which suggests that attributes are woven in a total impression (MacKay and Fesenmaier 1997). As a result, holistic image plays an important role in the way in which destinations are categorized (Echtner and Richie 1993). Consistent with Stepchenkova and Morrison (2008, p.550), we consider the holistic component as reflecting 'the overall component of the destination image,' and consequently, incorporating both cognitive (attribute-based) and affective components. In addition, existing literature focuses on destination image as construed by visitors. Past studies (e.g., Andrades-Caldito, Sánchez-Rivero and Pulido-Fernández 2012; Jenkins 2003; Markwell 1997) suggest that visual representations promoted by the tourism industry should be informed by visitors' photographs and their images of a destination. In support of this, Perdue (2002) argues that in order for tourism marketing strategies to be successful, marketers need to show appreciation of the distinguishing and unique characteristics of tourists' experiences. However, such studies do not compare images construed by visitors and marketer-controlled images, which is a research area worth pursuing.

This study addresses the two theoretical gaps outlined above, namely the lack of research on holistic destination image, and the lack of comparison between images construed by destination visitors and marketer-controlled images. Thus, this research aims to contribute to the extant literature firstly by exploring visitors' holistic destination image of Taiwan, including both cognitive and affective components rather than a single dimension (e.g. Su 2006; Wu 2004); and secondly by comparing this image with marketer-controlled, visual

image representations of Taiwan on the Internet. To achieve these objectives, a study has been conducted using online visitor-generated photography to capture visitors' holistic image of Taiwan (Study 1). A second study has been carried out to compare visitors' image with the image marketers attempt to create via visual representations of Taiwan on the Internet (Study 2). Additionally, research investigating the Internet as a destination image formation tool is still limited (Choi, Lehto and Morrison 2007), and the use of visual images in travel destination research is relatively new. Therefore this study contributes to this end as well. In terms of practical contributions, the findings of this study have significant implications for the promotion of Taiwan as a tourism destination. Successful tourism campaigns promoting Taiwan should focus on creating an image with elements that tourists value when visiting this destination.

2. Literature review

2.1 Background on Destination Image

Destination image is defined as '*a composite of various products (attractions) and attributes woven into a total impression*' (MacKay and Fesenmaier 1997, p.538). Individuals form impressions about destinations as a consequence of a selection process that considers numerous pieces of information (Reynolds 1965). The image construed by tourists constitutes an individual or group perception of a particular place (Fakeye and Crompton 1991).

Destination image therefore constitutes the overall perception a traveler holds about a particular place. Garrod (2008) argues that it is these perceptions, either real or projected, that determine destination image.

Destination image has been defined in various ways, with many definitions being vague (Echtner and Ritchie 2003). In particular, theory has been inconclusive with respect to the

elements incorporated in the concept. Some studies define destination image using only cognitive elements, highlighting the functional characteristics of a place, such as price and availability (Hunt 1975; Prebensen 2007). Others focus on psychological characteristics, such as atmosphere and feelings, to elicit destination image (Baloglu and Brinberg 1997; Ryan and Cave 2005). Nevertheless, there is wide agreement among tourism researchers that destination image encompasses at least two dimensions, namely cognitive and affective (Baloglu and McCleary 1999; Echtner and Ritchie 2003; Hosany, Ekinici and Uysal 2006; McKay and Coulwell 2004). The cognitive component involves beliefs and knowledge about the physical attributes of a destination, while the affective component refers to the appraisal of the quality of feelings towards the attributes and the proximate environments (Baloglu and McCleary 1999). A review of the destination image literature by Bigné, García and Blas (2009) illustrates the dominance of the cognitive component, and emphasizes a failure to address critical affective elements. Yet, empirical evidence highlights the critical role of affect (Baloglu and Brinberg 1997; Elliott, Papadopoulos and Kim 2011; Mazanec 2010) and suggests that emotions and feelings also need to be incorporated into the concept of destination image.

Adding to the complexity of the conceptual boundaries of destination image, several scholars recognize a third dimension in the form of conative elements (Gartner 1993; Mazanec 2010; Pike and Ryan 2004). The conative component refers to the way in which individuals act towards a given destination based on the knowledge (cognition) and feelings (affect) they have about it, reflecting behavioral intentions. The three dimensions are interrelated; cognitive components impact on affect (Baloglu and McCleary 1999), while both cognition and affect have a significant effect on conation (Stepchenkova and Morrison 2008). In an attempt to conceptualize destination image comprehensively, Echtner and Ritchie (2003)

present a multidimensional model which summarizes the main dimensions using three continuums, namely *attribute-holistic*, *functional-psychological* and *common-unique*. The attribute-holistic continuum refers to whether consumers perceive images in terms of ‘separate’ pieces of information (e.g., climate, accommodation facilities, convenience of transportation) or as a ‘whole’ mental picture. The functional-psychological continuum suggests that functional characteristics such as price levels, transportation infrastructure and climate, or psychological characteristics such as friendliness, safety and service quality can shape destination image. The common-unique continuum describes traits that are common and applicable to all destinations or those that are unique to a certain destination.

2.2 Destination Image Formation and Its Implications

The challenge of exploring destination image formation lies in the fact that each person’s view of a destination is unique and derives from his/her own memories, associations, and imagination of that destination (Jenkins and McArthur 1996). A plethora of factors affect destination image formation. Specifically, personal (Baloglu and McCleary 1999) and stimulus factors, such as marketing communications and information use (Baloglu and McCleary 1999; Govers, Go and Kumar 2007; McCartney, Butler and Bennett 2008), as well as visitors’ distance from the destination (Hunt 1975; Kastenholtz 2010), have a considerable impact on the formation of destination image. In addition, other studies highlight differences in the formation of image as a result of culture (Crompton 1979; Hunt 1975; Fakeye and Crompton 1991; Martín and del Bosque 2008).

Given the numerous factors that affect destination image formation, researchers have sought to integrate them into coherent categorizations. Gunn (1972) identified three different types of images based on the sources used to construct them, and the stages in which destination

image is constructed. Travelers may first construct an *organic image* of a destination based on non-commercial, social, and advisory sources (Van Raaij and Francken 1984), such as friends' views and other information sources. Secondly, destination image may also be construed through the assimilation of travel information from commercial sources, such as travel agents and brochures (*induced image*). Thirdly, image could be formed through personal experiences. This image, labeled *modified-induced image*, tends to be more realistic and more complex (Phelps 1986; Echtner and Ritchie 2003). Literature attests that *organic* and *modified-induced* images are the most influential because they have higher credibility than *induced* image. Additionally, organic and modified-induced image may entail emotional aspects (e.g. experiences), while induced image, which is controlled by marketers, may focus mostly on cognitive components such as price, convenience and availability.

Marketers cannot directly control organic and/or modified-induced images (Tasci and Gartner 2007). However, they are able to create induced destination images that are consistent with the organic and modified-induced images tourists have of specific destinations, which in turn can be more credible. To achieve this, marketers should develop appropriate methods to unveil the holistic dimensions of destination image and also capture the idiosyncratic features and auras of destinations (Echtner and Ritchie 2003) by eliciting visitors' *emic* perspectives; that is, representational accounts that reflect and prioritize beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of research participants in ways that are meaningful and significant to them.

2.3 Methodological Challenges for Destination Image Researchers

Various methods have been used to capture the different dimensions of destination image. Although the focus has been on structured surveys to measure both the cognitive and affective aspects of destination image (e.g., Baloglu and Mangaloglu 2001; MacKay and

Fesenmaier 2000), qualitative methods such as interviews, pictorial stimuli, and tourists' own projected images have also been used (Dann 1996; MacKay and Couldwell 2004; Hosany, Ekinci and Uysal 2007). However, different methods yield different destination images and attributes (Prebensen 2007; Hosany, Ekinci, and Uysal 2007), which suggests that no single technique is completely successful in capturing all the dimensions of destination image (Echtner and Ritchie's 2003). The literature concludes that images of tourism destinations are sometimes connected with storytelling and visual narratives and as a result, researchers should rather use open-ended and free elicitation methods.

The points above highlight the importance of developing innovative methodological approaches to investigate destination image, which allow for new meanings and thus new types of knowledge to emerge from both textual and visual representations, grounded on the perspectives of those who travel to the destination. Many disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, psychology and marketing recognize the relevance of visual images and new technologies in affording new understandings (Dicks, Soyinka and Coffey 2006) of how people make sense of and construct meanings about the world. This, in turn, has meant new potential for the use of photographic images and technologies in interdisciplinary qualitative research (Pink 2009) and has given rise to a range of diverse visual research approaches (e.g., Kress and van Leeuwen 2001; Pink 2009; van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2000).

These approaches have faced some resistance, as some disciplines seem to value textual narratives above all other communicative modes and media (Heisley 2001; Pink 2009). Nevertheless, photographs have been used extensively to uncover perceived image (MacKay and Couldwell 2004; Urdapilleta et al. 2010; Wade and Abetz 1997). In marketing,

researchers employ print ads to explore consumer perceptions and attitudes (Polyorat, Alden, and Kim 2007), masculinity representation and identity in advertising (Schroeder and Zwick 2004), and ethical issues of visual representation in marketing communication (Schroeder and Borgerson 2005).

2.4 Photography, Visual Representation, and Travel Research

Numerous studies show the significant role of photography in tourism (e.g., Chalfen 1979; Jenkins 2003; Markwell 1997; Morgan and Pritchard 1998). In support of this, Urry (1990) *'holds the practices of photography and tourism to be both conceptually and practically inseparable'* (in Garrod 2009, p.347). Photographs and visual representations are used by marketers in brochures to promote destinations and create induced image (Pritchard and Morgan 2001; Choi, Lehto and Morrison 2007). Yet visitors are not passive recipients of the promotional efforts made by tourism marketers. Based on Urry's work (1990), a number of studies acknowledge visitor photography as a key determinant of destination image formation (e.g., Jenkins 2003; Markwell 1997). Tourists' own photographs reinforce the visual representations developed by tourism marketers, and consequently help maintain the attractiveness of a particular destination. Put differently, visitors can co-create the image of a destination alongside the tourism industry, and therefore it is important for marketers to consider the organic or modified-induced image visitors hold of a destination when developing destination image promotional campaigns.

Evidence illustrates a strong link between photography and tourism, so researchers have turned their attention to the data collection method of visitor-employed photography (Haywood 1990; MacKay and Couldwell 2004; Markwell 2000; Dortwart, Moore, and Leung 2009), which is a structured method that allows the in-depth investigation of destination

image through the use of *prompted*, visitor-captured photographs. Scholars argue that destinations' images should be believable, simple, appealing, distinctive, and should resonate with visitors' experiences (Gilmore 2002; Kotler and Gertner 2002). Therefore, visitor-employed photography is considered an appropriate method to use in destination image elicitation. Visitor-captured photographs are part of visitors' accounts of their travel experiences and evaluations, which allow researchers to interpret tourists' accounts of a destination from tourists' own, *emic* perspectives. The advantage of such methodologies is that they attempt to describe and understand beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors in ways that are meaningful and significant to research participants and their cultures, whereas methodologies that prioritize *etic* accounts seek to investigate the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of participants from the perspective of the researcher, which is inevitably guided and framed by the *prior* theoretical assumptions of those conducting the research. This means that, as a method, visitor-employed photography has the potential to empower research participants since they shoot the visual themes or issues on which they wish to focus, by taking and displaying their own photographs. As Balomenou and Garrod (2010) suggest, asking participants to identify themes themselves is a more fruitful technique than researchers' attempts to make assumptions about the significance of pre-determined narrative themes or issues.

Photographs can also represent the emotions and information that individuals experience when visiting destinations (Morgan and Pritchard 1998). Further, visitor-employed photography unveils both tangible and symbolic dimensions of image (MacKay and Couldwell 2004), providing greater insights into destination image components and helping to delineate the holistic image of a destination. Despite the established importance of visitors' perspectives in destination image formation (e.g., Jenkins 2003, Garrod 2009), there is still a

lack of research using visitor-employed photography (Garrod 2009). Further, the limited number of studies that have utilized visitor-employed photography have based their data collection on pre-travel requests for photographs (e.g., Dorwart, Moore, and Leung 2009; Garrod 2009; MacKay and Couldwell 2004). This may have introduced bias in the research design in that participants might have seen their destinations in a different way had they not participated in such studies (Balamenou and Garrod 2010). Also, given the recent advances in online consumer and travel research (e.g., Kozinets 2009; Lin and Huang 2006; Magnini, Crotts and Zehrer 2011), there is much scope to explore the extent to which unprompted, visitor-generated photography can be combined with online research to deconstruct destination image, and the extent to which such data may provide richer insights into visitors' holistic images, and their *emic* representations of travel destinations.

3. Study 1

3.1 A study of Taiwan

Taiwan is an island in the western Pacific Ocean 160 kilometers off the coast of China, it is 36,000 km², and has a population of 23 million. Taiwan has put great emphasis on building their tourist destination image and although tourist arrivals have increased over the past years, the numbers are still low relative to destinations such as Thailand and Malaysia (World Tourism Organization 2010). Taiwan's poor performance as a travel destination relative to other competing Asian destinations is attributed to the lack of a clear positioning (Chen 2004; Liao 2005). Despite its beautiful sceneries and natural resources, visitors do not recognize Taiwan as a travel destination but instead, as an 'Industrial Formosa' (Tourism Bureau of Taiwan 2007). Taiwan has tried to enhance its image by focusing on the ecological environment (e.g., national parks) and cultural characteristics and events (e.g. aborigine festivals, foods, and the art of drinking tea), which are unique to Taiwan (Tourism Bureau of

Taiwan 2007). However, there is still a lack of knowledge about visitors' holistic image of Taiwan, which is one of the gaps this study seeks to fill (Study 1).

3.2 Methodology

The study's objective was to elicit visitors' *emic* and holistic image of Taiwan using unprompted 'visitor-generated' photography online. For the purpose of this study, we consider the term 'visitor-generated' photography to be more appropriate than 'visitor-employed' photography because visitors created and generated the images themselves without being prompted, and then submitted them electronically after their trip to Taiwan. In this way, the study addresses the bias problem faced by previous travel research utilizing prompted visitor-employed photography. It is this unstructured element in the data collection process that helps to uncover the holistic features of Taiwan (Echtner and Richie 2003).

The qualitative research design required that participants submit electronically up to 5 digital photographs (MacKay and Couldwell 2004) shot by them while visiting Taiwan. The total number of digital photographs received reached 103, with an average of 4.6 photographs per participant. The main researcher informed participants that their digital photographs were going to be used for academic purposes only. Although images featuring people have been analyzed, they are not presented in this article to avoid privacy issues. A purposive sample, which entails the use of judgment to deliberately and purposefully recruit participants for a study (Patton 1990; Pratt 2009; Strauss and Corbin 1998), was recruited online through discussion boards and travel forums about Taiwan. The names of such boards and forums are not disclosed here in order to protect participants' anonymity. The sample consisted of 22 participants (12 females and 10 males) from various countries, and their ages ranged from 18 to 55. Most participants had extensive travel experience and visited all regions of Taiwan.

Participants' comprehensive knowledge of Taiwan enabled them to provide insightful photographic representations of Taiwan's holistic image from their own perspectives. Participants had a chance to select the photographs that, in their opinion, best represent their overall image of Taiwan as opposed to the image of a single Taiwanese region or place as done in previous studies (e.g., Chen and Tsai 2007). In line with MacKay and Couldwell (2004), participants provided brief textual narratives that described why they think that those photographs best represent their overall image of Taiwan. In addition, participants assigned each photograph a short subject or title and indicated whether the image was positive or negative.

3.3. Analysis of Qualitative Data

Although written and visual analytical processes can be very different and difficult to integrate, they both require meaningful textual coding that resonates with a specific research aim. Such an approach has been used in previous studies, following a '*call for more pluralistic approaches in tourism analysis*' (MacKay and Couldwell 2004, p.390). We have reconciled the differences in written and visual analysis by using the brief titles and short textual descriptions submitted by participants to sensitize ourselves to the *emic* perspectives intrinsic to participants' visual representations. The written data was coded and analyzed following the general principles of thematic analysis (Bryman and Bell 2011) alongside the themes that were emerging through the coding of digital photographic images. This allowed for new meanings and knowledge to emerge from each representational mode (visual and written), in a complementary and joint way (Pink 2009). Further, participants were also contacted via online forums and bulletin boards when the subjects of specific photographs were unclear or ambiguous. This practice created a dialogue between the researcher and participants, which was facilitated by the online environment and enabled participants to have

‘more voice’ in the interpretive process. Indeed, such collaborative approaches to visual research are said to ‘share control’ over the process of visual representation and participants’ meanings (Pink 2009; Warren 2005), where new knowledge emerges as a joint, multi-vocal, and co-creative endeavor.

Images were logged according to content and textual narratives were coded and then categorized thematically (Table 1). Consistent with MacKay and Couldwell (2004), the analysis moved from a descriptive to an interpretive stage, and given that the interpretive process is usually influenced by the main researcher’s own background, interpretation was triangulated through ‘meaning cross-checks’ among different members of the research team (Pratt 2009). The preliminary analysis resulted in forty-three photographic subjects and 13 types of reasons for visiting Taiwan, which were then integrated and grouped into five main categories. These categories, in turn, generated two key themes, which are discussed in the following section.

(Table 1)

3.4 Emerging Themes and Discussion

3.4.1 A Sense of ‘Taiwanese Ancientness’

The notion of an exciting and unique ‘Taiwanese ancientness’ emerges as a common theme across most of the participants’ visual and textual representations. Participants attach words such as ‘*uniqueness*’ to pictures as diverse as ancient natural landscapes, traditional architecture and culture.

Ancient Geographic Sites, with Traditional and Modern Structures. Participants consider the

uniqueness of landscapes as an important representational feature of their image of Taiwan. In fact, much of the imagery participants provided include representations of the natural beauty and the ancient geographic sites that are so ‘*popular*’ and ‘*unique*’ (Etchner and Ritchie 2003) to Taiwan. Visual icons encompass gorges, mountains, waters, and national parks in sites such as Mount Alisan (Picture 1), Yehliu Geographic Park, Kenting National Park, Sun Moon Lake (Picture 2) and Taroko Gorge (Picture 3).

Picture 1

Picture 2

The textual material, which accompanies the visual evidence, shows that Taiwan’s landscapes fascinate the study’s participants:

“Taiwan’s endless panorama of mountains is truly breath-taking; Taiwan has many beautiful mountains with the kinds of spectacular features and views even non-hikers can easily enjoy” (Participant 21, Male, North America).

And another participant commends Taroko gorge:

“Stunning scenery, like nothing man-made” (Participant 4, Male, Malaysia).

Indeed, this sense of uniqueness also extends itself to dimensions of Taiwan’s ancient, but also modern civilization, particularly buildings such as the Taipei 101 (Picture 4), the National Palace Museum, Chiang Kai Shek Memorial Hall, and other temples that represent the subjects of the photographic evidence participants provided.

Picture 3

Picture 4

Participants' visual representations of Taiwan indicate that they value the archaic structures that reveal traditional and exotic qualities, as many of the built structures in the photographic submissions are of this kind. These structures and buildings have a sense of tradition and heritage that tourists appreciate and contribute to visitors' perceptions of Taiwan as authentic, that is, outside of contemporary society. Indeed, some respondents consider built structures such as Taipei 101, and Queen Head in Yehliu Geographic Park, to be unique and authentic because they are the only ones in the world.

Although the sample of this research is very small to make any overarching claims about cross-cultural comparisons, it is interesting to highlight that Western respondents' visual representations of their image of Taiwan consist mainly of ancient, natural landscapes, whereas Asians' representations of Taiwan involve images of the man-made, traditional, Taiwanese built environment such as the Taipei 101, and the Eslite bookstore. Indeed, previous research highlights that visitors from different countries or cultures have different knowledge about, and motivations to visit, a particular destination (Prebensen 2007). Other research on the impact of culture also highlights differences in terms of destination image among visitors (Fakeye and Crompton 1991; Martín and del Bosque 2008). This encourages further cross-cultural research to explore differences in destination image among culturally diverse visitors of Taiwan.

Unique Cultural Traditions. Participants describe visual representations of Taiwanese culture as '*reflect[ing] local daily life*', '*commonly seen*', and '*reveal[ing] local culture*'; all primary reasons for the selection of the digital photographs that best represent participants' image of Taiwan. These textual descriptions (e.g., '*reveals local culture*') extend to Taiwan's traditional love of food. The majority of participants mention either the food stalls (picture 5),

a particular dish or fruit (picture 6), or the night markets in their descriptions of the photographs. This finding complements Chen's (2004) observations that food and food stalls constitute the most common cognitive tourist image of Taiwan. Concurrently, Taiwan's Tourism Bureau survey on tourists' preferences reports that Taiwanese gourmet is one of the most important reason for tourists to visit Taiwan (Tourism Bureau of Taiwan 2011).

Picture 5

Picture 6

Participants also express an admiration for the variety of food, particularly at the Shih-Lin Night Market:

"We may need to take around seven days to try up all the foods in the market"

(Participant 12, Female, Southeast Asia)

Similarly, another participant affirms:

"Food is almost a national obsession – from the vast varieties to the sheer amount of it available anywhere, anytime. Delicious, abundant, and of course, cheap!" (Participant 20, Male, North America)

Taiwan's traditionally wide variety and availability of food indicate that culinary art is a strong dimension of visitors' image of Taiwanese culture; this study suggests that participants appreciate the quality of the foods available in Taiwanese markets, relative to those of other destinations. Specifically, a respondent conveys:

"Night markets occur in many other Asian countries, but they are much better, particularly the food, in Taiwan" (Participant 14, Female, Europe).

Almost all photographic representations of Taiwanese people reveal the importance that participants attach to interaction with locals during their visit. Visual representations of this kind include digital photographs of new Taiwanese friends, fellow tour members, and indigenous people. Participants' descriptions of the photographs indicate that they perceive Taiwanese people as religious and friendly. This corroborates Hofstede's (1984) notion that some cultures are more collectivist (i.e. cultures that value social ties and collective wellbeing above the achievement of single individuals) than individualist (i.e. cultures that value individual achievement and wellbeing).

Religion and Taiwanese Tradition. Some participants find the combination of religious symbols and the local, contemporary atmosphere very unique to Taiwan (pictures 7 and 8):

Picture 7

Picture 8

“The exotic and mundane occur side by side in other countries. But the Chinese temples [in Taiwan] and similar representations are part of everyday life, which they are not in mainland China. The day-to-day involvement of these religious temples in everyday life I find unique to Taiwan” (Participant 14, Female, Europe).

Participants perceive Taiwanese people as religious due to the plethora of ancient temples, which are in the middle of contemporary urban spaces that are part of everyday life. Also, events such as religious ceremonies, natives' festivals, and the New Year festival reveal local traditions, and are key dimensions of Taiwan's functional image (Etchner and Ritchie 2003). Attendance at, or participation in, these local events provides visitors with new experiences

and a sense of involvement with the local traditions. The experiences of visitors who took part in cultural activities created a ‘*sense of participation*’ and had a big positive impact on their image of the Taiwan. For example, participant 3 learned to ride a motorcycle whilst in Taiwan, so his visual representation of Taiwan involves digital photos of scooters and bikes (“*the ubiquitous scooter*”, picture 9). Likewise, participant 13 made her own clay doll, so she submitted a digital photograph of her doll, which reflects a very personal and subjective image of Taiwan (picture 10). These examples illustrate that participants develop feelings of authenticity and closeness to that particular local culture, which is often what visitors seek during a trip.

Picture 9

Picture 10

Finally, participants’ image of Taiwan involves one of the most iconic symbols of Taiwanese culture, the ‘Dragon’, mainly due to the fine dragon sculptures present in temples, as well as due to the annual dragon festival.

3.4.2 Contradicting and Negative Images of Taiwan

Contradictory Taiwan. Another cognitive image expressed by participants involves the scooters and bikes in Taiwan’s busy streets. While these scooters represent the main transportation of the locals, they also reflect the density of Taiwanese towns and cities and the fast pace of life in Taiwan. A participant indicates:

“*It is interesting to see men in suits and women in dresses driving a motorcycle to work*” (Participant 6, Female, USA).

In line with Chen (2004) this suggests that the density of cities and the busy streets constitute tourists' functional holistic image of Taiwan (Etchner and Ritchie 2003). However, this is in not an entirely positive dimension of Taiwan's image. Despite the distinctive fusion of old and new that contributes to its unique sense of 'Taiwanese Ancientness', the business and crowding of the streets and markets are somewhat inconsistent with participants' perceptions of tradition.

Negative Representations. Participants' comments on the crowding of the streets and markets imply negative connotations. However, only 4 out of 103 photographs of crowded streets and areas had a negative textual description, which indicates a qualitatively low level of negative affect and experiences. Nevertheless, participants still hold negative attitudes toward the current political situation in Taiwan, although this may be as a result of information participants' acquired via the media. Previous research highlights the importance of the media as catalysts in destination image formation (Gunn 1972). For example, in Prebensen's (2007) study, respondents held negative images of North Norway as a result of exposure to different media. Similarly, Nuttavuthisit (2007) suggests that promotional campaigns have contributed to the creation of images and stereotypes of Thailand as a sex tourism destination. This suggests that the media has the potential to contribute to the creation of negative destination images. Therefore marketers should manage such negative images in order to ensure a coherent destination image for Taiwan.

4. Study 2

4.1 Destination Image Representation of Taiwan on the Internet: A Content Analysis

A second objective of this study was to compare visitors' destination image of Taiwan with marketer-controlled visual image representations of Taiwan on the Internet. As

aforementioned, photographs are used by marketers to promote a destination, and communicate a certain 'induced' image (Pritchard and Morgan 2001). By comparing visitors' image of Taiwan with visual representations controlled and communicated by marketers to tourists via the Internet, we aim to identify any disparities which would have implications for the effective positioning, and development, of an appealing offer to tourists. To achieve this goal, we undertook extensive online research that aimed to collect and analyze websites found in Google and Yahoo travel directories.

4.2 Methodology

Our methodology involved the selection of a sample of websites found through an extensive research of websites' lists under Google's and Yahoo's travel directories (e.g. Choi, Lehto and Morrison 2007). This research was conducted between July 3 and July 16, 2012. During this period we collected data from three tourists' website sub-categories: 'tour operators and travel agencies', 'travel guides', and 'government tourism office'. Given that some of the websites from the first two sub-categories contained little information on Taiwan, but provided a direct link to official government websites, they were excluded from our study. After data screening, we maintained 10 tourist agencies, and tour operators' websites (e.g., PlanetWare), eight tourist guide websites (e.g., Lonelyplanet) and two official government websites (e.g., Ministry of Transportation and Communications and Republic of China and Taiwan – the heart of Asia). Visual images collected from all three categories were saved as separate files, alongside any image descriptions provided. We excluded all photographs uploaded by visitors, and focused only on those uploaded by marketers or government officials. This resulted in 1526 photographic images, of which 453 were from travel agents and tour operators, 528 from tour guides, and 545 from official government websites. The following section presents the analysis of the imagery found on these websites followed by a

comparison of the findings with those of study 1.

4.2 Emerging Themes and Discussion

In line with previous research (Choi, Lehto and Morrison 2007), we analyzed our visual and textual data by first logging the images in each category of websites, according to their content and textual narratives (i.e. descriptions/captions provided by marketers to the digital images). This resulted in 10 sub-categories within each category of website (Table 2). Table 3 lists the categories according to the order of importance of specific visual representations of Taiwan.

(Table 2)

(Table 3)

Secondly, we compared the images across all the website categories and, to minimize researchers' bias in interpreting the images and textual content, different members of the research team conducted 'meaning cross-checks' (Table 2).

Nature and Geographic Scenery. Overall, the websites portrayed Taiwan as a destination characterized by its distinct “*geographical richness and stunning scenic views*” (Taiwan, The Heart of Asia). In contrast to the themes that emerged in Study 1, Taiwan's natural beauty is presented idiosyncratically; separate from traditional and modern structures. Such representations include 240 visual icons encompassing a large variety of natural settings

ranging from Taiwanese landscape, such as parks and forests, to animal life and vegetation. Interestingly, a comparison of the marketer-controlled visual representations of Taiwan across website subgroups reveals somewhat different strategies in portraying Taiwan. While *nature and geographic scenery* is the most important and prominent visual characteristic of Taiwan on both government and tour guide websites, tourist agencies have a different approach and attempt to induce a different image of Taiwan. Tourist agencies and tour operators place more emphasis on images of Taiwanese cities, towns, and populated areas. Their presentation of Taiwan is less static, showing a vibrant everyday city life, and the charming atmosphere of small towns in Taiwan.

Religion, Tradition and Heritage. Consistent with Study 1, where respondents find *religion, tradition and heritage* of Taiwan an important determinant of its uniqueness, our website image analysis showed that out of 1526 digital images, 15.14% fall into this category. A key difference is that in Study 1 respondents see festivals as part of the religious and traditional atmosphere of Taiwan, whereas in Study 2 festivals are a separate category. Web images of Taiwanese festivals are clustered separately from those portraying religious symbols, temples and Taiwan's heritage, and are found in separate sections of tourism websites. Although previous research highlights the importance of taking part in local events such as festivals when visiting a place (Etchner and Ritchie 2003), marketers' visual representations of Taiwan's image as a tourism destination that encompasses festivals is very limited (see Table 2).

Cities, Towns and Populated Areas. Compared to Study 1, where respondents find photographs of modern structures such as the Taipei 101 to be the most distinct features of Taiwan, in Study 2 there are only 64 (out of 209) digital images of city and town areas

containing representations of Taipei 101. Also, almost half of those images (31) are located in websites of tourism agencies and tour guides.

Arts, Art Facilities, and Contemporary Taiwan. Two categories that emerged only in Study 2 pertain to modern as well as artistic images of Taiwan. Government websites emphasize contemporary Taiwan, and portray digital images of Taiwanese art as well as art facilities (i.e. museums). There is a special focus on representing Taiwan as a modern destination, which keeps up with today's social (e.g. equality laws), and technological (e.g. agriculture, production, farming) progress. This contradicts Study 1, where a more traditional and ancient image of Taiwan represents Taiwanese uniqueness. In contrast to government websites, travel guides', travel agencies', and tour operators' websites portray a more active image of Taiwan, with a higher number of visual images relating to recreational activities (i.e. hot springs, cycling, hiking, and shopping), and the dynamic, everyday city life of Taiwan.

Local Cuisine and dining. In contrast to Study 1, where respondents indicate that local cuisine as a key part of their image of Taiwan, in Study 2 local cuisine and dining occupy a very small percentage of the visual images found in marketer-controlled websites. Although this emerged as a separate subcategory in our analysis, only 6.95% of total subgroup representations capture images of food, food stalls, and night markets. This is surprising, considering the results of a 2011 report of Taiwan's Tourism Bureau survey, which shows Taiwanese gourmet as the most important reason for tourism in Taiwan.

Ecotourism. This is another emerging category, which occupies sections in the travel websites explored and which has not emerged as a theme in Study 1. However, marketer-controlled digital images in this category are scarce, and correspond only to 0.5% of this study's total

visual representations of Taiwan. Nonetheless, it is important to dedicate a special subcategory to ecotourism as it is consistent with Taiwan's recent '21st Century Taiwan Tourism Development Plan', in which ecotourism is identified as an important direction for future Taiwanese tourism development (Tsaur, Lin and Lin 2006). Ecotourism is necessary for both sustainable development and conservation (Stem et al. 2003), and as such has been considered a top priority for national tourism organizations (Moisey and McCool 2001).

Finally, a few marketer-controlled visual representations of Taiwan's image on relevant websites explore tourist facilities and recreational tours although most of the visual images in these categories were extracted from travel guides, travel agents, and tour operators.

5. General Discussion and Practical Implications

The findings of this study complement previous literature (Gunn 1973) by highlighting a number of differences between visitors' image of Taiwan explored through online visitor-generated photography and the image representations of Taiwan portrayed in commercial websites (Table 4).

(Table 4)

Within the three marketer-controlled website categories (e.g., government websites, tour guides and travel agents/tour operators), there is inconsistency in terms of the representation of Taiwan's image as a destination. In particular, government websites and tour guides portray a somewhat static picture of Taiwan by emphasizing natural and geographic scenery, while tourism agencies and tour operators focus on presenting a more dynamic image of Taiwan and show a busy city life. This is in line with Asian visitors' image of Taiwan, as

identified in Study 1. This image involved the man-made element of the Taiwanese built environment, such as the Taipei 101 building. As aforementioned, our sample was small and does not support such cross-cultural comparisons, however this calls for further research on the topic in order to explore differences in destination image among culturally-diverse visitors, and to complement research that investigates differences in destination images created by tourism agencies targeting Western versus Asian tourists.

Findings from Study 1 show that the image participants hold about Taiwan is different from the visual image representations portrayed by all three website categories. Specifically, Study 1 indicates that respondents associated geographical scenery with ancient and modern structures of Taiwan, whereas these themes emerged as separate categories across three types of marketer-controlled websites. We argue that this finding has implications for the development of successful tourism campaigns that promote Taiwan as a tourism destination. If marketers wish to be successful in achieving effective positioning and development of an appealing offer to tourists, they should portray a more holistic image of Taiwan, where the modern intertwines with the ancient. In addition, certain aspects of Taiwan, such as the local cuisine and festivals, which are valued greatly by visitors of Taiwan (Study 1), are only marginally represented across the three marketer-controlled website categories. It is advisable for tourism marketers to recognize the importance such aspects of Taiwan have for potential tourists, in order to reorganize their image representations according to what tourists are likely to value more deeply, including notions of ancientness and participation in local culture and local cuisine, and which participants in Study 1 identify as unique among other competing Asian destinations. In line with previous empirical evidence, it is suggested that marketers should focus their promotional activities on 'iconic' assets (Litvin and Mouri 2008) unique to Taiwan. Further, given that some respondents in Study 1 indicated negative images

of Taiwan as emerging from the crowded streets and areas (although the level of negative affect and experiences was low), and given that the extant literature shows that visitors are more likely to consider, and choose, destinations with strong positive images (Woodside and Lysonski 1989), commercial websites can contribute to minimizing negative affect by portraying the business and crowdedness of Taiwan's streets and markets as a part of Taiwanese uniqueness, and as an example of the fusion between old and new.

Finally, the critical role of affective components of the destination image is widely accepted within the destination image domain (e.g. Baloglu and Brinberg 1997; Mazanec 2010). The dominance of cognitive elements in existing literature results in a failure to address these critical affective components (Bigné, García and Blas 2009). This is also the case across all three website pictorial image descriptions, where physical attributes dominate appraisal of the quality of feelings towards the attributes and the proximate environments (Baloglu and McCleary 1999). The only exceptions that could be found are in one of the government websites and two tour guides websites. However, the affective representations are still dominated by the cognitive representations (Tables 5a and 5b).

Table 5a

Table 5b

Conclusions

This study investigates Taiwan's image in a holistic manner through the use of online visitor-

generated photography and compares the identified visitors' images with visual representations of Taiwan on the Internet to identify key gaps. With regard to Taiwan's destination image, two main themes are uncovered. The themes reflect participants' images of local people and the unique infusion of cosmopolitanism and traditionalism, which participants perceive as authentic and unique to Taiwan. On the basis of the meanings that have emerged from this study, key adjectives that shape the image visitors hold of Taiwan vis-à-vis other Asian destinations include 'unique', 'authentic', 'ancient' and 'exotic', and they are useful to promote Taiwan as a travel destination. Hence the promotion of uniqueness, ancientness and particularly authenticity could benefit Taiwan significantly, since authenticity (see Chhabra 2005) has a significant effect on tourist expenditure (e.g., Chhabra, Healy and Sills 2003) and destination choice (e.g., Sedmak and Mihalič 2008).

Additionally, this study explores marketer-controlled visual image representations of Taiwan on the Internet and compares this image with that of visitors as identified in Study 1, highlighting key disparities. Our findings indicate that visitors to Taiwan value the images of ancientness and the sense of participation and interaction with the local culture as well as the local cuisine, which they referred to as unique among other Asian cuisines. In contrast, marketer-controlled visual representations of Taiwan highlight mostly nature, the modern and contemporary images of Taiwan, which respondents tend to intertwine with ancient elements. These findings are important and relevant to destination managers in forming appealing images of destinations on the Internet. Destination marketers should consider visitors' holistic images of a destination when attempting to form images of tourism destination via online visual representations.

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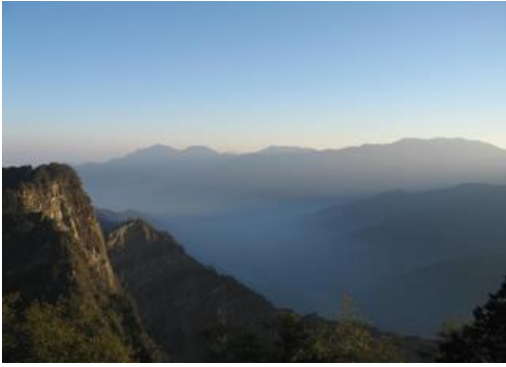
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Picture 1



Picture 2



Picture 3



Picture 4



Picture 5



Picture 6



Picture 7



Picture 8



Picture 9



Picture 10



Table 1: Key Themes and Sub-Categories of Online Visitor-Generated Photography (Study 1)

Themes	Sub-Categories
A Sense of 'Taiwanese Ancientness'	Ancient Geographic Sites, with Traditional and Modern Structures
	Unique Cultural Traditions
	Religion and Taiwanese Tradition
Contradicting and Negative Images of Taiwan	Contradictory Taiwan
	Negative Representations

Table 2: Marketer-Controlled Image Subcategories

	Government websites	Travel guides	Travel agencies and tour operators
Nature and geographic scenery	115 (21.1%)	87 (16.5%)	38 (8.4%)
Cities, towns and populated areas	50 (9.2%)	32 (6%)	127 (28%)
Religion and tradition and heritage	66 (12.11%)	76 (14.4%)	89 (19.65%)
Art and art facilities	104 (19.1%)	64 (12.12%)	5 (1.1%)
Modern and Contemporary Taiwan	93 (17.1%)	35 (6.6%)	44 (9.7%)
Festivals	24 (4.4%)	16 (3%)	10 (2.2%)
Local cuisine and dining	42 (7.7%)	48 (9%)	16 (3.5%)
Recreation tours and activities	43 (0.79%)	86 (16.29%)	30 (6.6%)
Tourist facilities and infrastructure	2 (0.3%)	78 (14.77%)	86 (18.98%)
Ecotourism/eco-parks	5 (0.9%)	1 (0.1%)	2 (0.4%)
Other (medical travel etc.)	1 (0.2%)	5 (0.9%)	6 (1.3%)
TOTAL	545	528	453

Table 3: Order of Importance of Visual Representations by Category (Study 2)

Image Categories	Number of Visual Representations
1. Nature and geographic scenery	240
2. Religion, tradition and heritage	231
3. Cities, towns and populated areas	209
4. Art and art facilities	173
5. Modern and contemporary Taiwan	172
6. Tourist facilities	166
7. Recreation tours and activities	159
8. Local cuisine and dining	106
9. Festivals	50
10. Ecotourism	8

Table 4: Marketer-Controlled Image Categories in Frequency of Appearance across Website Categories (Study 2) and Online Visitor-Generated Photography Categories (Study 1)

Government web-sites	Travel guides	Travel agencies and tour operators	Online Visitor- Generated Photography categories
Nature and geographic scenery 115 - (21.1%)	Nature and geographic scenery 87 - (16.5%)	Cities, towns and populated areas 127 - (28%)	Ancient Geographic Sites, with Traditional and Modern Structures – landscapes, ancient and modern civilization/structures
Art and art facilities (including museums and outdoor sculptures plus photos of old Taiwan) 104 - (19.1%)	Recreation tours and activities (including sport and shopping, night life and hot springs) 86 - (16.3%)	Religion and tradition and heritage 89 - (19.6%)	Unique cultural traditions – everyday life, local cuisine, interaction with locals
Modern and Contemporary Taiwan 93 - (17.1%)	Tourist facilities and infrastructure 78 - (14.8%)	Tourist facilities and infrastructure 86 - (18.9%)	Religion and Taiwanese tradition - religious symbols, religious ceremonies, festivals, taking part in cultural activities

Religion and tradition and heritage 66 - (12.11%)	Religion and tradition and heritage 76 - (14.4%)	Modern and Contemporary Taiwan 44 - (9.7%)	Contradicting and Negative Images of Taiwan - business and crowdedness of the streets and markets, political situation
Cities, towns and populated areas 50 - (9.2%)	Art and art facilities (including museums and outdoor sculptures plus photos of old Taiwan) 64- (12.12%)	Nature and geographic scenery 38 - (8.4%)	
Recreation tours and activities (including sport and shopping, night life and hot springs) 43 - (0.79%)	Local cuisine and dinning 48 - (9%)	Recreation tours and activities (including sport and shopping, night life and hot springs) 30 - (6.6%)	
Local cuisine and dinning 42 - (7.7%)	Modern and Contemporary Taiwan 35 - (6.6%)	Local cuisine and dinning 16 - (3.5%)	
Festivals 24 - (4.4%)	Cities, towns and populated areas 32 - (6%)	Festivals 10 - (2.2%)	

Ecotourism/ecoparks	Festivals	Art and art facilities
5 - (0.9%)	16 - (3%)	(including museums and outdoor sculptures plus photos of old Taiwan)
		5 - (1.1%)
Tourist facilities and infrastructure	Other (medical travel etc.)	Other (medical travel etc.)
2 - (0.3%)	5 - (0.9%)	6 - (1.3%)
Other (medical travel etc.)	Ecotourism/eco-parks	Ecotourism/eco-parks
1 - (0.2%)	1 - (0.1%)	2 - (0.4%)
TOTAL	545	528
		453

Table 5a: Marketer-Controlled Digital Photographs with Affective Elements

Website

Government:

<http://taiwanimage.gio.gov.tw/photo/en/> Covered in thick mats of seaweed that grow every March and April, green fingers of rock reach into the sea near Laomei in the Northeast Coast National Scenic Area.

Along Taiwan's Central Cross-island Highway, the Liwu River has carved the marble cliffs of Taroko Gorge into a dramatically deep and narrow chasm.

Tranquil under the warm glow of sunrise, Taipei welcomes another new day.

A night scene of Kaohsiung Harbor, the largest harbor in Taiwan and the 6th largest container port in the world.

As Taiwan's social values become more diverse, many people no longer view a passionate kiss on the street as outrageous.

Tour guides:

Lonely planet description – only one A colorful tiger sculpture at the Spring and Autumn Pavilion.

Go2Taiwan – only one Love River is perhaps the best place in KAOHSINUG for an evening promenade.

Table 5b: Examples of Digital Image Descriptions with Cognitive Elements

Website

Tourist agency:

Absolutetravel

Lantern festival in Tainan

Tour guide:

Taiwan Adventures online guide

Sileng Hot Spings - North Cross Island Highway

Government:

Taiwan – the heart of Asia. Tourism Bureau,
Republic of China (Taiwan)

Blowing Sugar Figurines