Destination image

Sometimes the notions people have about a brand do not even seem very sensible or relevant to those who know what the product is 'really' like. But they all contribute to the customer's deciding whether or not the brand is the one for me.

Gardner & Levy (1955, p. 35)

Aims

The aims of this chapter are to enhance understanding of:

- the role of image in destination marketing
- consumer decision sets
- the importance of travel context in destination image analysis.

Perspective

The images held by consumers play a significant role in travel purchase decisions, and so an understanding of the images held of the destination by consumers is important. The previous chapter introduced the concepts of brand identity, brand positioning, and brand image as distinctive components of the brand construct. These are graphically presented again Figure 11.1. Brand identity represents the values and essence of the destination community, is the self-image aspired to in the marketplace, and has an internal focus on motivating and guiding stakeholders. This chapter discusses the image component of destination branding. This represents the actual image held by consumers, which might be quite different to that intended in the brand identity. Major objectives of any marketing strategy will usually be to either create a new image, or to reinforce positive images already established in the minds of the target audience. The topic of destination image has arguably been the most prevalent in the tourism literature.
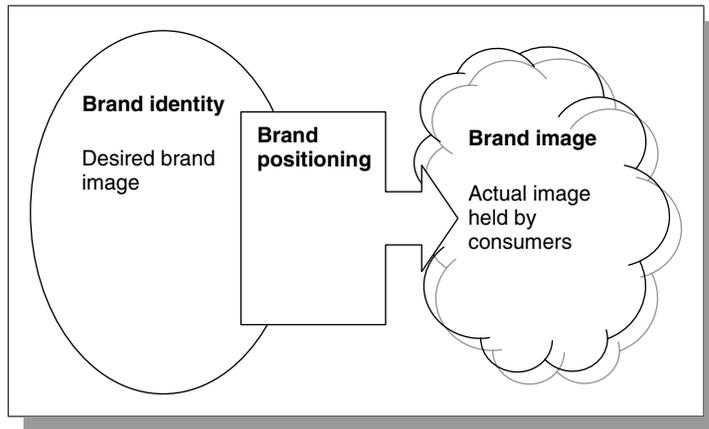

Figure 11.1
Brand identity, brand positioning and brand image

The role of image in destination marketing

At the 2000 Tourism and Travel Research Association conference in Hollywood, John Hunt used the example of three peasants breaking-in a new field, to describe the 1970s destination image research undertaken by himself, Edward Mayo and Clare Gunn. In the 30 years since their pioneering work, destination image has been one of the most prevalent topics in the tourism literature. One of my papers, for example, categorised 142 destination image studies published in the literature between 1973 and 2000 (see Pike, 2002).

Chon's (1990) review of 23 of the most frequently cited destination image studies found that the most popular themes were the role and influence of destination image in buyer behaviour and satisfaction. Indeed Hunt's (1975) view, that images held by potential travellers are so important in the destination selection process that they can affect the viability of the destination, has become axiomatic. After all, most tourism products are services rather than physical goods, and can often only compete via images. Key implications of this for destination marketers are the issues of intangibility and risk, substitutability, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability.

Intangibility and risk

Prior to purchase, a guitar may be played in the store, shoes can be fitted, and a car taken for a test drive. Products are tangible things that can generally be inspected, touched, trailed, and exchanged. All of our senses are available to us as we shop for products at the mall. However, the only physical evidence of a holiday destination may be in brochures, web pages, holiday snapshots, or in the media. Thus, expectations of the holiday are realisable only after purchase and actual travel (Goodall et al., 1988). It follows then that a consequence of intangibility is an increased risk in the travel purchase decision. Several types of risk may be of concern to travellers and suppliers:

- **Performance risk** Will the service perform as expected? Tourism destination performance risks include a diverse range of factors, such as poor weather, labour strikes, substandard service encounters, civil unrest, grumpy travellers, theft and other crimes, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes, fluctuating exchange rates, traffic delays, airport congestion, and terrorism. Since satisfaction with a destination will result from a series of service interactions, over which the DMO has no control, the potential for dissatisfaction is considerable.
- **Social risk** To what extent will the travel experience enhance well-being or the self-concept? Is there potential for embarrassment? There may also be a risk of stress involved when travelling in unfamiliar environments. Mansfield (1992) referred to the social stress of tourism, when motivated to travel by membership of a social reference group. For example, social risk may occur when joining a coach tour of strangers, since holidays represent interplay between merging into a group and affirming individuality (Mollo-Bouvier, 1990).
- **Physical risk** Is there potential for harm? Travellers not only assess the risk of harm at a destination, but will also consider the transport facilities and transit environments en route (see, for example, Page et al., 1994; Page & Wilks, 2004).
- **Financial risk** Does the financial investment represent value? The annual holiday is often regarded as a high involvement decision with significant household expenditure (Driscoll et al., 1994). The higher the level of involvement in the decision, the higher the perceived risk will likely be.

Inseparability and variability

Customers are actively involved in the delivery of a service, since production and consumption occur simultaneously. Increasingly, travellers have been seeking greater involvement in tourism products as participants rather than as passive observers (Crouch, 2000). Also, perceptions of the same destination experience may be quite different among different travellers, leading to different perceptions of value.

Perishability

Destination services are perishable, since they cannot be stored for sale later during high-demand periods. Individual businesses attempt to match capacity with projected levels of demand though measures such as yield management and sales promotions. For DMOs, this presents challenges in forecasting the impacts of seasonality, periodicity, special events, and exogenous events.

Substitutability

As has been suggested, destinations are close substitutes for others in crowded markets, since travellers have available to them a myriad of destinations that will satisfy their needs. Even taking into account price incentives, what influences a traveller to select a destination they have not previously visited? In such cases images can provide a pre-taste. Influencing these images by DMOs requires insights into the image formation process.

Image formation

While it is agreed that destination images can play an important role in travel decisions, defining destination image and understanding image formation are not so clear. A number of authors have been critical of attempts to conceptualise the construct. Certainly the range of definitions used in the tourism literature has been so great that image is becoming marketing jargon (Cossens, 1994a). It has been proposed that most destination image studies have lacked any conceptual framework (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). From a review of 15 studies between 1975 and 1990, Echtner and Ritchie suggested most definitions were vague, such as 'perceptions of an area'. Jenkins (1999) found the term destination image had been used in a number of different contexts, including for example perceptions held by individuals, stereotypes held by groups, and images projected by DMOs. Questions have been raised as to whether researchers were actually certain of the unique properties of destination image, and whether it could be accurately measured. However, this not a problem faced by destination image researchers in isolation since, in the wider marketing literature, Dobni and Zinkhan's (1990) review of brand image

studies found little agreement on either the definition of the construct or on how it should be operationalised.

The mind's defence

Our minds often struggle to cope with the daily flood of advertising and other media (Ries & Trout, 1981). In this regard the explosion in destination choice and destination publicity material has only served to increase confusion among potential travellers (Gunn, 1988). A central theme within the marketing literature has been the difficulty the mind has in dealing with this increasingly busy world. However, Jacoby (1984) argued that while consumers could become overloaded with information, they would not generally allow this to occur. Instead, coping mechanisms are developed. The need for simplified processing by the mind was implicit in the definition of image proposed by Reynolds (1965, p. 69):

> *The mental construct developed by the consumer on the basis of a few selected impressions among the flood of total impressions.*

This viewpoint holds that we develop simplified images through some sort of creative filtering process. For example, we are selective about which messages attract our attention; we are selective about how we interpret and even distort information; and we are selective about which information we will retain in memory. This selective filtering is a form of perceptual defence (Moutinho, 1987). The black box of how this filtering of cognitive information occurs in the internal brain processes to produce a composite image is not yet fully understood (Stern & Krakover, 1993). The same may be said of the process of destination image formation by individuals (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a).

Associative network memory

A number of extensive literature reviews on the topic of memory structure (see, for example, Keller, 1993; Cossens, 1994b; Cai, 2002) have found the most commonly accepted conceptualisation has been by a spreading action. This has been referred to as the associative network memory model, which sees memory as consisting as nodes and links (Anderson, 1983). A node represents stored information about a particular concept, and is part of a network of links to other nodes. Activation between nodes occurs either through the action of processing external information or when information is retrieved from memory. When a node concept is recalled, the strength of association will dictate the range of other nodes that will be activated from memory. A destination brand is conceptualised as representing a node, with which a number of associations with other node concepts are linked. Key implications of this are the level of awareness of the destination and the strength and favourability of associations with important attributes and benefits.

Another important concept for multi-attributed entities such as destinations is that of an overall or composite image (see Baloglu & McCleary,

1999a; Dichter, 1985; Gartner, 1986; MacInnis & Price, 1987; Mayo, 1973; Stern & Krakover, 1993). MacInnis and Price described imagery as a process of the representation of multisensory information in a gestalt. Discursive processing on the other hand is the cognitive elaboration of individual attributes. A key issue for destination image research is whether imagery or discursive processing is used to evaluate destinations (Echtner, 1991). In the view of Echtner and Ritchie (1991), the definitions of image used by destination researchers did not explicitly identify whether the interest was in a holistic image or in the individual attributes. My (Pike, 2002a) review of 142 destination image studies found most were using lists of attributes. Studies interested in measuring holistic impressions have included Pearce (1988), Um and Crompton (1990), and Reilly (1990).

A further dimension of destination image introduced by Echtner and Ritchie (1991) was the issue of common functional attributes versus unique and psychological features. Since most of the studies they reviewed required respondents to compare destinations across a range of common attributes, there was little opportunity to identify any attributes that may be unique to a destination. They proposed a continuum between those common functional and psychological attributes on which destinations are commonly rated and compared and more unique features, events, or auras. However, it should also be recognised that unique features may not necessarily explain a destination's competitive position if they do not offer benefits in a specified travel context.

Perception is reality

Unfortunately for the marketer, images may only have a tenuous and indirect relationship to fact (Reynolds, 1965). However, whether an individual's perceived images are correct is not as important as what the consumer actually believes to be true (Hunt 1975). This proposition continues to underpin consumer behaviour research today, often referred to as *perception is reality*. This originated from Thomas' theorem: 'What is defined or perceived by people is real in its consequences' (Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p. 572, in Patton, 2002)

Also, given a single fact, a consumer can create a detailed image of a product through simple inferences (Reynolds, 1965). One way this occurs is through 'plot value', where certain attributes are seen by an individual to go together. In this way we construct a plot from a small amount of knowledge. Knowledge of a destination's location may enable the construction of an image including likely climate and geography. For example, New Zealand's location in the South Pacific may incorrectly stimulate an image of a tropical climate. A similar phenomenon may occur through the 'halo effect', where a product that is rated highly on one attribute is then also assumed to rate highly on others. The reverse may also apply. Pizam et al. (1978) suggested a halo effect may occur at a destination where satisfaction, or dissatisfaction, of the total product is the result of an experience of one of its components.

> **In practice**
>
> One example from my own experience highlights this issue. As a destination marketer I received a handful of complaints from travellers each year, primarily relating to service encounters. One of these was from a North American visitor to Rotorua (New Zealand) who felt so strongly about their encounter that they took time to write to me after they had arrived home. During a visit to the resort's most popular visitor attraction they were handed a Fiji 20 cent coin as part of the change given at the ticket booth. When they then tried to spend that same Fiji 20 cent coin at the attraction's café they were told in no uncertain terms that foreign coins were not accepted. It is so easy for the actions of one pedantic employee to undermine a destination brand campaign, which in this case was *Full of Surprises*.

Crompton (1979a) suggested two schools of thought concerning destination image formation. Firstly, images are person-dominated. Variance will always exist as individuals have different experiences and process communications differently. On the other hand, images can be destination determined, where people form images based on experience at the destination. This implied that a destination cannot do much to create an image that is different to what it actually is. Geographers have commonly referred to images held of environments being either designative or appraisive (Stern & Krakover, 1993). The former use a cognitive categorisation of the landscape, while the latter are concerned with attitudes towards the place. These ideas are consistent with Gunn's (1988) concept of organic/induced images, which, along with cognition, affect, and conation, have been the most cited destination image formation concepts.

Organic and induced images

Gunn (1988) suggested images that were formed at two levels: organic and induced. The organic image is developed through an individual's everyday assimilation of information, which may include a wide range of mediums, from school geography readings, to mass media (editorial), to actual visitation. The induced image on the other hand is formed through the influence of tourism promotions directed by marketers, such as advertising. This usually occurs when an individual begins sourcing information for a holiday. The distinction between organic and induced images is the level of influence held by marketers. Gunn suggested destination marketers should focus on modifying the induced image since they can do little to change the organic image.

Unlike the majority of products, where information sources are mostly commercial, destination images appear to be derived from a wider range of sources (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). They suggested therefore that Gunn's concept of organic and induced images was unique to destinations. There

are two important implications of this. First, it is possible for individuals to have images of destinations that they have not previously visited. Second, since image may change after visitation (Chon, 1991; Hu & Ritchie, 1993; Hunt, 1975; Pearce, 1982a; Wee et al., 1985), it is important to separate the images held by visitors from those of non-visitors. Non-visitors will include those who would like to visit but have not yet been able to for various reasons, as well as those who have chosen not to visit. Destination image can be enhanced through travel to a destination. Milman and Pizam (1995) demonstrated how familiarity with a domestic USA destination, measured by previous visitation, led to a more positive image and increased likelihood of repeat visits. However, many studies of destination image have excluded those who have chosen not to visit (Ahmed, 1991b; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a).

Image formation agents ● ● ●

Gartner (1993) proposed a typology of image formation agents with practical implications. These ranged in a continuum from overt induced advertising through to organic sources such as visitation, as shown in Table 11.1. Marketers could use such agents independently, or in some combination, depending on the marketing objectives. Due to increasing use of public relations, organic and induced images may not necessarily be mutually exclusive (Selby & Morgan, 1996), since news is more voluminous than advertising and has higher credibility (Crompton, 1979a).

Change occurs only slowly ● ● ●

While individual components of a destination image may fluctuate greatly over time, their effect on overall image might not be influential (Crompton,

Table 11.1 Image change agents

Image change agent	Examples
Overt induced 1	Traditional advertising
Overt induced 2	Information received from tour operators
Covert induced 1	Second-party endorsement through traditional advertising
Covert induced 2	Second-party endorsement through seemingly unbiased reports, such as newspaper articles
Autonomous	News and popular culture
Unsolicited organic	Unsolicited information received from friends
Solicited organic	Solicited information from friends
Organic	Actual visitation

1979a; Gartner, 1986). Gartner and Hunt (1987) found evidence of positive destination image change over a 13-year period, but concluded that any change only occurs slowly. Likewise, a study by the English Tourist Board (1983, in Jeffries, 2001) which analysed the impact of an advertising campaign to modify Londoners' perceptions of England's North Country over a three-year period, found only minor changes in destination image. Gartner (1993) proposed that the larger the entity the slower the image change. This supports the proposition that it is difficult to change peoples' minds, with the easier marketing communication route being to reinforce positively held images (Ries & Trout, 1981).

Cognition, affect and conation

Fishbein (1967) and Fishbein and Azjen (1975) argued for the importance of distinguishing between an individual's beliefs and attitudes. While beliefs represent information held about an object, attitude is a favourable, neutral, or unfavourable evaluation. Fishbein was concerned that both concepts were frequently subsumed under the term attitude. Instead, it was proposed that attitude comprises cognitive, affective, and conative components. *Cognition* is the sum of what is known or believed about a destination, and might be organic or induced. This knowledge may or may not have been derived from a previous visit. Cognition denotes awareness.

Affect represents an individual's feelings about an object, which may be favourable, unfavourable, or neutral (Fishbein, 1967). The number of terms used in the English language to describe affect toward a destination is in the hundreds (Russel et al., 1981). Following Russel (1980), Russel et al. factor analysed 105 common adjectives used to describe environments, and generated the affective response grid shown in Figure 11.2. Eight adjective dimensions of affect were included in the model, 45 degrees apart. The assumption was that these dimensions were not independent of each other, but represented a circumplex model of affect. The horizontal axis was arbitrarily set to represent 'pleasantness', while the vertical axis represents level of 'arousal'. In this way exciting, which is a dimension in its own right, is a combination of arousing and pleasant, while distressing is a function of arousing and unpleasant.
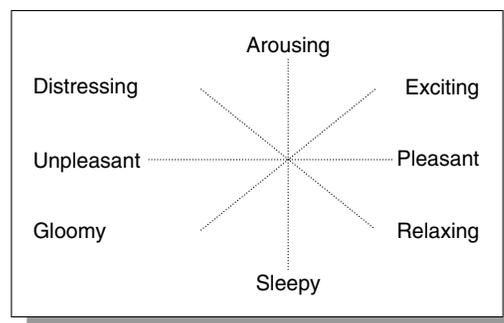

Figure 11.2
Affective response grid
Source: Adapted from Russel, Ward & Pratt (1981).

Using four semantic differential scales, 'pleasant/unpleasant', 'relaxing/distressing', 'arousing/sleepy' and 'exciting/gloomy', Baloglu and Brinberg (1997) demonstrated how the affective response model could be applied to destinations. They used multidimensional scaling to plot the affective positions of 11 Mediterranean destinations. Baloglu and McCleary (1999a) also reported the use of these four scales, while Baloglu and Mangaloglu (2001) used the four scales in an analysis of images held by travel intermediaries.

Russel et al. (1981) suggested that two dimensions, 'sleepy/arousing' and 'unpleasant/pleasant', could be sufficient to measure affect towards environments. Other studies have demonstrated how this can apply to travel destinations. For example, Walmsley and Jenkins' (1993) principal components analysis of repertory grid data produced the same two factor labels.

It has been suggested that affect usually becomes operational at the evaluation stage of destination selection process (Gartner, 1993). However, the evaluative image component has been overlooked in tourism (Walmsley & Young, 1998). The majority of destination image studies have focused on cognitive attributes. My analysis (Pike, 2002a) found that only 6 of the 142 published destination image papers showed an explicit interest in affective images. Only recently have destination studies studied both cognition and affect towards destinations together (see Baloglu, 1998; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a; Dann, 1996; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997; Pike & Ryan, 2004). Research Snapshot 11.1 Shows the similarities in cognitive and affective images for a competitive set of destinations.

Research snapshot 11.1   Similarity in cognitive and affective images

A study of the images of a competitive set of short-break holiday destinations in New Zealand used a battery of 20 cognitive scale items and two affective semantic differential scales. Exploratory factor analyses of the cognitive scales identified quite distinctive leadership positions occupied by two of the five destinations. One destination was perceived strongly on attributes in the 'Getting away from it all' factor. The other destination rated strongly on attributes in the 'Lots to do' factor. The affective response matrix showed the first destination as leading the 'Relaxing' dimension of affect, while the second destination was perceived the most 'Exciting'. The similarity in the results of the two sets of scales was useful in describing the market positions to the management at each destination.

Source: Pike, S. & Ryan, C. (2004). Dimensions of short-break destination attractiveness – a comparison of cognitive, affective and conative perceptions. *Journal of Travel Research*, *42*(4), 333–342.

The *conative* image is analogous to behaviour since it is the intent or action component. Intent refers to the likelihood of brand purchase (Howard & Sheth, 1969). Conation may be considered as the likelihood of visiting a destination within a given time period. Woodside and Sherrell (1977) found intent to visit was higher for destinations in the evoked set, as did Thompson and Cooper (1979) and Pike (2002b). Figure 11.3 highlights how the cognition/affect/conation relationships apply in decision-making.

Figure 11.3
Cognition/affect/
conation

Need awareness ⟶ Develop alternatives ⟶ Evaluate alternatives ⟶ Choice
(Cognition)   (Affect)   (Conation)
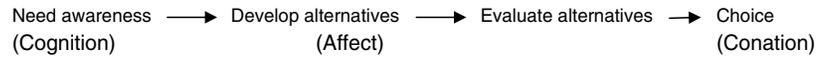
The process is similar to the hierarchy of effects (see Lavidge & Steiner, 1961) or AIDA model used by advertisers, where the aim is to guide a consumer through the stages of awareness, interest, desire, and action.

Myers (1992) acknowledged that the model might not always progress in this manner, since preferences might not need any cognitive antecedents. Therefore, the process could begin at any stage of the model. Manstead (1996) suggested cognition, affect, and conation towards an object would be correlated. However, this might not always be so, due to intervening or moderating variables (Fishbein, 1967). In tourism, Woodside and Lysonski (1989) suggested that preferences in the destination decision process are based on a combination of cognitive and affective associations. Baloglu and McCleary (1999a) found cognition, affect, and overall image positively influenced intent to visit a destination. Baloglu (1998) found affect influenced intent following experience at a destination.

Motivation

Arguably, motivation begins the holiday travel decision process, when a need arises that cannot be met at home (Gartner, 1993). Motives may therefore be viewed as the psychological determinants of demand (Kotler et al., 1999). Motivation in tourism is a relatively new field of study, and researchers have consistently reported a lack of understanding (see Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a; Dann, 1981; Dann et al., 1988; Fisher & Price, 1991; Mansfield, 1992; Pearce, 1982b). Tourism motivation theories have mostly been conceptual rather that empirical (Ritchie, 1996). However, the lack of theory is not unique to the tourism industry, since the issue of consumer motivation in general is not fully understood (Mansfield, 1992; Pearce, 1994):

> *Since it can be justifiably claimed that these issues are not settled within the field of psychology itself, it is rather demanding to expect that they are satisfied in the context of tourist motivation* (Pearce, 1994, p. 119).

Sunlust and wanderlust

One of the first attempts to explain pleasure travel motivation was Gray's (1970) concepts of wanderlust and sunlust, which subsume many of the motivation categories outlined in more recent studies. *Wanderlust* characterised the innate human need to temporarily leave familiar surroundings to experience different cultures and places. It has been suggested that apart from an innate need to explore, all other travel motivations are learnt by individuals (Mayo & Jarvis, 1981). For example, no one is born with the

need for status. Therefore, an individual's travel preferences and behaviour can change during a lifetime as needs and motives are learned. *Sunlust* was described as travel for a specific purpose for benefits not available at home, such as winter sun holidays or visits to a larger city.

Push versus pull

Related to this was the work of Dann (1977) who discussed push factors to explain the link between motivation and destination choice. Motivational push factors were proposed to be a logical antecedent to the analysis of pull factors such as destination attributes. Within the push category, Dann introduced the concepts of anomie and ego-enhancement from social psychology to explain the core travel motivations. The anomic traveller seeks escape from the mundane and isolation at home to obtain opportunities for social interaction. Ego-enhancement on the other hand seeks increased self-recognition, such as opportunities to recreate oneself at a place where identity is not known, or trip-dropping at home to reinforce status.

Traveller typologies

Related to the study of tourism motivation is the work of Cohen (1972) and Plog (1974) in categorising traveller types. Cohen suggested four types of tourist roles: the organised mass tourist, the individual mass tourist, the explorer, and the drifter. While the core motives for most were variety and novelty, each group clearly differed in the level of control and predictability sought from the experience. The key variable in the typology was 'strangeness versus familiarity'. Plog introduced psychocentricity and allocentricity to travel. Psychocentrics were posited to be nervous and non-adventurous, who travel to familiar places, preferring to drive rather than fly. Allocentrics on the other hand were more confident and willing to experiment with life. These individuals would prefer new experiences such as non-touristy destinations. Both Cohen and Plog linked their concepts to the evolution of a destination's lifecycle. For example, Cohen suggested strangeness and novelty were important for travellers. Plog proposed allocentrics would be the first to visit or explore a new destination, while psychocentrics would be attracted at the maturity or even the decline stage. However, Cohen suggested mass tourism had created a paradox, where novelty was increasingly difficult to cater to as tourism had become institutionalised.

Satisfying needs

One of the problems for tourism researchers is that the motives for travel may not actually be entirely understood by travellers themselves (Crompton, 1979b, p. 421): 'The in-depth interviews caused many respondents to confront for the first time their real motives for going on a pleasure vacation.' Therefore, the reasons people give for taking holidays are not

sufficient to explain motivation (Mill & Morrison, 1992). Instead, following Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation as a hierarchy of needs, Mill and Morrison argued that the key to understanding travel motivation was through the recognition of travel as a needs and wants satisfier: 'Motivation occurs when an individual wants to satisfy a need' (Mill & Morrison, 1992, p. 17). They suggested that this view of motivation is the difference between seeing the destination as a collection of attractions and seeing it as a place for satisfying needs and wants.

Gilmore (2002) suggested that holiday decisions are made on the basis of activity first, destination second, and succinctly summarised the complex field of tourism motivation into three categories: hedonism, self-improvement, and spiritual. Recognising that the needs of an individual traveller will be physical, psychological, or intellectual, Mill and Morrison linked the relationships between needs and motives referenced in the tourism literature, as shown in Table 11.2. It could be argued that the physiological and safety needs are physical, while the belonging, esteem, and self-actualisation needs are psychological. The last two categories are intellectual needs.

Table 11.2 Needs and tourism motives

Need	Motive	Tourism literature
Physiological	Relaxation	Escape, relaxation, relief of tension, sunlust, physical, mental relaxation of tension
Safety	Security	Health, recreation, keep oneself active and healthy
Belonging	Love	Family togetherness, enhancement of kinship relationships, companionship, facilitation of social interaction, maintenance of personal ties, interpersonal relations, roots, ethnic, show one's affection for family members, maintain social contacts
Esteem	Achievement, status	Convince oneself of one's achievements, show one's importance to others, prestige, social recognition, ego-enhancement, professional business, personal development, status, prestige
Self-actualisation	Be true to one's own nature	Exploration and evaluation of self, self discovery, satisfaction of inner desires
To know and understand	Knowledge	Cultural, education, wanderlust, interest in foreign areas
Aesthetics	Appreciation of beauty	Environmental, scenery

Source: Adapted from Mill & Morrison (1992, p. 20).

Consumer decision sets

When motivated to act, the individual consumer-traveller becomes a decision-maker (Mayo & Jarvis, 1981). Decisions must be made about where to go, when to go, how to get there, and what to do there. Brand decisions then essentially involve alternative brands and the buyer's own choice criteria (Howard & Sheth, 1969). Choice criteria will be associated with motives. Therefore, while a favourable image of a destination is important, it must also be aligned to the traveller's motives, to increase the likelihood of visitation (Henshall et al., 1985; Mansfield, 1992). Mill and Morrison (1992) suggested that one implication of Maslow's hierarchy of needs was that holidays targeting the satisfaction of lower-level physical and physiological needs would be treated as a necessity rather than as a luxury. Of particular interest is how travellers select a holiday destination from so many places that could ably provide satisfaction.

Consumer decision set theory offers some explanation of this most complicated aspect of consumer behaviour. Howard (1963) and Howard and Sheth (1969) introduced the evoked decision set concept to propose that the number of brands considered in any purchase decision was considerably lower than those available. The evoked set was defined as comprising only those brands the consumer will actually consider in the next purchase decision. Howard proposed that the number of brands in an individual's evoked set would remain constant at about three or four. Woodside and Sherrell (1977) were the first to investigate evoked sets of destinations in the holiday decision process. They were motivated by the proposition that the mental processes required to evaluate the features of 15 or more destinations would represent too great a task for most travellers.

The reduced set of likely alternatives that form the evoked set is part of the total set. For travellers, this total set would consist of all those destinations that may or may not be available, and which they may or may not be aware of. How many destinations must there now be on the planet? Within this total set of destinations, Woodside and Sherrell (1977) proposed the following possible overlapping subsets:

- Unavailable and unaware set
- Awareness set
- Available set
- Evoked set
- Aware and unavailable set
- Available and unaware set
- Inert set
- Inept set
- Chosen destination

Since consumers will either be aware or unaware of the existence of a product, it is from the awareness set that a purchase choice will ultimately be made (Narayana & Markin, 1975). Clearly, a destination must firstly make it into the consumer's awareness set for consideration. However, as simple and logical as this may appear, from a practical perspective this represents a significant challenge for some destinations. Lilly (1984),

for example, discussed the difficulty in promoting North Staffordshire, a region with little tourism image outside its own boundaries. Likewise, strategists appointed by Papua New Guinea's NTO in 2004 found that a major barrier to the development of tourism in that country is a lack of consumer awareness about the destination (Wright, 2004).

It is important to recognise the distinction between an awareness problem and that of a negative image, since the existence of the latter denotes awareness. However, more than simply awareness of a destination is required. For example, Milman and Pizam (1995) found that awareness of a popular USA domestic destination was not necessarily a strong indicator of intent to visit. In short, other determinants of choice exist.

Due to the number of possible destinations in the awareness set, it is therefore more realistic for the marketer to determine the composition of the early consideration set. These are the destinations the consumer believes could realistically be visited within a given time period. This represents the overlap of the awareness and available sets.

Miller (1956) cited a number of studies from the consumer psychology literature to suggest that the limit to the number of stimuli people would generally be capable of processing would be around seven. Miller even linked this proposition to the use of questionnaire rating scales, where seven points had generally been considered the limit of usefulness. Woodside and Sherrell's (1977) literature review found this limit had generally been consistent in brand recall tests across product categories as diverse as cars and toothpaste.

When a consumer becomes involved in a purchase decision the early consideration set is categorised into three subsets: inert, inept, and evoked (Narayana & Markin, 1975). The inert set consists of brands for which the consumer has neither a positive nor a negative opinion. The consumer will have some awareness of the destination to stimulate initial interest and inclusion in the early consideration set, but may lack information to make a judgement. Or they may have sufficient information but see no advantage in pursuing it further at that point. The consumer is undecided about visiting these destinations within a certain time period.

The inept set consists of brands the consumer has rejected from the initial purchase consideration within some time period. Destinations in the inept set will have been rejected from the early consideration set due to negative perceptions, perhaps from comments by significant others for example.

Once the inert and inept destinations have been eliminated from the early consideration set the remaining destinations form the evoked decision set. The evoked set comprises those destinations the consumer has some likelihood of visiting within a given time period (Woodside & Sherrell, 1977). Woodside and Sherrell found that perceptions of destinations listed in the evoked set of their respondents were more favourable than for those listed in the inert and inept sets. In their study the evoked set size averaged 3.4 destinations for selection during the following twelve months. Their proposition of four plus or minus two destinations in the evoked set has been supported in other destination studies (see Thompson & Cooper, 1979; Woodside & Lysonski, 1989). Thompson and Cooper

noted that no tourism study had examined the effect of travel context on evoked set size. However, my investigations of decision sets in the context of short-break holidays in New Zealand (Pike, 2002b) and Australia (Pike 2004, 2007) found a consistency in the size of the evoked decision sets with means of three to four destinations.

For consumer goods, it has been suggested that brands excluded from the evoked decision set may have a purchase probability of less than 1% (Wilson, 1981). The concept of the evoked set therefore has important implications for DMOs if it is from this set that final destination selection is made. It must be accepted that a hierarchy of destination brand saliency is formed within the evoked set of destinations, if a final selection is to be made. The higher a brand's position in a consumers mind, the higher the intent to purchase (Burke & Schoeffler, 1980; Wilson, 1981).

Top of mind awareness (ToMA)

It has been shown that top of mind awareness (ToMA), measured by unaided recall, is related to purchase preference among competing brands (Axelrod, 1968; Wilson, 1981; Woodside & Wilson, 1985). Consequently, for the destination that first comes to mind when a consumer is considering travel, ToMA must surely represent a source of advantage (Pike, 2002b).

The importance of travel context in destination image analysis

Attribute importance can vary between situations (Barich & Kotler, 1991; Crompton, 1992), as will ToMA destination preference. However, there has been limited attention to the importance of context in consumer research. In an assessment of the tourism marketing research state of the art, Ritchie (1996) proposed ten key shortcomings. Among the gaps, which Ritchie labelled the 'dark side of the universe', was travel context. Destination image studies have generally been undertaken without explicitly defining the context in which the traveller decision is being made (Hu & Ritchie, 1993).

Travel context refers to the situation or usage of the product, such as the time of year, type of trip, or geographic travel range. For example, destination brand attribute salience will likely differ between the context of a honeymoon and an end-of-season football team trip. Brand association salience therefore depends on the decision context (Keller, 1993). Golf excursions, for example, may act as both the catalyst for travel and the destination choice (Woodside, 1999). Phelps (1986) found visitors to Menorca had a low awareness of the destination they were travelling to on a package tour, since the package product was more important that the destination.

Even though it was proposed three decades ago that any list of determinant destination attributes will vary depending on situational context (see Gearing et al., 1974), only 23 of the 142 published destination image papers I analysed (Pike, 2002a) were explicit about a travel context of interest. These are highlighted in Table 11.3.

Table 11.3 Destination image papers with an explicit travel context

Author(s)	Year	Travel context
Mayo	1973	Self-drive
Anderssen & Colberg	1973	Overseas winter holiday
Dillon, Domzal & Madden	1986	Student spring break
Perdue	1986	Boating
Woodside & Carr	1988	Foreign travel
Woodside & Lysonski	1989	Foreign travel
Embacher & Buttle	1989	Summer holiday
Chon, Weaver & Kim	1991	Short break
Crompton, Fakeye & Lue	1992	Winter long stay
Javalgi, Thomas & Rao	1992	Self-drive
Hu & Ritchie	1993	Education travel
Amor et al.	1994	Sun/beach
King	1994	Sun/beach
Oppermann	1996	Convention
Go & Zhang	1997	Convention
Hudson & Shephard	1998	Snow skiing
McClellan	1998	Short break
Ritchie	1998	Bicycling
Vaughan & Edwards	1999	Overseas winter holiday
Baloglu & McCleary	1999a, 1999b	Summer holiday
Murphy	1999	Backpacking
Chacko & Fenich	2000	Convention

Key points

1. The role of image in destination marketing

Tourism marketing is generally concerned with the selling of dreams, since expectations of an intangible tourism service can only be realised after travel. The images held by consumers therefore play a critical role in their decision-making. Since tourism services can only compete via images, it is imperative marketers understand that 'perception is reality'. The brand image of the destination may or may not be quite different to the brand identity intended by the DMO. Since the first destination image studies appeared in the 1970s, the topic has become one of the most prevalent in the tourism literature. A destination's image is a repertoire of brand associations held in the mind of the consumer. These associations may be cognitive, affective, conative, or a combination of these. They may have been developed through organic sources such as previous visitation or induced sources such as advertising.

2. Consumer decision sets

Consumers are spoilt by choice of available destinations, but will only actively consider a limited number in the decision-making process. The size of the consumer's decision set of

destinations will be limited to around four. The implication for DMOs examining the image of their destination is that destinations not included in a consumer's decision set will be less likely to be selected.

3. The importance of travel context in destination image analysis

Both the images held of destinations and the consumer's decision set composition will vary according to the travel context. Travel context refers to the type of travel situation, such as a romantic getaway, family camping trip, or golf weekend. A traveller will not only experience different travel contexts in the course of a lifetime, but also at different times of the year.

Review questions

- To what extent does inclusion in a consumer decision set by a destination represent a source of advantage?
- What is meant by the marketing adage, 'perception is reality', and why is this relevant to DMOs?
- Analyse the content of your DMO's advertising to determine whether the intent is to stimulate cognitive, affective, or conative brand associations.