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The role of information sources in image fragmentation



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Introduction

Tourist image is highly strategic in creating, maintaining or increasing tourism demand at a destination, and influencing its competitiveness (Hsu, Wolfe, & Kang, 2004; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Therefore, Govers and Go (2004) mention the need “to formulate a plan for projecting the ‘right’ image” as an essential part of tourism development strategy. This process is especially challenging, considering the complex organisational structure of tourism destinations (Scott, Cooper, & Baggio, 2008), where multiple agents intervene in the process of tourism image projection.

Gartner (1994) identifies a continuum of eight agents that contribute to the destination image formation. These agents can be internal or external to the destination, with each one representing one or more information sources (IS), which in turn influence tourists’ image perception of the destination. Information displayed through each IS may be fragmented as “each [agent] ‘highlights’ and ‘singles out’ some particular aspects of the destination, and ‘hides’ or ‘dismisses’ other aspects or attributes which are also an integral part of the actual destination image” (Camprubí, Guia, & Comas, 2014). Therefore, when dissonances on emitted images appear, cognitive evaluations of the perceived tourist image can be either positively or negatively affected, depending on the IS used.

In this regard, several studies have analysed the extent to which each type of IS influences tourist behaviour (Fodness & Murray, 1999), and contributes to image perception (Li, Pan, Zhang, & Smith, 2009). There are insights into the analysis of image perception gaps (Govers & Go, 2004) and the image fragmentation of urban destinations in tourism brochures (Camprubí et al., 2014). However, no studies

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clearly relate the tourist perceived image of a destination and IS used, with the aim of finding out dissonances among the various IS used. When significant dissonances are detected, this indicates differences between the projected tourist images in the various IS. This shows that tourist destination image is fragmented in various IS, and thus, the consequences on tourist cognitive evaluations should be examined. In this context, [Camprubí et al. \(2014\)](#) point out the need to explore the effects of image fragmentation patterns in tourist perception and behaviour. Consequently, this paper aims to analyse the relationship between the perceived tourist image of a given destination and the number and type of IS used, in order to detect dissonances in the image projected through IS; and their effects on cognitive evaluations.

Methods

Data collection was carried out in Palafrugell, Costa Brava (Spain), between April–September 2014.

The sample was stratified in the different months, according to the distribution of the number of tourists in each period. The final sample size was 593 and data were collected using a survey on tablet computers. The survey included questions about information sources and perceived image.

The destination perceived image was measured through photo elicitation ([Matteucci, 2013](#)). Pictures were classified in three categories (culture, heritage, and landscape) following [Dilley \(1986\)](#). For each category, there were four pictures of the destination ([Fig. 1](#)). These were pre-selected in agreement with the local Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO), and participants were asked to choose the most representative picture for each category.

Information sources were measured by asking the following question: “Which information sources have you used to be informed about Palafrugell?” Respondents indicated whether they used or not six different types of IS ([Fig. 2](#)).

The number and types of IS are analysed in order to identify whether they are determinants for image selection. The data analysis considers a differentiation between online and offline IS, as well

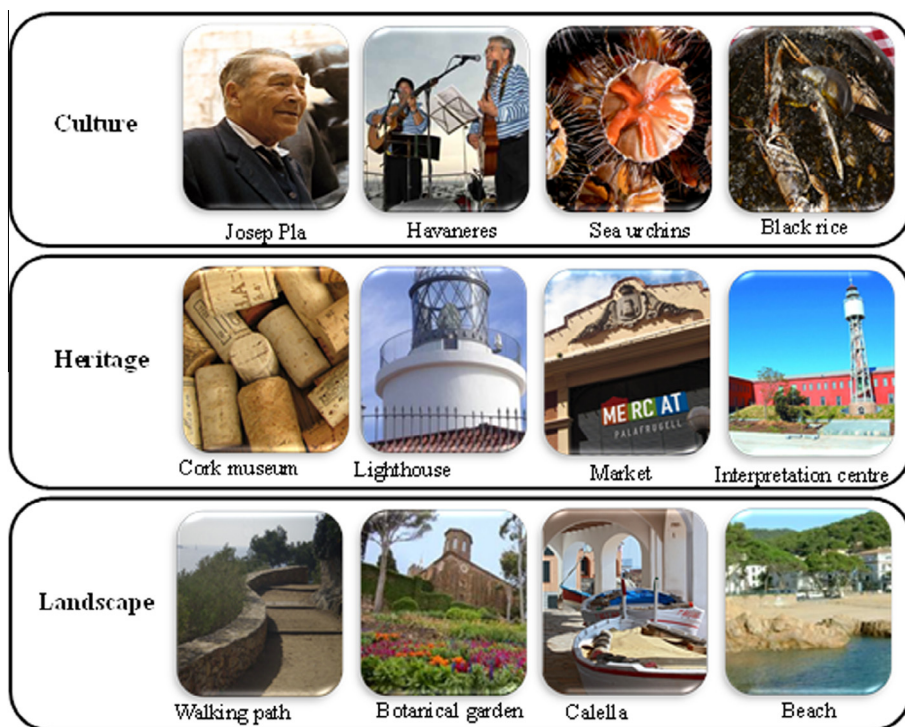


Fig. 1. Pictures by category.

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