



# Measuring the gap between projected and perceived destination images of Catalonia using compositional analysis

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## ABSTRACT

Tourist destination image (TDI) is considered crucial when planning a trip. The aim of this paper is to propose a methodology to analyse and measure the (in)congruity or gap between the two sides of the TDI (supply-side projected vs. demand-side perceived) based on the difference between proportions of appearance. This method is applied to an outstanding Mediterranean destination, Catalonia, based on three different information sources: induced (Catalan Tourist Board dossier), autonomous (Lonely Planet travel guide), and organic (UGC: user-generated content). UGC consists of a random sample of 80,000 online travel reviews written in English by tourists who visited Catalonia during 2015. Our findings emphasize discrepancies in three aspects of the TDI, namely spatial, cognitive and affective image. The measurement of the gap between these TDI components shows that organic images (perceived) are significantly different from autonomous and induced images (projected), and that, the last two resemble one another much more.

## 1. Introduction

For many decades, tourist destination image (TDI) has been a recurrent subject of study in the literature of travel, tourism and hospitality (Chon, 1990; Li, Ali, & Kim, 2015; Pike, 2002; Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010; Tasci, Gartner, & Tamer Cavusgil, 2007). The core words that have been used to define its nature are, in order of frequency: impression, perception, belief, idea, representation, and feeling (Lai & Li, 2016); for instance, Crompton (1979) defines the TDI as “the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination” (p. 18). However, Lai and Li (2016), after an exhaustive literature review, propose a much more elaborate definition of TDI: “A voluntary, multisensory, primarily picture-like, qualia-arousing, conscious, and quasi-perceptual mental experience held by tourists about a destination. This experience overlaps and/or parallels the other mental experiences of tourists, including their sensation, perception, mental representation, cognitive map, consciousness, memory, and attitude of the destination” (p. 1074).

The overall TDI is formed by two interrelated components (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999): cognitive, involving the basic processes whereby the individual knows his environment, and affective, involving emotions and feelings about this environment. A third component, conative, is derived from the previous two involving acting, doing or striving in response to both (Agapito, Oom do Valle, & da Costa Mendes, 2013; Gartner, 1993; Rapoport, 1977). Most authors have taken into account

this cognitive-affective dichotomy to analyse the TDI (Kim & Perdue, 2011). However, tourists' activities tend to be spatially oriented in destinations (Lee, Hitchcock, & Lei, 2017), and other authors have emphasised, mainly in the field of Tourism Geography, the spatial aspect of the image. In this vein, Lynch (1960) asserted that “the image must include the spatial or pattern relation of the object to the observer and to other objects” (p. 9). Furthermore, Pocock and Hudson (1978) considered that the elements or attributes were not enough by themselves to know the urban structure: “The urban image is acquired and sustained by an underlying network representing the individual's movement field or activity space” (p. 52). These authors proposed the designative rather than the cognitive component. The designative component is informational in nature, regarding the description and classification, and considers two aspects of the cognitive image: Structure/physical qualities (“whatness”) including shape, size, texture, colour and arrangement (Lynch, 1960), and spatial features (“whereness”) including relative location, distance, and directional relationships (Pocock & Hudson, 1978). As an example of the few studies in the tourism field based on the spatial aspect of the image, we can mention Son (2005), who uses mental mapping techniques to measure the TDI; Stepchenkova and Zhan (2013), who use geo-maps representing projected and perceived images of Peru, and the territorial distribution of the pictures; and Marine-Roig & Anton Clavé (2016b), who analyse the territorial specialisation of the TDI through spatial coefficients.

From the perspective of the actors in the process of building the

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image, place marketing literature studies two types of TDI—projected and perceived—and the relations between them (Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993). Projected images can be considered as the ideas and impressions of a place that are presented for people's consideration, and the perceived images as a result from the interaction between these projected images and the visitor's own personal characteristics (Bramwell & Rawding, 1996). Traditional research methods on the contrast between the projected and the perceived TDI have primarily been based on quantitative analyses of data obtained through visitor surveys conducted to capture perceived destination image, and through secondary information sources, mainly official (NTO: National tourism organisation) and promotional (DMO: Destination marketing organisation) sources, in order to obtain the projected image (Andreu, Bigné, & Cooper, 2000; Bui, 2011; Farmaki, 2012; Grosspietsch, 2006; Ji & Wall, 2015; Meneghello & Montaguti, 2016; Önder & Marchiori, 2017). In recent years, the proliferation of user-generated content through social media has encouraged researchers (Chen & Law, 2016) to study perceived image through cost-effective, unsolicited, and unbiased travel-related UGC online sources, such as websites hosting photos and videos (Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013), and travel blogs or online travel reviews (OTRs) (Chen, Yung, & Wang, 2008; Khan, 2013; Mak, 2017; Marine-Roig & Anton Clavé, 2016a).

According to the typologies of the various TDI formation agents (Camprubí, Guia, & Comas, 2013; Gartner, 1993), secondary information sources can be classified in a simplified way as organic (received from individuals), induced (emanating from destination promoters) and autonomous (independently produced), although the mutual exclusivity of these three agents cannot be assured (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Gartner (1993) makes an estimation of the credibility, market penetration, and destination cost of the different types of sources; however, it is crucial to know which information sources current vacationers consider most important when making decisions about their travel plans. Hence, Llodrà-Riera, Martínez-Ruiz, Jiménez-Zarco, and Izquierdo-Yusta (2015), in a survey of 541 tourists and residents of Mallorca gathered online in 2013, identify as organic sources: “Friends and acquaintances”, followed by “Web pages with assessments by users”; induced sources: “Web pages of official tourist information”; and autonomous sources: “Travel guides”, that appear especially useful. These results are consistent with those obtained by Eurobarometer (2016), when about 30,100 respondents from different social and demographic groups of the European Union were interviewed in January 2016 about their preferences towards tourism. Concerning secondary information sources, the majority considered organic sources as the most important: “Recommendations of friends, colleagues or relatives”, followed by “Websites collecting and presenting comments, reviews and ratings from travellers”; in second position, induced sources: “Websites run by service provider or by destination”, followed by “Counters of travel agencies and tourism offices”; and, finally, autonomous sources: “Paid-for guidebooks and magazines”, which grew two points in relation to previous surveys. Conversely, in a sample of 196 respondents from Hong Kong about the influence level of various information sources, “Travel guidebooks” appeared in first place, followed very closely by “Friends and relatives”, and “Tourist offices” ranked last because respondents considered that it had low influence in their itinerary and decision making (Tsang, Chan, & Ho, 2011). In another survey of 11,400 foreign tourists in Britain carried out by VisitBritain (2017) in spring 2016, on the 30 key influences on choosing a holiday destination, the results were: “Talking to friends/family” (1st), “Websites providing traveller reviews of destinations” (4th), “Travel guidebooks” (7th), “Travel agent or tour operator website” (8th), “Travel blogs/forums” (10th), “Official tourist websites” (15th), and “Official tourist brochures for the country/city/region” (16th). A survey of 2010 North-American travellers in 2016 on 15 technologies or services used to help plan a leisure trip (Statista, 2017) obtained: “User-generated content” (1st), “Print resources” (4th), “Opinions of friends, colleagues or relatives” (6th), “DMO website” (7th), and “Travel agent”

(12th). Finally, a survey of 270 international tourists in Turkey on travel information source selection (Yasin, Baghirova, & Zhang, 2017) yielded disparate results for the various segments (travel experience, genre and age) of the sample. In summary, these surveys do not display unique results on image-building agents, but a preponderance of organic sources can be deduced: “Recommendations of friends, colleagues or relatives” (WoM: word-of-mouth marketing) and “Websites collecting and presenting comments, reviews and ratings from travellers” (eWoM: electronic WoM communication). In addition, the recent and dramatic increase in the creation and use of the latter has been especially remarkable (Marine-Roig, 2017).

In relation to TDI, the issue of representative dissonance (Bandyopadhyay & Morais, 2005) and destination image congruency (Bui, 2011) between information sources has been a subject of interest for the influence they may have in destination image formation. Concerning the issue of congruency, it is generally accepted that the closer projected and perceived images are, the better. Indeed, marketers intend to match, to the greatest possible degree, the projected and perceived images (Mackay & Fesenmaier, 1997). In a branding context, harmony and alignment between projected brand attributes and brand image perception are essential to creating a strong relationship of the customer to the brand (Kim & Lehto, 2013). Thus, in general, achieving congruency between destination images is a key goal for destination promoters and marketers who then intend to assess whether the destination image they project has been conveyed to and assimilated by tourists (Ji & Wall, 2015) into their images of the destination. This affirmation could be extended to suggest that congruency is also desirable with other sources of information that can influence tourists. Beyond marketing purposes, image dissonance or congruency has been related to socio-political, identity and economic issues (Anton Clavé, 2010; Bandyopadhyay & Morais, 2005; Dinnie, 2008). In this sense, NTOs and DMOs need to calculate the incongruence between projected and perceived images to improve the supply and promotion of the destination (what gets measured gets managed), but, no study has been found to actually quantitatively assess the gap between the TDI of different sources.

Hence, the aim of this paper is to quantify the (in)congruency between the two sides of TDI (supply-side projected and demand-side perceived image). To do it, we propose a methodological approach to measure the TDI differences within various key information sources, based on an appropriate quantitative technique which allows for the comparison of proportions and data carrying relative information, called Compositional Analysis (Aitchison, 1986). The proportions of contents are the key interest, since it is obvious that longer websites or documents or more active media will have more content of everything and of every type, so that what matters is in which proportion a specific content (e.g. keyword) appears. At the first impression, the idea would be to compute the differences between proportions directly (subtracting percentages), however this does not make sense because when taking into account proportionality, the distances between the pairs of proportions 0.01 and 0.10 and 0.51 and 0.60 are not mutually distant as Euclidean distance considers. Bearing this in mind, a distance between proportions was defined by Aitchison (1986). It considers that the distance between 0.01 and 0.10 is 900% and the distance between 0.51 and 0.60 is less than 20%. Results derived from the direct subtraction between proportions are non-precise and confusing. Aitchison's distance will be the actual gap between projected and perceived images, and it will also allow knowing which components contribute more to differentiate the information sources.

To test this methodological approach, we select a sample of the previously mentioned secondary information sources, which represents the three TDI formation agents (organic, induced and autonomous), and we analyse their content in order to assess the (in)congruence between projected and perceived image in a multiscale destination (Marine-Roig & Anton Clavé, 2016b), focusing on the most frequent keywords used, the spatial component of image (Pocock & Hudson, 1978), and

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