Chapter 2
How Foreign Tourist Intermediaries Perceive and Sell a Destination:
The Case of Portugal

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ABSTRACT

Research on tourist destination images is vast and embraces many destinations, approaches, and methods. More attention has been given to the perspective of final customers, instead of the ones who sell the tourist products to them. This chapter aims to understand how foreign tourist intermediaries, from the top outbound countries, perceive and sell Portugal as a tourist destination. It aims also to analyze the travel motivations they expect Portugal can satisfy and the information sources used to collect information to create tourist products regarding this destination. Foreign tourist intermediaries have a very positive image of Portugal as a destination, associating it to a set of cognitive attributes and psychological motivations.

INTRODUCTION

Over time, people tend to acquire images of locations or destinations through various communication inputs they receive (Gunn, 1988). Image is very important for tourism (Gallarza, Saura, & García, 2002; Gartner, 1994) as the projection of a proper image can be reflected in the tourists' perceived image (Gartner, 1994), which in turn influences the destinations' assessment and the behavior of potential visitors (Agapito, Valle, & Mendes, 2013; Baloglu, 1999; Bigné, Sánchez, & Sánchez, 2001). Moreover, the success or failure of tourism in many destinations strongly depends on the effective management of image, as well as on understanding of individuals' image of specific locations (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Elliot, Papadopoulos, & Kim, 2011). Stepchenkova and Mills (2010) defend that destination image research is one of the tourism scholarly areas with strong implications for destination management, marketing, and branding.

Many authors have conceptualized and defined tourist destination image. However, according to Jenkins (1999), the most complete definition is the one proposed by Lawson and Baud-Bovy (1977): *the expression of all objective knowledge, impressions, prejudice, imaginations, and emotional thoughts an individual or group might have of a particular place*. According to Gartner (1994), the perceived image of a destination consists of three components (Agapito, Valle, & Mendes, 2013; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a; Beerli & Martín, 2004a; Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010; Tasci & Gartner, 2007): affective, cognitive and behavioral.

There has been plenty of research on the importance of destination image and how it influences tourists' behavior (e.g. Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a; Beerli & Martín, 2004a; Souiden, Ladhari, & Chiadmi, 2017). Selecting tourism intermediaries as the target population is a central contribution for research since tourism intermediaries are usually focused on promotional efforts, with functions such as developing and promoting destination tourism packages, besides informing potential visitors, these professionals are key influencers when it comes to the tourism sector. Furthermore, the majority of research regarding destination's image is focused on being understood through the perspective of the tourist, with limited literature focused on the perspective of these professionals.

In Portugal, studies on perceived image are not new. Some address Portugal as destination as a whole, while other studies examine only certain regions or cities. However, there is a lack of understanding how Portugal's perceived image is influenced by international tourist intermediaries (Mano, Costa, & Moutinho, 2014; Silva, Costa, & Moreira, 2018). As such, the main objective of this study is to investigate the importance of foreign tourist intermediaries in selling a destination (Camilleri, 2018a), considering the image they perceive and create. In order to accomplish this central objective, four specific goals were set to this research:

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