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Tourist Destination Image and Consumer Behaviour: The Case of the Azores

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RESUMO/ABSTRACT

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Nowadays places seek to become more distinctive in an increasingly competitive market and the image is a decisive element in the selection of a tourist destination. This research aims to understand the overall image of the Azores as a tourist destination from major source markets, and also aims to ascertain the level of satisfaction and future expectations of these markets concerning the region.

The literature review addresses the definition of tourist destination image and the issue of satisfaction since these influences the intention to return and / or intention to recommend the tourist destination.

The results indicate that: (1) the overall image influence satisfaction and intention to recommend and/or return to the tourist destination; (2) satisfaction influence the intention to recommend and/or return to the tourist destination. We also verified that most of the tourists are very satisfied with the destination in study, as well as a very positive overall image about the Azores.

Keywords: image, tourist destination, consumer behaviour, TDI, Azores.

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Abstract

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1. Introduction

Tourism has been seen as the driving force for regional development, once it contributes to economic growth. The gradual emergence, proliferation, and consolidation of tourists' destinations is, currently, a challenge in terms of competitiveness and loyalty of markets. In general, there is a consensus that a positive image influences in an affective way the tourists' behavior. In this sense, it is vital to find out how to attract tourists not only for the first time but above of all to discover how to attract them to revisit and recommend the destination to others.

Based on studies that determine the image as a persuasive element, we understand that their study is extremely important so there is effective management of the tourist destination.

This paper aims to understand the overall image of the Azores as a tourist destination from major source markets, and also aims to ascertain the level of satisfaction and future expectations of these markets concerning the region. Furthermore, the study intends to know if the overall image influence satisfaction intention to recommend and/or return to the tourist destination, and if satisfaction influence the intention to recommend and/or return to the tourist destination.

2. Literature Review

In today's competitive environment, creating and managing an appropriate destination image have become essential for effective product positioning, in this sense destination loyalty and satisfaction have become an important part of destination marketing and management due to increasing competition.

According to Wang (2000), the concept of tourist destination image is complex and subjective. There are multiple definitions assigned to the concept of image, but there is no consensus on its definition, formation, and measurement (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Kim & Richardson, 2003). These acceptations suffer oscillations that are dependent on different scientific areas that address the concept in question, as well as the time factor.

In relation to tourism, as an area of study, the concept of the image was applied in the early 70s by Hunt (1971), since then the image has been one of the most discussed issues in the tourist literature (Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010). The fact that we are facing a widely studied topic triggers a series of definitions of the concept of tourist destination image. According to Hunt (1971), tourist destination image is the set of impressions that a person or a group of people have about a place where not inhabit.

The process of selection of tourist destinations is complex since this is dependent on the influence of a number of factors such as budget; free time; season; and image (Pizam & Telisman-Kosuta, 1999; Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005; Bornhorst, Ritchie & Sheehan, 2010).

The persuasive power of the image is not limited to the fate of the election phase, affecting therefore all phases related to the tourist behavior as a consumer (Ashworth & Goodall, 1988; Baloglu, Henthron & Sahin, 2014; Campo-Martínez, Garau- Vadell & Martínez-Ruiz, 2010; Jeong & Holland, 2012; Luque-Martínez, Barrio-García, Ibáñez-Zapata & Molina, 2007; Mansfeld, 1992; Nicoletta & Servidio, 2012; Pratminingsih, Rudatin & Rimenta, 2014). Thus, the image is assumed as being a very relevant factor in the analysis of tourist behavior before, during and after the trip (Moutinho, 1987; Chon, 1990; Bigné, M. Sánchez & J. Sánchez, 2001; Kim & Mc Kercher, 2009), since this, the image , affects the tourist experience satisfaction levels (Chi & Qu, 2008; Phelps, 1986; Chon, 1990; Bigné *et al.*, 2001; Prayag, 2009; San Marin & Del Bosque, 2008; Pratminingsih *et al.*, 2014; Puh, 2014; Munhurrún, Seebaluck & Naidoo, 2015), influence the intention to visit / revisit the tourist destination (Court and Lupton, 1997; Seabra, Abrantes & Lages, 2007; Qu, Kim & Im, 2011), and influence the intention of recommendation or not the destination to family and friends (Bigné *et al.*, 2001; Joppe, Martin & Waalen, 2001; Govers & Kumar, 2007; Choi, Tkachenko & Sil, 2011; Zhang, Xiaoxiao, Cai & Lu, 2014; Pearce, 1982; Qu *et al.*, 2011; Kim, Hallab & Kim, 2012; Pandža Bajš, 2013).

According to San Martín & Del Bosque (2008), satisfaction can be understood as an individual, cognitive and affective state, which derives from the tourist experience, and this leads to the loyalty of the tourist towards the destination (Chi & Qu, 2008; Munhurrún *et al.*, 2015; Özdemir & Şimşek, 2015). The tourist loyalty towards a particular destination is studied taking into account their behavior over the destination, that is, by intention to revisit and by intention to recommend (Chi & Qu, 2008, San Martín & Del Bosque, 2008; Alegre & Garau, 2010; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Pratminingsih *et al.*, 2014). Considering the influence of the image on these elements, we can affirm that this influences indirectly the loyalty of the tourist (Pandža Bajš, 2013).

Based on the above, the following hypotheses are set out:

Hypothesis 1: The overall image influences satisfaction, recommendation and return intentions.

Hypothesis 2: The satisfaction influences recommendation and return intentions.

3. Methodology

According to Turismo de Portugal (2013) in 2012, in the Azores, the internal market generated 43% of total overnight stays, while the foreign markets generated 57%. As stated in Turismo de Portugal (2013) the major source markets for the region are Germany (22%), Spain (11%), Holland (11%), Sweden (8%), and Denmark (7%). Was also verified an increase of overnight stays by USA, France and Belgium (14%).

The universe was defined based on the number of guests, according to the country of residence, to São Miguel Island. This universe corresponds to a total of 155 620 guests between January and November 2014 (SREA, 2014). The sampling method used is stratified probabilistic, and the sample size calculation was performed based on a margin of error of 5% yielding, thus, 384 questionnaires.

In accordance with literature review and in order to achieve the outlined objectives, a questionnaire was prepared. This one included four closed-ended questions, in which respondents were asked first to classify the overall image of the Azores and then to classify the satisfaction degree with the region in study. The third and the fourth questions intended to determine the degree of likelihood of recommending and return to the Azores. The questionnaire includes, also, a group of questions about social demographic characteristics (gender, age, marital status, education, country of residence and gross monthly income).

The questionnaire used apply the structured technique, it means that we used closed-ended questions. To measure the overall image a Likert scale of 5-points was used from 1 “very negative” to 5 “very positive”. The method used to measure the satisfaction was a Likert scale of 5-points, ranging from 1 “very unsatisfied” to 5 “very satisfied”. Regarding the likelihood of recommending and return to the Azores was utilized a Likert-scale of 5-points from 1 “very improbable” to 5 “very probable”.

Data collection was carried out between May and August 2015 in the vicinity of the main attractions of the city of Ponta Delgada and Ribeira Grande, both on São Miguel Island. The questionnaires were developed in two languages : Portuguese and English. The data obtained were subjected to analysis using the SPSS 23.0.

4. Results

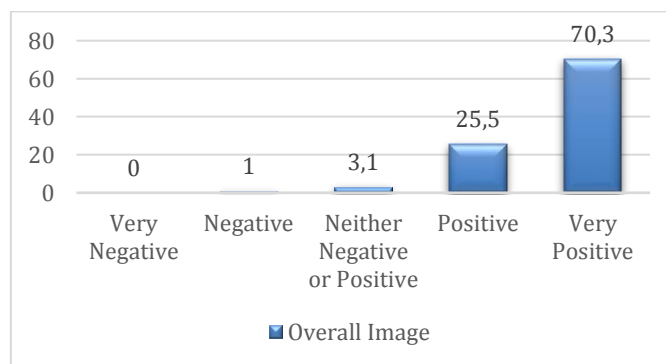
4.1 Sample

According the results there were more male respondents (223 respondents = 58,1%) than female ones (161 respondents = 41,9%). Among the respondents 31,5% were aged between 46 and 56 years old and 59,4% were married. With regard to education, more than half (73,2%) held a university degree, and 36,2% earned between 1001 and 2000 euros, followed by 2001 to 3000 euros (28,1%) monthly.

4.2 Overall Image, Satisfaction, Return and Recommendation Intentions

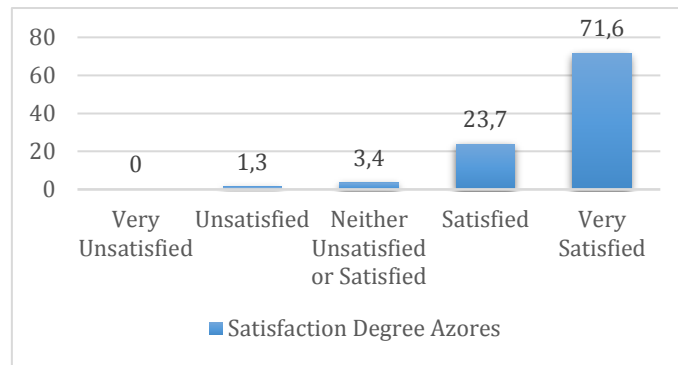
The respondents' perception of the Azores overall image is very positive (70,3%) and positive (25,5%) (Graphic 1). Moreover, the majority of tourists (71,6%) are very satisfied with the region (Graphic 2).

Graphic 1 – Overall Image Azores Touristic Destination



Source: Authors

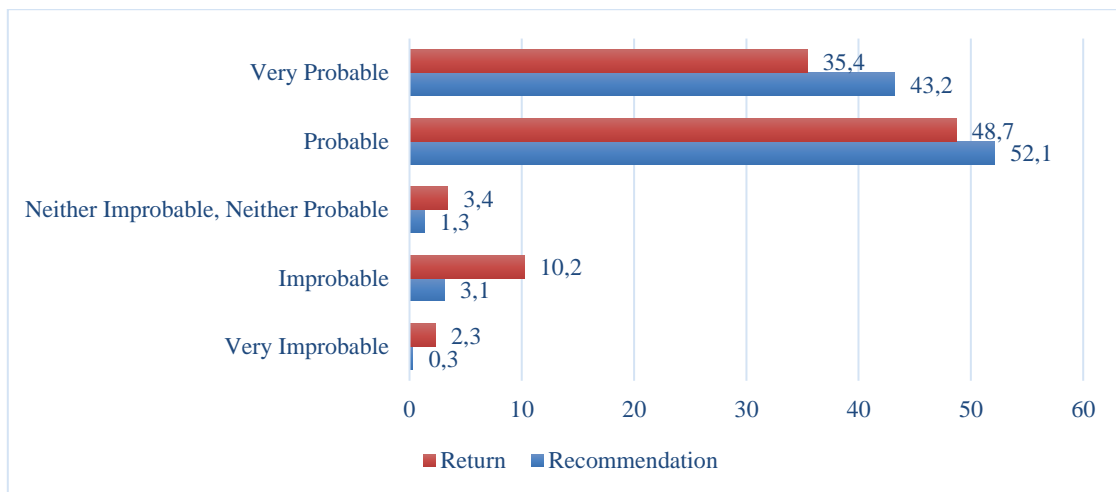
Graphic 2 – Satisfaction Degree with Touristic Destination



Source: Authors

Asked about their future behavioral intentions, the majority of tourists (52,1%) responded that they will probably recommend the destination, while with an equal degree of probability 48,7% of respondents intend to return (Graphic 3).

Graphic 3 - Behavioral Intentions



Source: Authors

4.3 Test of the Research Hypotheses

To test the hypotheses we used the Spearman Correlation.

The first hypothesis tested the influence of the overall image in satisfaction, recommendation, and return intentions. This statistical test allows that there is a positive correlation between overall image and the degree of satisfaction. The correlation is also verified between overall image and return and recommendation intentions (Table 1).

Table 1 - Spearman Correlation Overall Image

	Satisfaction Degree	Recommendation	Return
Overall Image			
Correlation	0,789**	0,253**	0,225**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,000	0,000
N	384	384	384

** . Correlation is significant at the 0,01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Authors

The results demonstrate that tourists' with a positive overall image have a lower satisfaction degree to those who have a very positive image ($p= 0,000$), and tourists with the less positive overall image have a lower probability of return and recommend the destination ($p= 0,000$) (Table 2).

Table 2 – Parameter Estimates Overall Image

		Estimate	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
							Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Threshold	[Satisfaction Degree = 2]	-42,444	3896,390	0,000	1	0,991	-7679,228	7594,339
	[Satisfaction Degree = 3]	-7,987	0,778	105,261	1	0,000	-9,513	-6,461
	[Satisfaction Degree = 4]	-2,765	0,258	115,049	1	0,000	-3,270	-2,260
Location	[Overall Image = 2]	-25,217	2756,447	0,000	1	0,993	-5427,753	5377,320
	[Overall Image = 3]	-42,108	3896,390	0,000	1	0,991	-7678,891	7594,675
	[Overall Image = 4]	-4,069	0,356	130,369	1	0,000	-4,767	-3,370
	[Overall Image = 5]	0 ^a	.	.	0	.	.	.
Threshold	[Return = 1]	-4,437	0,3398	124,229	1	0,000	-5,217	-3,657
	[Return = 2]	-2,435	0,193	158,517	1	0,000	-2,814	-2,056
	[Return = 3]	-2,092	0,174	144,763	1	0,000	-2,433	-1,751
	[Return = 4]	0,421	0,122	11,914	1	0,001	0,182	0,660
Location	[Overall Image = 2]	-3,591	0,966	13,830	1	0,000	-5,483	-1,698
	[Overall Image = 3]	2,992	0,572	27,388	1	0,000	-4,112	-1,871
	[Overall Image = 4]	-0,437	0,227	3,690	1	0,055	-0,883	0,009
	[Overall Image = 5]	0 ^a	.	.	0	.	.	.
Threshold	[Recommendation = 1]	-9,349	1,295	52,105	1	0,000	-11,887	-6,811
	[Recommendation = 2]	-5,959	0,728	67,077	1	0,000	-7,385	-4,533
	[Recommendation = 3]	-4,955	0,582	72,461	1	0,000	-6,096	-3,814
	[Recommendation = 4]	0,067	0,122	0,307	1	0,580	-0,171	0,306
Location	[Overall Image = 2]	-6,908	1,248	30,619	1	0,000	-9,355	-4,461
	[Overall Image = 3]	-6,377	0,876	53,020	1	0,000	-8,093	-4,660
	[Overall Image = 4]	-0,502	0,241	4,328	1	0,037	-0,974	-0,029
	[Overall Image = 5]	0 ^a	.	.	0	.	.	.

Link Function: Logit

a. This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.

Source: Authors

The second hypothesis explored the influence of the degree of satisfaction in return and recommendation intentions. The Spearman Correlation state that exists a positive influence between those elements (Table 3).

Table 3 - Spearman Correlation Satisfaction Degree

Satisfaction Degree		Recommendation	Return
	Correlation	0,310**	0,197**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,000
	N	384	384

** Correlation is significant at the 0,01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Authors

The results shows that least satisfied tourists are less likely to return and recommend the destination (Table 4).

Table 4 - Parameter Estimate Satisfaction Degree

		Estimate	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
							Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Threshold	[Recomendation = 1]	-11,260	1,609	48,954	1	0,000	-14,414	-8,106
	[Recomendation = 2]	-7,699	1,201	41,104	1	0,000	-10,052	-5,345
	[Recomendation=3]	-6,140	0,1004	37,377	1	0,000	-8,108	-4,172
	[Recomendation=4]	0,010	0,121	0,007		0,932	-0,226	0,247
Location	[Degree Satisfaction = 2]	-8,799	1,519	33,542	1	0,000	-11,776	-5,821
	[Degree Satisfsaction = 3]	-8,128	1,269	41,036	1	0,000	-10,615	-5,614
	[Satisfaction Degree = 4]	-0,736	0,254	8,389	1	0,004	-1,233	-0,238
	[Satisfaction Degree = 5]	0 ^a	.	.	0	.	.	.
Threshold	[Return = 1]	-4,410	0,398	122,976	1	0,000	-5,189	-3,630
	[Return = 2]	-2,407	0,193	155,289	1	0,000	-2,785	-2,028
	[Return = 3]	-2,056	0,173	1441,871	1	0,000	-2,394	-1,717
	[Return = 4]	0,475	0,122	15,241	1	0,000	0,237	0,714
Location	[Satisfaction Degree = 2]	-3,139	0,855	13,480	1	0,000	-4,814	-1,463
	[Satisfaction Degree = 3]	-3,020	0,554	29,689	1	0,000	-4,106	-1,934
	[Satisfaction Degree = 4]	-0,210	0,232	0,814	1	0,367	-0,665	0,246

[Satisfaction Degree = 5]	0 ^a	.	.	0	.	.	.
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Link Function: Logit

a. This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.

Source: Authors

5. Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to understand the tourists' overall image about the Azores, the degree of satisfaction with the region and the probability of return and recommend the destination. Findings reveal that tourists have a very positive overall image and they are very satisfied with the tourist destination. The results also confirmed that a considerable percentage of tourists intends to return and recommend the destination.

The study findings confirmed the hypothesis 1, and this is congruent with the results of the studies of: Bigné *et al.*, 2001; Prayag, 2009; Chi & Qu, 2008; Puh, 2014; Pratminingsih *et al.*, 2014; Özdemir & Şimşek, 2015; Munhurrin *et al.*, 2015; Choi *et al.*, 2011; Qu *et al.*, 2011; Zhang *et al.*, 2014; and Kim *et al.*, 2012.

The hypothesis two was also verified, and this result is in accordance with Chi & Qu, 2008; San Martín & Del Bosque, 2008; Alegre & Garau, 2010; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Pratminingsih *et al.*, 2014; and Munhurrin *et al.*, 2015.

Understanding the processes and outcomes of the tourist-destination relationship it is very important because through this destination managers can create, develop and implement successful marketing campaigns to attract tourists and build long last emotional bond between them and the touristic destination. This research makes an important contribution not only because it fills a gap in the context of tourism studies about the Azores, but also because it provides information to local managers once it contributes to perceive the behavior of tourists toward the region. However, as with all research, the current study has several limitations. Firstly, the Azores archipelago is composed of nine islands and surveys was only applied in one of them – São Miguel Island, so it would be more enriching extend the local of surveys collection to the other islands. Secondly, this study measured tourists' satisfaction using a single measurement item. It would be more appropriate utilize a multiple scale attribute measurement once it will provide destination managers more specific data. Finally, this research only examined tourists' behavior and destination image for a short period of time, therefore, it is recommended for future studies to conduct a longitudinal study to track the changes in destination image perception and in consumer behavior.

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