TOURISMOS: AN INTERNATIONAL MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF TOURISM
Volume 5, Number 2, Autumn 2010, pp. 179-191
UDC: 338.48+640(050)

IMAGES OF EGYPT IN UNITED KINGDOM TOUR OPERATORS' BROCHURES

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Tour operators and travel agents play a double role as distribution channels and image creators with tourist brochures playing an important role in the image creation process. This paper assesses tourist images of Egypt in the United Kingdom through content analysis of the brochures of United Kingdom tour operators using 35 image attributes which are rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Most of the brochures in the United Kingdom market present Egypt and its physical attractions - beaches, historical sites, luxury accommodation - extremely positively although clearly they have a vested interest in doing this. They are however silent on certain aspects of the destination which have received negative comments in the literature - the real lifestyles of local people and their friendliness and hospitality, the local cuisine and safety and security.

Keywords: *Brochures, content analysis, Egypt, tour operators, tourist image, UK tourist market*

JEL Classification: *L83, M1, O1*

INTRODUCTION

Competitive advantage not only depends on the quality of a destination's tangible attributes but also on the quality of its intangible attributes, such as service quality and image (Hernadez-Lobato et al., 2006). The success or failure of destinations depends on their images in the minds of potential tourists abroad and the effective management of those images by destination managers (Sonmez and Sirakaya, 2002). Egypt as a tourist destination has been unable to achieve its tourist aims and has not maintained a good share of the international tourist market, despite its unique tourist attractions. This may result from its tourist image abroad.

Formal information sources, such as brochures, have an important impact on image formation of a destination (Beerli and Marten, 2004).

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According to Molina and Esteban (2006) tourism brochures have a direct influence on destination image formation and on the destination choice process. Destination marketers need to understand what to include in brochures, before placing their promotional strategies in tourist markets.

The aim of this paper is to assess tourist images of Egypt as a tourism destination in the UK tourist market. The assessment is undertaken through a review of the relevant destination image literature and content analysis of UK tour operators' brochures collected from travel agencies in UK high street travel agencies. 35 image attributes are identified and rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The paper concludes that while the brochures are extremely positive about Egypt's physical attractions - beaches, historical sites, luxury accommodation – they are silent on some aspects of the tourism product which have received some negative comments in the literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourist image is considered an important aspect of a country's general image. Every destination has an image, but some destinations have stronger images than others (Sonmez and Sirakaya, 2002; Marino, 2008). The intangibility of tourism products means that their image is the only way which potential tourists have of comparing destinations and choosing between them and therefore it is important to create and transmit favourable images to potential tourists in target markets (O'Leary and Deegan, 2005; Marino, 2008). Hernadez-Lobato et al. (2006, p.344) define tourism destination images as 'a mental schema developed by a tourist on a basis of impressions'.

Studies of destination images can be traced back to the 1970s, when Hunt examined the role of image in tourism development (Hunt 1975 cited in Ekinci and Hosany, 2006). Many researchers have discussed image formation components, for instance Gartner (1993) and White (2004) explain that images are formed by three different but interrelated components: cognitive, affective and conative. Gunn (1988a; 1988b) demonstrated also that images are conceived at a number of levels, namely, organic, induced and modified-induced. Gunn also argues that images are slow to change, so regular assessment is very important.

A clear understanding of tourist images of a destination is essential for developing successful marketing strategies (Sonmez and Sirakaya, 2002). Kokosalakis et al. (2006) assert that destination marketers should promote destination images distinctively enough to achieve competitive advantage and that they should direct the image marketing campaigns not

only at potential tourists but also at residents. Molina and Esteban (2006:1041) emphasise that 'destination image is formed from communication inputs throughout one's lifetime, including suggestions made by family and friends, television programs, movies, books, magazines, guides, brochures, and advertisements'. Brochures as a means of promotion play an essential role in the formation of the tourist's destination-induced image (Sirakaya and Sonmez, 2000).

Tourist images of Egypt

Tourism in Egypt has suffered from neighbourhood security and international and national political crises. The number of tourists decreased during the Second Gulf War (1990-1991). Numbers also decreased in 2000 as a result of the Al-Aksa Intifada in Palestine (Steiner, 2007) and in 2002 during the American invasion of Iraq. Egypt's tourism statistics still suffer from poor security in the Middle East region (e.g. as a result of Israel and the ongoing Palestinian problem). The terrorism attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York on 11 September 2001 similarly had a negative impact on tourism in Egypt with the number of tourists decreasing by over 50% (Mansfeld and Winckler, 2004; Steiner, 2007).

Egyptian tourism has also suffered from national crises, such as the terrorism attacks which targeted tourists from 1990 to 2006. Of these, the most damaging crisis occurred in Luxor in 1997 when 58 tourists were shot by terrorists and resulted in large numbers of tour operators cancelling their reservations for the 1997/1998 season (The Specialist National Councils, 1998). Some tourist-generating countries, such as Japan and Switzerland, issued statements warning their citizens against travelling to Egypt (El Beltagy, 1998) and hotel occupancy in Luxor and Aswan reached its lowest levels ever at only 10% (Awad, 1998). These tourism crises negatively impacted on the tourist images of Egypt in international tourist markets.

According to Baloglu and Mangaloglu (2001) tourist images of Egypt in the United States have both positive and negative attributes. For instance, Egypt was perceived to score well in terms of its historical and culture attractions, accommodation, value for money, friendly people, beautiful natural attractions and good climate. However it was scored badly in terms of its local food, nightlife and entertainment, personal safety, good quality of infrastructure and standards of hygiene and cleanliness. Baloglu and Mangaloglu (2001) demonstrate also that the most frequently-mentioned positive responses for Egyptian image

attributes were historic, ancient ruins, archaeology, old, fascinating, exciting, stimulating, exotic, colourful and attractive. The most frequently-mentioned negative responses were dangerous, unreliable, militaristic and terrorism.

The importance of the destination image held by intermediaries

Potential tourists usually have limited knowledge about tourist destinations not previously visited from media and tourist intermediaries (Um and Crompton, 1999). Baloglu and Mangaloglu (2001) emphasise the importance of destination tourist images held by tour operators and travel agents in the tourism distribution and information system. Tour operators and travel agents are opinion formers for their consumers - their images about destination have an important influence on the decision-making processes of potential tourists (Lawton and Page, 1997). Therefore in the destination selection process, tour operators and travel agents play a double role as distribution channels and image creators. They present new definitions of the destination tourist product for their consumers, rather than presenting the tourist product according to consumers' perceived images (Reimer, 1990). Local tourist intermediaries in Egypt do not have enough power to independently enhance or modify the destination image. They depend on cooperation with international tourist intermediaries and media in major tourist markets (Steiner, 2007).

Tourism Brochures as images creators

Despite the development of electronic information sources for tourism activities, public authorities in charge of tourism development and mega tour operators still allocate enormous sums to the production of brochures (Segui-Llinas and Capella-Cervera, 2006). It is argued that potential tourists compare tourist brochures then make their choice for a preferred destination (Molina and Esteban, 2006). Potential tourists use an affective choice mode for expressing destination attributes, such as the pictures in brochures, and an information-processing mode to evaluate attributes, such the price and the quality of tourist facilities (Goossens, 1994). Tain-Cole and Crompton (2003) assert that tourism brochures should meet three main objectives and influence: image formation; destination choice; satisfaction.

Molina and Esteban (2006) assert that destination image formation can be predicted by only two attributes of brochures: luring and sense of

wonder. They argue that the brochures are a conventional communication tool frequently used in public and private tourism activities and brochures are designed to be informational, promotional, and lure. Andereck (2005) is convinced that tourism brochures have more influence on inexperienced tourists than repeat tourists.

Many researchers ranked brochures as one of the most important information sources for tourist attractions, for instance O'Leary and also Andereck and Caldwell 1993 (cited in Andereck, 2005) ranked brochures as the third most commonly-used information source by tourists. Yamamoto and Gill 1999 (cited in Andereck, 2005) found brochures to be one of the two most important sources of information for Japanese tourists. Andereck (2005) reported that brochures were ranked the fifth most-common source of information. Researchers have analysed tourism brochures from different perspectives - some of them focusing on the brochure text and others focusing on the pictures. Tuohino, (2001) analyses destination images in two ways: images of tourism professionals and images of tourist brochures. The brochure analysis focuses on the picture-text relation as well as on the general appearance and style of the brochures.

METHODOLOGY

The research out lined in this paper was based on an analysis of the tourist images of Egypt presented by tour operators to the UK tourist market. Selected sample of brochures to be analysed were produced by main tour operators in the United Kingdom tourist market. Seventeen brochures, most of them produced by Thomas Cook, Thomson, Kuoni and Airtours for the 2008/2009 season, were collected from local travel agents located in three major United Kingdom cites: Cardiff, Liverpool and London. The brochures selected were divided into two categories: the first category included Egypt together with other country destinations destinations, the second presented Egypt as a specific destination.

The research survey focuses on the brochure pictures and textual comments. After reviewing other image attributes and measurement scales (Echtner and Richie, 1991; Getz and Sailor, 1993; Baloglu and Mangaloglu; 2001; Hayes and Macleod, 2006; Molina and Esteban, 2006; Marino, 2008), 35 image attributes were selected for investigating the tourist image of Egypt (see Table 1). Each attribute was rated by the researcher on a 5-point Likert scale (very positive, positive, neither positive nor negative, negative, very negative). A sixth 'not applicable' category was offered for image attributes.

Table 1. Attributes used to measure tourist images of Egypt in 17 brochures produced by UK tour operators

Attributes	
Natural attractions	Local infrastructure
- Coral reefs	Safety and security
- River Nile	Unpolluted environment
- Beaches	Night life and entertainments
- Desert (Safari)	Hygiene and cleanliness
Rich landscape	Friendly and hospitably people
Historical attraction	Local life and customs
- Pyramids	Shopping facilities
- Ancient	Luxury
- Temples	Magical, majestic, memorable
- Tombs	Mysterious, unique
- Islamic Architectures (Cairo)	Festival, events and conferences
Accommodation facilities	Relaxing and comforting
Weather	Sunny
Local food (cuisine)	Luxor
Value for money	Red Sea
Active tourism (sports activities)	Camels
- Diving	

This study used content analysis as an unstructured technique to measure tourist destination images as presented in tourist brochures of Egypt. Albers and James (1988), Crompton (1979 cited in Jenkins, 1999), Pritchard (2001) and Segui-Llinas and Capella-Cervera (2006) also used this technique to analyse tourism brochures to measure destination images. According to Finn et al. (2000 cited in Segui-Llinas, and Capella-Cervera 2006) content analysis is a quantitative means of analysing qualitative data by counting frequencies in categories with different meanings. Pine and Gilmore (1999) suggest that content analysis of brochures and leaflets should integrate both qualitative and quantitative dimensions. Jenkins (1999), Hall and Valentin (2005) and O'Leary and Deegan (2005) indicate that the content analysis technique can be used to analyse written and photographic information, such as guidebooks and tourism brochures. They also highlight that content analysis can provide a great deal of information about the image projected of tourist destinations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Visualization of the Egyptian tourist product was presented through photographs and these were supplemented by textual comments. Most of the brochures (94%) emphasised the enjoyability of tourist places in Egypt. In general positive images of Egypt as a tourist destination were presented by the United Kingdom tour operators' brochures. All the brochures focused mainly on beach tourism, as well as historical tourism. The brochures emphasised on the luxury accommodation (96%). Historical and ancient tourist images were the most popular images although some brochures (24%) such as Kouni (2008), Airtours (2008), and Thomson (2008) refer to the diversity of the Egyptian tourist product. For instance the Thomson brochure commented that:

> *When you picture Egypt what springs to mind? Rippling desert sands? Majestic pyramids? The River Nile? Well think again, because these days it's all about the beaches. A relaxing alternative to the fabled treasure of ancient Egypt, the fashionable resorts that make up the Red Sea Riviera are now considered to be the place to holiday. You're talking luxurious hotel complexes, golden sandy beaches, and, of course, diving centres.*
>
> (Thomson, 2008:16)

Most of the brochures focused on the Pyramids (88%) and temples (78%). This is not unusual - many tourist destinations marketing strategies spotlight their cultural and heritage attractions (Kokosalakis et al, 2006). Bryce (2007) demonstrated this also in his study emphasising that Egypt was presented and promoted in European tourism brochures with two dimensions - ancient Pharaonic Egypt and modern beach (sun/sand/sea) tourism. The Pharaonic, the oriental and the mystery images are the dominant popular images of Egypt. The River Nile is presented positively in about half of the brochures. It is always linked to cruises and Luxor city which is presented very positively in all brochures. Islamic images of Old Cairo are also presented positively in some brochures (35%) through photographs of Islamic architecture. The images of Cairo and the rest of Egypt in all the brochures were dominated by camels and Pyramids. The brochures used words such as: magical; majestic; memorable; mysterious; unique, to describe the historical and natural tourist attractions of Egypt.

Although all brochures showcased the superb beaches in the Red Sea region, only half of them commented on the coral reefs as underwater

attractions. Some of them (33%) demonstrated diving activities. However not one of the brochures mentioned the north-western coastal resorts on the Mediterranean Sea. Hence the image of Egypt as a destination for the sports activities (active tourism) focuses only on the Red Sea resorts. The tourist image of Egypt constructed through photographs of historical and recreational landscapes is not connected to local people, local culture and local identity. In other words the Egyptian tourist image is mostly based on physical landscape rather than Egypt's rich cultural heritage and its local people, local culture and local identities.

There were no local people at all in the most of brochures (80%), if local people were shown it was in a negative terms - of poor people and dirty children in crowded streets, but images of the wider cross-section of real local people and real lifestyles was not presented in the brochures. There are no textual comments or photographs showing local people and tourists interacting in most of the brochures (79%). Some of them (21%) present Bazaar sellers and camel owners dealing with tourists. Thereby images of Egypt's friendly and hospitable people are not presented in brochures. This may impact negatively on perception of safety because depicting local people with tourists in the same picture gives a feeling of safety and security, especially in destinations such as Egypt which have suffered from different tourism crises, particularly terrorism. One brochure also refers indirectly to the unsafe situation in Egypt through publishing the address of internet site (www.fco.gov.uk) which provides advice tourists before they travel. In August 2008 this site warned potential tourists not to travel to Egypt because the risk of terrorism remained.

Apart from night shots the weather was always shown as being sunny. This may reflect two images: positive for beaches and negative for historical sites in summer when temperatures can soar. All the brochures focused on the desert landscapes of Egypt but only a few (18%) demonstrates positively the desert tourist activities, such as safari tours and Bedouin tent celebrations. Most of the brochure pictures (88%) referred positively to the unpolluted environment. All brochures demonstrated a very positive image of Egypt as a value for money destination through explicit comparison of the prices of tourist programmes and tourist nights in Egyptian hotels with prices in other comparable destinations. The brochures emphasise that these destinations do not have the same attractions as Egypt but their prices are higher than Egyptian prices.

Some negative attributes of the tourist image of Egypt are missing in the United Kingdom tour operators' brochures. Most of the brochures (88%) did not mention the Egyptian local food as a key part of the total tourist product. This may be so as not to draw attention to negative images relating to low standards of hygiene as mentioned by Baloglu and Mangaloglu (2001). The standard of local infrastructure and transportation is not mentioned or pictured at all in the brochures - again this may be because of perceptions of its low standards. Similarly most of the brochures (82%) did not focus on the night life or entertainments.

Although Egypt has many Bazaars in all its tourist places, many of the brochures did not picture or comment on these shopping facilities. It may be that these retail outlets do not have a good relationship with the tour operators producing the brochures. Many modern and new aspects of the Egyptian tourist product - festivals, conferences, bird watching, diving to observe ancient architecture underwater - are not pictured or commented on at all in the brochures,. Most of the brochures (88%) portrayed tourists either singly or in couples. The United Kingdom tour operators' brochures are clearly not aiming the Egyptian tourism product at families - this may give the impression that Egypt not suitable for family tourism.

CONCLUSION

The research investigates the tourist image of Egypt held by the United Kingdom tour operators through analysis of a sample (17) of their brochures. A 5-item Likert scale was developed to content analyse 35 Egyptian image attributes. Clearly the tour operators producing the brochures have a vested interest in the consumer purchasing the tourist products portrayed and therefore are likely to be silent on any negative aspects of the destination image. They are extremely positive about Egyptian physical tourist attractions (e.g. beaches, historical sites, accommodation). They are silent on the real lifestyles of Egyptian local people and their friendliness and hospitality, Egyptian cuisine, the safety and security. This echoes Baloglu and Mangaloglu (2001) observation on the food and security. One of the tour operators (First Choice) protected the company by making reference, albeit in small print, to the foreign aid commonwealth office website which provides travel advisors for UK citizens. In terms of the diversity of the Egyptian tourism product the brochures sell the destination short - they do not draw attention to certain tourist products, such as the attractions of the birdwatching, the potential

of Egypt as a conference destination, festival tourism or desert tourism (safari).

The managers of the tourist product in Egypt should pay attention to the quality of the local infrastructure and the quality of the tourist services and facilities to realise the tourists' satisfactions. Thereby they can modify and enhance their tourist image. According to Marino (2008), natural and manmade (physical) tourist resources available in the destinations can assure comparative advantage. But to assure competitive advantage needs more ability to use and manage these natural and man-made resources over the long term. Destination managers also need to manage their relationship with United Kingdom tour operators and try to complete the blanks on missing image attributes and enhance negative image attributes. The marketers of the Egyptian tourist product should establish and manage an image strategy for the United Kingdom market and other key international tourist markets based on the promotion, pricing and distribution channel efforts.

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SUBMITTED: APRIL 2009
REVISION SUBMITTED: AUGUST 2009
ACCEPTED: SEPTEMBER 2009
REFEREED ANONYMOUSLY

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to thank Professor Eleri Jones, Director of Research at Cardiff School of Management, UWIC for her helpful comments and support for completion of this paper.