

THE BRAND IMAGE OF A SMALL ISLAND DESTINATION

Perunjodi Naidoo

University of Technology Mauritius

Prabha Ramseook-Munhurrun

University of Technology Mauritius

Ramesh Durbarry

University of Technology Mauritius

Brand image is a prominent marketing tool for destination marketers. A strong brand image implies having an upper-hand over competitors and thus preventing tourists from shifting their purchase intentions to other destinations. This paper examines the brand image attributes of a small island developing state. It also determines the gap between tourists' expected and perceived brand image attributes. The study uses a focus group to guide the design of the questionnaire. Using factor analysis, the results indicate that the attributes performances exceed expectations, reinforcing the positive brand image of Mauritius. It is also found that the destination's attractiveness, up-market products, tourist attractions and the tropical setting were among the key factors in determining the brand image of the destination. The study also suggests that over-promising promotional campaigns may affect the brand image of small island developing destinations.

Keywords: *brand image attributes, destination marketing, Mauritius, positioning, small island developing states (SIDS)*

JEL Classification: *L83, M1, O1*

INTRODUCTION

The topic of destination image has received a lot of attention in tourism research (Kamenidou *et al.* 2009; Shin, 2009), however, the growing body of work on image (Gallarza *et al.*, 2002; Pike, 2002)

© University of the Aegean. Print ISSN: 1790-8418, Online ISSN: 1792-6521



Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

reveals that investigations focus mostly on a few countries or regions neglecting most emerging tourist destinations in developing countries (Sonmez and Sirakaya, 2002), specially overlooking small island destinations. As a result, island literature is peripheral as compared to the mainstream (Tsai and Clark, 2003). Therefore, despite the abundance of studies in this area, little attention has been given to the brand image of small islands developing states (SIDS) although a strong brand has become a prerequisite for SIDS who wish to compete amongst other international existing and emerging tourism destinations. These destinations need to be effectively managed from a strategic perspective with brand image playing a key role in positioning the destination as tourists have a multitude of destinations to choose from. Data obtained from studies conducted on image may assist destination managers to identify the strengths and weaknesses of these destinations and provide critical insights on how to better position SIDS as tourism destinations.

Despite Mauritius being featured as a prime island destination by many international magazines, there is scant research on the brand image of Mauritius. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to evaluate the brand image of Mauritius as a holiday destination from the tourists' perspective. The specific objectives of this study are to (1) identify the brand image attributes that tourists use to depict the island; (2) determine the gap between the tourists' expected and perceived brand image attributes.

BRAND IMAGE

Although destination branding is derived from the literature and marketing practices of product branding, branding a destination consists of unique challenges. Effective destination branding consists of marketing activities which create and reinforce positive images associated with the destination with the intention to influence consumers to select the destination instead of another (Blain *et al.*, 2005). Image is at the core of destination branding (Cai, 2002) and a strong destination brand can only be created through a powerful and distinct brand image. Brand image is the consumer's mental representation of the offering (Dobni and Zinjkan, 1990) where symbolic meanings are associated with the specific features of a destination. These mental pictures represent what tourists observe, feel and experience about the destination. It is acknowledged that tourists' selection of a holiday destination is founded on the degree to which the place generates favourable images (Gartner, 1989).

Brand image has been viewed as “a cluster of attributes and associations that consumers connect to a brand” (Biel, 1993: 71). Attributes have been defined as the “descriptive features” typifying a product or service (Keller, 1998: 93). Destination management organisations (DMOs) often use selected brand image attributes to build and strengthen the positioning of a destination. The result is that the appealing brand image attributes of the destination will reach the consumers and the associated benefits will be vividly present in their minds in the form of images. As such, image is a critical factor in motivating the tourists in their purchase decision (Cai, 2002) regardless of whether the image is truly representative of the destination (Um and Crompton, 1990). Studies have also found that there is a relationship between image and tourists’ behavioral intentions (Mohamed, 2008)

The positive images projected by destination authorities are meant to positively change the perceptions that tourists hold of the destination (Tasci *et al.*, 2007). However, in many cases “tourists who are the focus of the image formation campaign may see things differently from that of the destination promoters” (Tasci *et al.*, 2007:1531) as brand image is also influenced by factors which are less controllable by the DMOs such as unplanned communication tools like word-of-mouth or consumers own perceptions of the destination (Berry and Seltman, 2007).

Several methodologies have been developed to measure the image of destinations. According to Echtner and Ritchie (1993), destination image is a comprehensive and complex construct that is better approached using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Other researchers also support these methods which either mostly constitute of a structured, quantitative approach or less commonly, an unstructured, qualitative approach such as focus groups or open-ended survey questions (Pike, 2002; Beerli and Martin, 2004). In the quantitative approach, image is evaluated through a list of attributes assessed by a Likert scale or a semantic differential scale, where ratings are obtained for each attribute (Sonmez and Sirakaya, 2002). Echtner and Ritchie (1991; 1993) proposed a scale to measure tourists’ perceptions of a destination attributes and argue that the latter can be separated into functional and psychological attributes. The functional attributes are associated with the tangible or measurable attributes whereas the emotional aspect comprises of the symbolic or intangible attributes. Destinations should make a rigorous analysis of their image by combining together the different image attributes in order to identify the most functional and psychological characteristics of the destination (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993) since these attributes position and differentiate the destination. Furthermore, through

the quantitative approach, the overall image is calculated as an average or sum of the attribute scores. Structured approaches have the advantages that attribute lists are easy to administer, produce data that can be easily coded and analysed, and facilitate comparison (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991), however, they offer little opportunity to capture “the full dynamics or richness inherent in the process of destination choice” (Dann, 1996: 42), thereby potentially reducing the completeness of the measurement due to lack of qualitative information. Multi-attribute methodology is a common approach to measure image and it has been noted that differences are revealed across studies among attributes used (Ahmed, 1991; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a, b; Chaudhary, 2000; Chon *et al.*, 1991; Echtner and Ritchie, 1993; Fakeye and Crompton, 1991; Kozak and Rimmington, 2000; Stepchenkova and Morrison, 2008).

MAURITIUS AND TOURISM

Mauritius a developing island located in the Indian Ocean covering 1,860 square kilometres (720 square miles) is a well-known holiday destination for beach-resort tourists. Due to the influence of the colonial era where indentured labourers and slaves were brought from different countries, contemporary Mauritius consists of a dense population (about 1.2 million) of Indian, African, Chinese and French descendants.

Today, tourism is one of the main pillars of the Mauritius economy. The growth of the industry has occurred continuously from 27, 650 tourists in 1970 to 906, 971 in 2007 (AHRIM, 2008). In 2007, gross tourism receipts amounted to USD\$ 1,226 million (40, 687 million rupees) and provided direct employment to 26, 322 individuals (AHRIM, 2008). Europe is the main tourist generator with 595, 653 tourists in 2007, showing a rise of 16.7% since 2006 (Table 1). The leading market is France with 240, 028 tourist arrivals followed by the United Kingdom, Reunion island, Italy, Germany and India.

The brand image of Mauritius has been predominantly shaped by the marketing efforts carried out by the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority (MTPA) which is the national DMO responsible for promoting the island in selected foreign markets. The principal assets underpinned in the promotional tools are that of the sunny weather, sandy beaches and calm lagoons which depict Mauritius as a paradise island with tropical climate, exotic flora and fauna, and multi-ethnic hospitable inhabitants. As in several other island destinations (Ioannides and Holcomb, 2003), the Government has adopted the strategy of high-spending tourists in pursuing tourism development as a key economic activity. These up-

market tourists have higher requirements in terms of tourism products and facilities offered at the destination. Hence, Mauritius is positioned as a luxury destination with high standards of hotels where tourists can experience superior service.

Table 1 Tourist Arrivals for Year 2007

Country of Residence	Tourists Arrivals	Percentage (%)
France	240, 028	26.5
United Kingdom	107, 297	11.8
Reunion Island	95, 823	10.6
South Africa	81, 733	9.0
Italy	69, 510	7.7
Germany	65, 165	7.2
India	42, 974	4.7
Australia	19, 635	2.2
Switzerland	17, 546	1.9
Other Countries	167, 260	18.4
Total	906, 971	100

Source: AHRIM (2007)

In recent years, emphasis is increasingly being placed on the island's history, culture and heritage, ecotourism products, safety of the destination and niche products such as golf, medical and therapeutic tourism. The marketing efforts carried out by the MTPA have contributed to create the brand image of Mauritius. The challenge facing Mauritius as a holiday destination is even greater since the Government's strategy is to raise tourist arrivals to an unprecedented figure of 2,000,000 by the Year 2015. In order to attain these objectives, the Government has increased the budget of the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority to USD\$ 10 million (340 million Mauritian Rupees) for the year 2008/2009 (Deloitte 2008) and appointed a private firm for enhancing the destination brand.

STUDY METHODS

Due to the exploratory nature of the study, the research design consisted of two phases. Echtner and Ritchie (1993) suggested that in order to capture all the components of destination image a combination of structured and unstructured methodologies should be used. Gurthie and Thyne (2004) also recommended that unstructured methods be incorporated into the research design at an early stage to elicit information from respondents that can be later analysed using quantitative methods.

Following the combination of structured and unstructured methodologies suggested by the literature, the first phase of the research design consisted of a focus group, carried out to enable the social reality of the tourists to be constructed from their own perspectives. The purpose of the focus group was to develop a list of attributes representing the brand image of Mauritius which would then be used to develop the survey instrument. This is further supported by Echtner and Ritchie (1991), who suggested that if the attributes were likely to be numerous and diverse, extensive research should be taken to ensure that all have been uncovered and to give greater validity to the attribute list. McCartney (2005) also used a mixed methodology to measure destination image perceptions where a focus group was used to obtain additional attributes. One of the objectives of the questionnaire was to assess the gap between expected and perceived brand image attributes. To calculate this gap, it was necessary to phrase the focus group question in relation to respondents' expectations of the brand image of the destination prior to their visit. As a result of this process, the responses were refined into a list consisting of 18 specific attributes (Table 2). Most of the attributes generated were similar to those found in previous studies such as "safety and security", "quality standard of hotels" and 'reasonable price'. The attributes that were uncommon to other studies were "medical expertise", "spa facilities", and "golf".

The second part of the methodology consisted of a questionnaire that was designed taking into account the attributes generated from the focus group. A pilot study was conducted to determine if the questions were correctly set and understood and if the data collection approach was appropriate. Following this exercise, the questionnaire was revised with minor amendments. The survey was carried out daily over a period of 4 weeks in the months of January and February at the Sir Seewoosagar International Airport of Mauritius. In situations where individuals were travelling in groups or families, only one questionnaire was provided to avoid repetition and imitation of responses (Kozak and Rimmington, 2000). Only departing tourists were surveyed, as they would be in a better position to express their views based on the experience with several aspects of the destination. 400 samples were obtained from tourists at the departure lounge, fifty-eight of the responses were found unusable and the remaining 342 were processed for analysis purposes.

Table 2 Attributes Generated from Focus Group

	Attributes of Destination
1.	Standard of Hotels
2.	Hospitality of locals
3.	Cultural diversity
4.	Safety and Security
5.	Cultural and Historical Sites
6.	Local Cuisine
7.	Peaceful and Relaxing
8.	Ecotourism and Nature-based Activities
9.	Family Activities
10.	Nightlight and Entertainment
11.	Festivals, Events and Handicraft
12.	Shopping Facilities
13.	Medical Expertise
14.	Spa Facilities
15.	Golf
16.	White Sandy Beaches
17.	Sunny and Warm Climate
18.	Reasonable Price

Descriptive analyses were used to provide the European tourists' profile and to obtain mean scores of the brand image attributes for the perceptions, expectations and gaps data sets and paired *t*-tests were carried out to investigate if there was a statistically significant difference between the perceptions and expectations sets of scores. A principal components factor analysis was then conducted on the brand image instrument to confirm the various facets of the brand image construct.

STUDY RESULTS

Analysis of brand image attributes

A pre-analysis testing for the suitability of the entire sample for factor analysis was computed. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.86 and the Bartlett tests of sphericity was significant at $p < 0.01$, thus indicating that the sample was suitable for factor analytic procedures. A principal components factor analysis was then conducted on the brand image instrument to confirm the various facets of the brand image construct.

Table 3 Results of Factor Analysis on 16 Attributes and Its Four Factors

Factors and attributes	Eigen value	Factor loadings	Percentage variance	Cum. Percentage	Cronbach alpha
Factor 1: Tourists Attractions	6.549		36.38	36.38	0.843
Cultural and Historical Sites		0.843			
Ecotourism and Nature-based Activities		0.789			
Family Activities		0.674			
Festivals, Events and Handicrafts		0.643			
Nightlife and entertainment		0.580			
Shopping Facilities		0.555			
Factor 2:Up-Market Products	2.196		12.20	48.59	0.750
Medical Expertise		0.579			
Spa Facilities		0.827			
Golf		0.747			
Factor 3: Destination Attractiveness	1.327		7.37	55.96	0.751
Quality standard of hotels		0.527			
Hospitality of Mauritians		0.776			
Local Cuisine		0.688			
Reasonable Price		0.558			
Factor 4: Tropical Setting	1.024		5.69	61.65	0.704
White Sandy Beaches		0.694			
Peaceful and Relaxing		0.677			
Sunny and Warm Climate		0.814			

Notes: Overall alpha coefficient = 0.881

Individual attributes were assessed for discriminant validity within the destination brand image construct using VARIMAX rotation on the

perceptions-expectations scores of these attributes (Table 3). On the basis of Hair *et al.* (1998) criterion, factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 and factor loadings that are equal or greater than 0.5 were retained. The percentage of variance explained by four factors in the perceptions-expectations data sets were 61.65%. 16 attributes loading under the four factors were extracted from the analysis with the exception of two attributes “cultural diversity” and “safety and security”. The factors have been labeled as follows: “Tourist Attractions” (Factor 1), “Up-Market Products” (Factor 2), “Destination Attractiveness” (Factor 3) and “Tropical Setting” (Factor 4). Factor 1, “Tourist Attractions”, explained 36.38% of the variance in the model and encompassed 6 attributes including “family activities”, “nightlife and entertainment”, “shopping facilities”, “ecotourism and nature-based activities”, “cultural and historical sites” and “festivals, events and handicrafts”. Factor 2, “Up-Market Products”, explained 12.2% of the variance and consisted of “medical expertise”, “spa facilities” and “golf”. Factor 3, “Destination Attractiveness”, explained 7.37% of the variance in the model and composed of 4 attributes which were “standard of hotels”, “hospitality of Mauritians”, “local cuisine” and “reasonable price”. Factor 4, “Tropical Setting”, explained 5.69% of the variance and referred to 3 attributes “white sandy beaches”, “peaceful and relaxing”, and “sunny and warm climate”.

Attributes for each subscale were subjected to reliability analysis. The alpha coefficient for the total scale was 0.881 and 0.843, 0.750, 0.751 and 0.704 respectively for the factors of “Tourist Attractions”, “Up-Market Products”, “Destination Attractiveness” and “Tropical Setting” respectively. Usually a reliability coefficient above 0.70 is considered sufficient for exploratory studies (Nunnally, 1994). Thus, the results indicated that these multiple measures were highly reliable for the measurement of each construct.

Measuring brand image attributes

The 16 brand image attributes of Mauritius derived from the factor analysis are presented in Table 4 which portrays the expectations and perceptions scores as well as the gap results. It is observed from the expectations scores that the means ranged from 2.96 to 4.59. The respondents have high expectations for “peaceful and relaxing” with a mean of 4.59 and “sunny and warm climate, mean = 4.59” followed by “hospitality of Mauritians” with a mean of 4.53. The lowest mean score of 2.96 was obtained for “family activities”.

Table 4 Gap Scores for Brand Image Attributes

Factor 1: Tourist Attractions	3.41	3.22	0.18 (0.53)	6.44*
Cultural and Historical Sites	3.65	3.31	0.34 (1.00)	6.19*
Ecotourism and Nature-based Activities	3.47	3.24	0.23 (0.95)	4.47*
Family Activities	3.25	2.96	0.29 (0.96)	5.52*
Festivals, Events and Handicrafts	3.31	3.09	0.22 (1.00)	4.12*
Nightlife and entertainment	3.28	3.15	0.13 (0.96)	2.43**
Shopping Facilities	3.49	3.58	-0.09 (0.92)	-1.94**
Factor 2: Up-Market Products	3.54	3.35	0.18 (0.66)	5.05*
Medical Expertise	3.43	3.57	-0.14 (1.06)	-2.50**
Spa Facilities	3.45	3.01	0.44 (0.97)	8.34*
Golf	3.73	3.48	0.25 (0.88)	5.30*
Factor 3: Destination Attractiveness	4.18	4.32	-0.14 (1.09)	-2.38*
Quality standard of hotels	4.25	4.28	-0.03 (0.78)	-0.70
Hospitality of Mauritians	4.55	4.53	0.02 (0.68)	0.64**
Local Cuisine	4.06	4.31	-0.25 (3.90)	-1.16
Reasonable Price	3.85	4.16	-0.31 (0.97)	-5.89*
Factor 4: Tropical setting	4.51	4.52	-0.02 (0.43)	-0.72**
White Sandy Beaches	4.50	4.39	0.11 (0.65)	2.90*
Peaceful and Relaxing	4.54	4.59	-0.05 (0.65)	-1.40
Sunny and Warm Climate	4.49	4.59	-0.10 (0.68)	-2.80*
Overall Gap (Combined scale of 16 attributes)	3.91	3.86	0.05 (0.41)	2.38**

Notes: Standard Deviation, SD is presented in brackets; * $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$

Tourists were also required to rate their perceptions of the brand image attributes after having experienced the destination and the findings revealed that the mean scores ranged from 3.25 to 4.55. The highest mean values were observed for “hospitality of Mauritians” with a mean of 4.55 followed by “peaceful and relaxing” (mean value of 4.54), “white sandy beaches” (mean value of 4.50) and “sunny and warm climate” (mean value of 4.49). It can be further observed that relatively low

perceptions scores were obtained for “family activities” and “nightlife and entertainment” with mean values of 3.25 and 3.28 respectively.

Table 4 also depicts the gap scores, that is, the perceptions minus expectations (P-E) scores of the attributes measured. The largest positive gap scores were attributed to “spa facilities” (0.44) followed by “cultural and historical sites” (0.32) and “family activities” (0.29). In fact, out of the 16 brand image attributes, 9 were highly rated by the respondents. Hence positive gap scores were also obtained for “golf” (0.25), “ecotourism and nature-based activities” (0.23), “festivals, events and handicrafts” (0.22), “nightlife and entertainment” (0.13), “white sandy beaches” (0.11) and “hospitality of Mauritians” (0.02). The most notable negative discrepancy between the perceptions and expectations ratings is concerned with “reasonable price” with a score of -0.31. Negative gap scores were also obtained for “local cuisine” (-0.25), “medical expertise” (-0.14), “sunny and warm climate” (-0.10), “shopping facilities” (-0.09), “standard of hotels” (-0.03), and “peaceful and relaxing” (-0.05).

Using the paired *t*-test, a comparison of each tourist’s paired ratings on their perceptions and expectations of brand image attributes indicated that 12 of the 16 attributes examined were statistically significant (Table 4). In addition, the overall gap (defined as perceptions minus expectations) score was 0.05 and was statistically different at the 0.05 significance level, indicating that the destination performed better as compared to the expectations of tourists.

DISCUSSION

From the study, it is observed that despite faced with numerous challenges as a SIDS, Mauritius is well positioned in the European market since the overall gap between perceptions and expectations is positive. This tends to suggest that the destination has been able to deliver its brand promise as tourists’ perceptions of the destination concur with images projected by the DMO and other influential sources available to them prior to their visit. However, the development of a scale to measure the brand image attributes of Mauritius reveals that although the overall brand image is positive, there are also weaknesses in specific areas. The results indicate 4 distinctive factors that characterise the brand image of the island from the tourists’ perspective: “Tourist Attractions”, “Up-Market Products”, “Destination Attractiveness” and “Tropical Setting”. Factor 1, “Tourist Attractions” and Factor 3, “Destination Attractiveness” are factors which have also been revealed in the study of Kozak and Rimmington (2000) focusing on Mallorca, Spain. This shows that image

factors such as “Tourist Attractions” and “Destination Attractiveness” are common to both SIDS and larger developed countries although attributes falling under these factors are unique to specific destinations.

Factor 1 “Tourist Attractions” received lower expectations scores than any other factors. The small size and limited resources which characterise SIDS may have led to the expectations that apart from beach-based activities, the island would be limited in terms of availability of attractions. This is supported by strong positive gaps for “cultural and historical sites” (0.34), “ecotourism and nature-based activities” (0.23), “festivals, events and handicraft” (0.22) and “nightlife and entertainment” (0.13). Over several years, the marketing efforts have largely focused on Mauritius as a honeymoon destination rather than a family destination. Hence, tourists perceived that the attribute “family activities” performed better than their initial expectations. “Shopping facilities” scored a negative gap which could be explained by open-ended responses where some tourists stated that they felt exploited by locals as they were harassed to buy certain items and were charged higher prices than Mauritians.

Factor 2 “Up-Market Products” reflects product and services which have been developed and marketed in an attempt to position Mauritius on the “high end”. Mauritius is a known up-market destination in European countries and is further pursuing this image through products such as golf and wellness tourism. As Ioannides and Holcomb (2003) argue, the strategy of up-market tourism has been adopted by several small island destinations in order to preserve their limited natural resources. For the destination under scrutiny, increasing the number of international tourist arrivals to a figure which is equivalent to almost twice the current population size contradicts the initial development of up-market tourism strategies where the objective was to preserve limited resources and reduce environmental impacts on SIDS. The expected rise in the number of tourists has resulted in the construction of additional hotel rooms in Mauritius which may affect its high image status as in order to be profitable, prices of rooms may have to be reduced during off-peak seasons. As such, the destination is likely to become financially accessible to a larger number of tourists impacting on its up-market brand image.

Factor 3 “Destination Attractiveness” obtained the highest negative gap scores across all factors, Destination managers should devote particular attention to this factor as it consists of features which shapes the positioning of the destination and provides the place with its competitive edge. For example, Mauritius has long been marketed as a destination

which possesses high quality hotels and hospitable inhabitants. However, a positive gap was only observed for “hospitality of Mauritians”. The locals extend their welcome to tourists who they consider as guests. However, attributes regarding “quality standard of hotel”, “local cuisine” and “reasonable price” all obtained negative scores. The hotels of Mauritius are marketed as offering an excellent service. However, if employees have not been able to meet the requirements of customers in terms of service standards, this could have contributed to the lower perceptions of service quality delivered by hotels. Therefore, hotels must ensure that they have well-trained and dedicated employees so as to deliver the brand promise. “Local cuisine” also obtained a negative gap score as European, Chinese and Indian food are the most common types of cuisine available in Mauritius. A negative gap was also obtained for “reasonable price” as some tourists expressed that they were charged higher prices than Mauritians. It is common practice for several businesses in Mauritius to charge a “tourist price” as it is believed that tourists have a higher purchasing power as opposed to locals.

Factor 4 is a brand image factor unique to SIDS. However, shortcomings were observed for “sunny and warm climate” showing that the expectations of tourists were not met. This was because at the time of the survey, the country was under the influence of a cyclone and the perceptions of respondents were not equivalent to the idyllic weather portrayed in the promotional materials. For SIDS climate is an important image attributes which has become highly marketable and a source of comparative advantage. Mauritius is marketed as having sunny weather all year round despite being prone to cyclones from four to six months during the summer months. Although cyclones do not affect the destination every year, tourists are seldom aware that SIDS are nevertheless exposed to such natural disasters and that the ‘promises’ of a sunny holiday may not be met by the destination.

The attribute related to “peaceful and relaxing” also obtained a negative score. SIDS have been portrayed as remote destinations equivalent to a perfect getaway from metropolises such as Europe. Brown (1997) argues that Indian Ocean islands for instance the Maldives, Mauritius and Seychelles evoke idyllic images that are reflected in the language of promotional literature. Promotional slogans used by the DMO also evoke such images, for example- *a world out of this world* is a slogan used to portray Mauritius in European destinations. This slogan is supported by pictures of white sandy beaches and turquoise lagoons portrayed with no individual or sign of development. However, Mauritius is one of the most densely populated countries in the world where cities

and towns bustle with people, traffic jam, noise and other activities. This is further highlighted from open-ended responses which reveal that tourists felt that careless litter disposal and vehicles cause a considerable amount of pollution which tends to spoil the “peaceful and relaxing” environment. The European tourists also perceived that the Mauritian drivers were reckless and this further contributed to disturbing the peaceful expected state of the tropical destination setting. Thus, the negative gap could be explained by an “exaggerated” promotional campaign resulting in tourists developing anchored images of Mauritius as an untouched paradise island.

CONCLUSIONS

The study reveals that Mauritius has been able to develop a strong brand image due to its Unique Selling Proposition. It is reported that “Tourist Attractions”, “Up-Market Products”, “Destination Attractiveness” and “Tropical Setting” were key factors in determining the brand image of the destination. These brand image factors represent the Unique Selling Proposition of the brand Mauritius and cannot be transposed to other SIDS. The destination managers of SIDS should carry out a careful identification of their destination attributes in order to develop a Unique Selling Proposition for their respective destinations. The destination Mauritius should capitalise on its Unique Selling Proposition and related attributes as they represent an opportunity for differentiation. The threat to establishing a clear brand image in Mauritius lies in uncontrolled developments which may spoil the image of these nations. Mauritius is perceived as an attractive up-market tropical destination with a wide range of attractions. It is essential for destination managers to effectively handle its combination of attributes to consolidate the tourism appeal of the destination and to maintain its desired positioning in the target markets. The study has reported negative characteristics, which if not rectified will severely impinge on the image, and positioning of the destination. A positive image may continue even long after the factors that has moulded it has changed (Fayeke and Crompton, 1991) and although the present image is one where the local inhabitants are hospitable, negative incidents such as tourists feeling exploited in their exchange of transactions are likely to spoil the brand image of the destination over the long-term. Therefore, continuing to improve the features of the destination is imperative (Joppe *et al.*, 2001). Since SIDS are reported to have fragile ecosystems, it is also imperative to manage the natural environment and control litter disposal.

Branding a destination is more complex than branding a product since it is incorporeal and consists of several interdependent components which represent the holiday experience. The image of destinations is of imperative importance to tourism boards (Horrihan, 2009) and the brand image of destinations must be able to capture the multitude of experiences offered during a holiday. If the marketing efforts are successful, strong brand image attributes can become pull motivators for tourists to select a destination over another. There is also a greater risk in destination branding as travelling to a small distant island is more costly in terms of both finances and time. The brand image attributes are of utmost importance in providing tangible cues which will help reduce the perceived risks and provide impressions of quality. Although destination managers do not have ownership of the holiday experience, they still need to ensure that the image attributes are marketed in a homogenous manner to avoid inconsistencies between the projected image and the perceived image. This could be achieved through collaboration of the different stakeholders such as DMO, Government, tourism organisations, and the local population. They should work in partnership to promote these factors as well as to redress any shortfall associated with the brand image attributes. Additionally, destination managers should provide realistic promotional messages so as to meet its brand promise.

This study is of valuable assistance to academics, DMO and tourism organisations and it also extends the limited body of work available on destination branding in SIDS. However, the limitations of the study must be noted when interpreting the results and developing future research. The study was carried out during the aftermath of a cyclone and surveyed only European tourists. A study analyzing cross-cultural perceptions and expectations would be valuable in enhancing knowledge on how best to position the destination in specific markets based on brand image attributes.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, Z.U. (1991). The influence of the components of a state's tourist image on product positioning strategy. *Tourism Management*, December, pp.331-340.
- AHRIM (2008). Annual Report 2007-2008, Association des Hôteliers et Restaurateurs-Ile Maurice.
- Baloglu, S. & McCleary, K.W. (1999a). A model of destination image formation. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 26, No.4, pp.868-897.

- Baloglu, S., & McCleary, K.W. (1999b). US international pleasure travelers' images of four Mediterranean destinations: A comparison of visitors and nonvisitors. *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 38, No.2, pp.114–129.
- Beerli, A. & Martin, J.D. (2004). Tourists' characteristics and the perceived image of tourist destinations: a quantitative analysis-a case study of Lanzarote, Spain. *Tourism Management*, Vol. 25, pp.623–636.
- Berry, L.L. & Seltman, K.D. (2007). Building a strong services brand: lessons from Mayo Clinic. *Business Horizons*, Vol. 50, pp.199–209.
- Biel, A. (1993). Converting Image into Equity. In D.A. Aaker and A. Biel (Eds.) *Brand Equity and Advertising* (pp.67–82), NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Bigné, J.E., Sánchez, M.I. & Sánchez, J. (2001). Tourism image, evaluation variables and after purchase behaviour: inter-relationship. *Tourism Management*, Vol. 22, No.6, pp.607–616.
- Blain, C., Levy, Stuart, E. & Ritchie Brent, J.R. (2005). Destination Branding: Insights and Practices from Destination Management Organizations. *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 43, May, pp.328–338.
- Brown, G.P. (1997). Tourism in the Indian Ocean: a case study of Mauritius. In D. Lockhart and D. Drakakis-Smith (Eds.) *Island Tourism Trends and Prospects* (pp.229–248).
- Cai, L. (2002). Cooperative branding for rural destinations. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 29, pp.720–742.
- Chaudhary, M. (2000). India's image as a tourist destination-a perspective of foreign tourists. *Tourism Management*, Vol. 2, pp.293–297.
- Chon, K.S., Weaver, P.A. & Kim, C.Y. (1991). Marketing you community: Image analysis in Norfolk. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No.4, pp.31–37.
- Dann, G. (1996). *The Language of Tourism. A Sociolinguistic Perspective*. Wallingford. UK, CABI International.
- Deloitte (2008). Mauritius budget 2008. [Http://www.deloitte-mu.com/](http://www.deloitte-mu.com/) Accessed the 15th of July 2008.
- Dobni, D. & Zinjan, G.M. (1990). In search of brand image: a foundation analysis. In M.E. Goldberg and R.W. Pollay (Eds.) *Advances in Consumer Research*. Association for Consumer Research, UT: Provo, pp.110–119.
- Echtner, C.M., & Ritchie, J.R.B. (1991). The meaning and measurement of destination image. *The Journal of Tourism Studies*, Vol. 2, No.22, pp.2–12.
- Echtner, C.M. & Ritchie, B. (1993). The measurement of destination image: an empirical assessment. *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 31, No.3, pp.3–13.
- Fayeke, P.C. & Crompton J.L. (1991). Image difference between prospective, first-time and repeat-visitors to the lower Rio Grand Valley. *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 31, No.4, pp.3–13.
- Fill, C. (2002). *Marketing communications-contexts, strategies and applications*, 3rd ed. England: Prentice-Hall Financial Times.
- Gallarza, M.G., Saura, I.G. & Garcia, H.C. (2002). Destination Image. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 29, No.1, pp.56–78.

- Gartner, W.C. (1986). Temporal influences on images change. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 13, pp.635-644.
- Gartner, W.C. (1989). Tourism image: attribute measurement of state tourism products using multidimensional scaling techniques. *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 28, No.2, pp.15-19.
- Gurthie, C. & Thyne, M. (2004). Destination Image: The Impact of the Interaction Effect between the Visitor and the Destination on Tourist Perceptions, in *Conference Proceedings of Tourism State of the Art II*, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, 27–30 June.
- Hair, J.F.Jr, Anderson, R.E., Tatham, R.L. & Black, W.C. (1998). *Multivariate Data Analysis*, 5th ed., Prentice-Hall, Upper Saddle River, N.J.
- Hankinson, G. (2004). The brand images of tourism destination: a study of the saliency of organic images. *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, Vol. 13, No.1, pp.6-14.
- Horrigan, D. (2009). Branded content: a new model for driving tourism via film and branding strategies. *Tourismos: an International Multidisciplinary Journal of Tourism*, Vol. 4, No.3, Spring, 51-65.
- Ioannides, D. & Holcomb, B. (2003). Misguided policy initiatives in island destinations: why do up-market tourism policies fail? *Tourism Geographies*, Vol. 5, No.1, pp.39-48.
- Joppe, M., Martin, D.W. & Waalen, J. (2001). Toronto's image as a destination: a comparative importance-satisfaction analysis by origin of visitor. *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 39, pp.252-260.
- Kamenidou, I., Mamalis, S. & Priporas, C. (2009). Measuring destination Image and consumer criteria: the case of Mykonos Island. *Tourismos: an International Multidisciplinary Journal of Tourism*, Vol. 4, No.3, Spring, pp.67-79.
- Keller, K.L. (1998). *Strategic brand management: building, measuring and managing brand equity*. New Jersey, Prentice Hall.
- Kozak, M. & Rimmington, M. (2000). Tourist satisfaction with Mallorca, Spain, as an off-season holiday destination. *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 38, February, pp.260-269.
- Mansfeld, Y. (1992). From motivation to actual travel. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 19, pp.399-419.
- Mohamed, G.A. (2008). Egypt's image as a tourist destination: a perspective of foreign tourists. *Tourismos: an International Multidisciplinary Journal of Tourism*, Vol. 3, No.1, Spring, pp.36-65.
- McCartney, G. (2005). The Impact of the 50th Macao Grand Prix on Macao's Destination Image. *International Journal of Event Management Research*, Vol. 1, No.1, pp.46-65.
- Nunnally, J.C. (1994). *Psychometric theory*. New York, McGraw-Hill
- Pike, S. (2002). Destination Image Analysis-A Review of 142 Papers from 1973 to 2000. *Tourism Management*, Vol. 23. No.5, pp.541-549.

- Shin, Y. (2009). Examining the link between visitors' motivation and convention destination image. *Tourismos: an International Multidisciplinary Journal of Tourism*, Vol. 4, No.2, Autumn, pp.29-45.
- Sonmez, S. & Sirakaya, E. (2002). A distorted destination image? The case of turkey. *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 41, pp.185-196.
- Stepchenkova, S. & Morrison, A. (2008). Russia's destination image among American pleasure traveler's: Revisiting Echtner and Ritchie. *Tourism Management*, Vol. 29, pp.548-560.
- Tasci, Asli D.A., Gartner, William C. & Cavusgil, Tamer S. (2007). Measurement of destination brand bias using quasi-experimental design. *Tourism Management*, Vol. 28, pp.1529-1540.
- Tsai, Huei-Min & Clark, E. (2003). Nature-society interactions on islands: introduction. *Geografiska Annaler*, 85 B, No.4, pp.187-189.
- Um, S. & Crompton, J.L. (1990). Attitude determinants in tourism destination choice. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 17, pp.432-448.

SUBMITTED: OCT 2011

REVISION SUBMITTED: FEB 2012

2nd REVISION SUBMITTED: APR 2012

ACCEPTED: MAY 2012

REFEREED ANONYMOUSLY

Perunjodi Naidoo (pnaidoo@umail.utm.ac.mu) is a lecturer at the University of Technology Mauritius, School of Sustainable Development and Tourism, La Tour Koenig, Pointe aux Sables, Mauritius.

Prabha Ramseook-Munhurrin (pmunhurrin@umail.utm.ac.mu) is also a lecturer in the School of Sustainable Development at the University of Technology Mauritius.

Ramesh Durbarry (ramesh.durbarry@umail.utm.ac.mu) is an Associate Professor and Head of School at the same university.