

RESEARCH REGARDING THE TOURISM DESTINATION IMAGE OF TIMIȘOARA

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Abstract: *This study aims to explore the image of Timisoara as a tourism destination. The first part consists of a “top of mind” snapshot of characteristics that make up this image. This is achieved by asking the respondents for one word that best describes Timisoara, the answers being categorized into either psychological or functional attributes, while also analyzing their holistic or reductionist approach. Another goal is to measure the attitude of respondents towards several aspects of living and/or being a tourist in Timisoara, using the Likert scale in relation to sentences that describe a possible state of affairs. A topic we also addressed is how well known are some landmarks around the city. Lastly the respondents were asked to pick the most important reason they consider when choosing a certain tourist destination.*

Key words: *Timisoara, TDI, tourism destination image*

INTRODUCTION

The image of the tourism destination has been a widely discussed subject in the literature of tourism management, tourism marketing and related fields. Amongst the first and most widely cited definitions of tourism destination image (TDI) was the one proposed by Crompton in 1979, referring to it as “the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination”. The main limitation of this definition is that it ignores the macroscopic view of TDI, considering only the individuals and their personal opinions.

In this regard, an earlier definition would be more appropriate in relation to this study, namely the one offered by Lawson and Baud Bovy in 1977, which is “the expression of all objective knowledge, impressions, prejudice, imaginations, and emotional thoughts an individual or group might have of a particular place”.

Other attempts to define TDI were also made, a notable and more recent one is the one brought forward by Kun Lai and Xiang Li in 2015: “a voluntary, multisensory, primarily picture-like, qualia arousing, conscious, and quasi-perceptual mental (i.e., private, nonspatial, and intentional) 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”. This interpretation, although it is more technical and opaquer in the sense that it requires a robust understanding of neurosciences and at least some familiarity with theories presented in the field of the philosophy of mind, can provide some valuable insight in regard to the development of tourism research and how this field can benefit from a multi- and transdisciplinary approach.

Another point that this research paper would like to address is the actual method used to measure TDI. As stated by Charlotte M. Echtner (2003), after completing a comprehensive survey of methodologies used by researchers, it became apparent that both singular attributes and holistic impressions are the main points taken into consideration, with a heavy bias towards studying the first. Another dimension that's accounted is the one that defines and divides both attributes and holistic impressions into functional or psychological characteristics. A third layer, that according to Echtner was largely overlooked in previous research, is the common and unique divide. The elements identified as part of TDI can be categorized in accord to this framework, as seen in Figure 1.

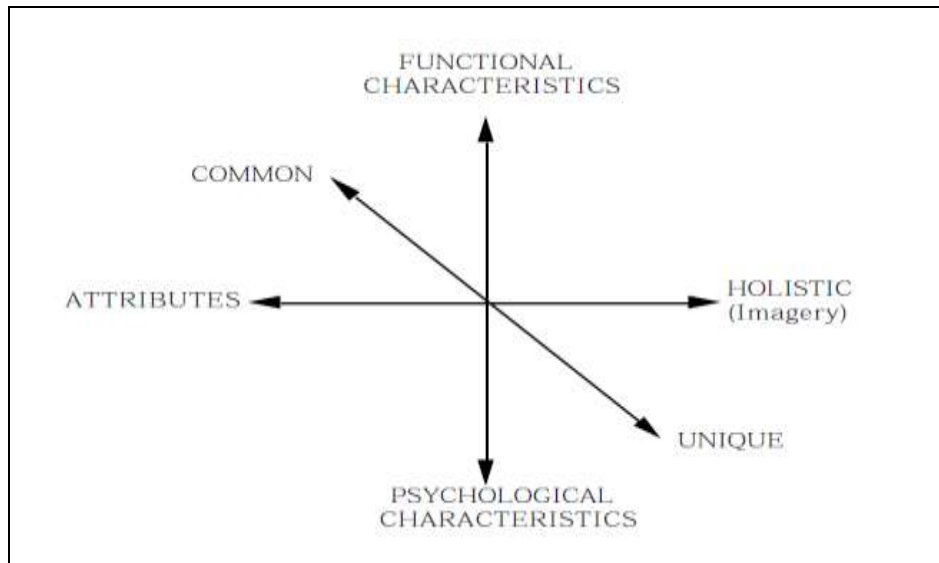


Figure 1. The components of destination image

Source: Charlotte M. Echtner, 2003, *The Journal of Tourism Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 43

Lastly, the importance of understanding the image of a brand or product was underlined by Aaker and later revisited by Pike (2010, apud Aaker 1991), the widely known CBBE (Consumer Based Brand Equity) model was proposed to be the mix of brand loyalty, brand quality, brand image and brand salience. Another research based on this model and applied to the field of tourism marketing, done by Jraisat in 2015, showed that brand image had a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty. In turn, brand image was widely influenced by brand quality. The fact that those causal relations were found by tourism researchers is of interest to us. For example, Timișoara will be the European Capital of Culture in 2021, which is a good time to build a positive and strong touristic brand image. In turn, this perceived image can lead to loyalty and thusly, to a sustainable model for tourism, that would not be centered on a single year (in this case 2021) but that has a long-term orientation and that would best value the architectural and cultural potential of Timișoara.

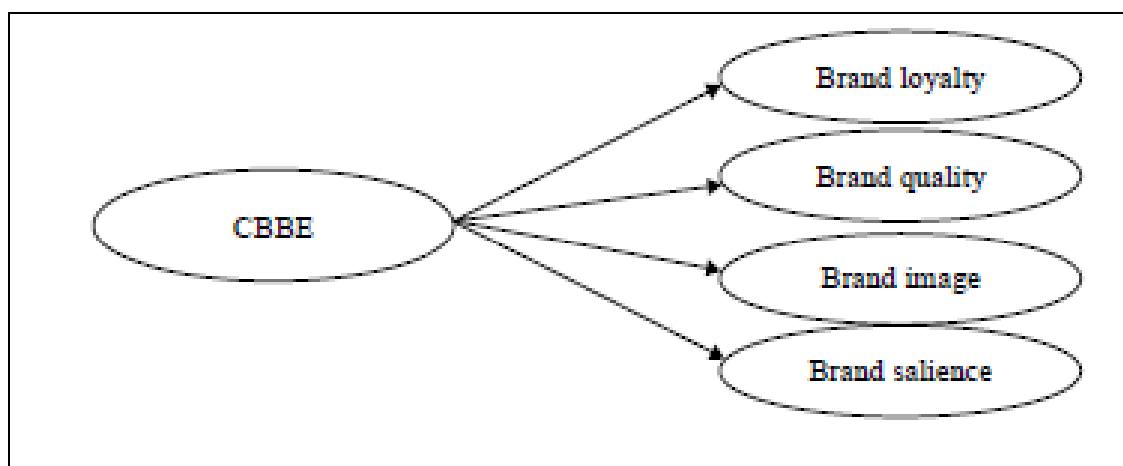


Figure 2. The customer-based brand equity model

Source: Steven Pike et al, 2010, *International Marketing Review*, No. 1, pp. 438

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This descriptive study follows a quantitative research methodology, using a survey composed of 11 questions. The sample size is 99 respondents, obtained using the snowball

sampling method. The questions were focused on a top of mind snapshot of characteristics that make up the image of Timișoara, done by asking the respondents for one word that best describes Timișoara. Further, those answers were analyzed according to the framework recommended by Charlotte Echter (in this case using a simplified model, considering only dimensions of the psychological-functional and the holistic-attributes based approach). Then, the respondents were questioned about several aspects of living and/or being a tourist in Timișoara, using the Likert scale in relation to sentences that describe a possible state of affairs. Another question touched the topic of the notoriety attributed to some landmarks around the city. The last question focused on what convinces people to travel to a destination, what is the most important factor that contributes to this decision.

RESEARCH RESULTS

When asked for the word that best describes Timisoara, the respondents had the following answers:

Table 1

List of words used to describe Timisoara

<i>Words used to describe Timisoara</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	Colored	1	Originality	1
Beautiful	10	Open to novelty	1	Palm trees	1
Multicultural	10	Well developed	1	Perspective	1
Crowded	6	Balanced	1	Welcoming	1
Home	4	Eclectic	1	Promising	1
Culture	4	Energy	1	Prosperity	1
Cosmopolitan	3	Two-faced	1	Revolution	1
Exceptional	3	Flowers	1	“Semaforișoara”	1
Dynamic	2	Formidable	1	Underdeveloped	1
Diverse	2	Developing	1	Stifling	1
Evolution	2	Incompetence	1	Joy	1
Dirty	2	Rotten	1	Opportunity	1
Picturesque	2	Initiative	1		
Wonderful	2	Unsanitary	1		
Youth	2	Interesting	1		
Agitation	1	Freedom	1		
Lively	1	Quiet	1		
Harmony	1	Meh	1		
Baroque	1	Melancholy	1		
Bega	1	Wonderful	1		
Rich	1	Mess	1		
Business	1	Modern	1		
Civilization	1	Tourist city	1		

The most frequently used words used were:

- beautiful and multicultural (10 respondents each)
- crowded (6 respondents)
- home and culture (4 respondents each)
- cosmopolitan and exceptional (3 respondents each)
- dynamic, diverse, evolution, dirty, picturesque, wonderful and youth (2 respondents each)

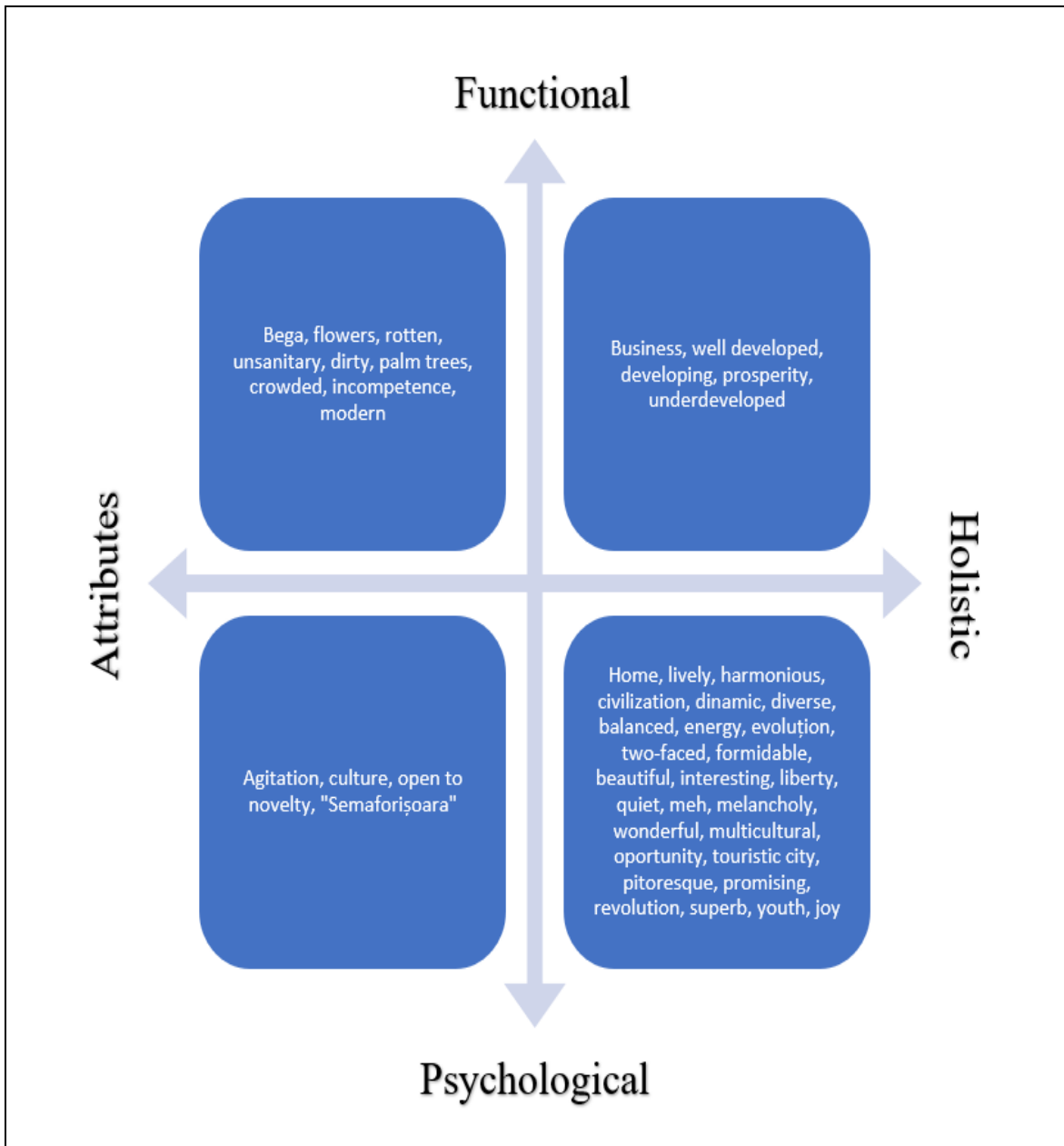


Figure 3. The words used to describe Timisoara, categorized according to their nature

Another area explored in the questionnaire was the measurement of the respondent's attitude towards several sentences describing life in Timișoara. The respondents were asked to mark one of the options given (I fully agree; I tend to agree; I'm neutral about this; I tend to disagree; I don't agree at all) in regards to several factors, namely safety, public transport, roads, cleanliness, state of hotels, events, architecture, attractions, cuisine and overall friendliness. The results are the following:

Table 2

The attitude of respondents towards characteristics that influence image

	I fully agree	I tend to agree	I'm neutral about this	I tend to disagree	I don't agree at all
Timișoara is a city where I feel safe.	30,3%	51,5%	3%	13,2%	2%
Public transport in Timișoara is efficient.	10,1%	20,2%	22,2%	26,3%	21,2%
Public roads in Timișoara are in a good state.	6,1%	30,3%	15,2%	32,3%	16,2%
Timișoara is a clean city.	6,1%	27,3%	12,1%	32,3%	22,2%
Hotels in Timișoara are comfortable	15,2%	36,4%	38,4%	6,1%	4%
Hotel prices are low.	3%	28,3%	45,5%	17,2%	6,1%
Timișoara has events that I'm interested in.	51,5%	34,3%	7,1%	5,1%	2%
The architecture magnifies our touristic potential.	67,7%	27,3%	3%	2%	0%
Tourist attractions are well maintained.	8,1%	35,4%	16,2%	26,3%	14,1%
Timișoara has an interesting cuisine.	31,3%	35,4%	17,2%	15,2%	1%
Nightlife is interesting in Timișoara	31,3%	25,3%	27,4%	2%	4%
People from Timișoara are friendly.	39,4%	33,3%	21,2%	6,1%	0%

The third topic of our research is the notoriety of some landmarks and attractions around the city. In order to quantify this to each of the possible answers that respondents could give we assigned a number (I have visited this landmark – 1; I know about this and I want to visit it – 2; I know about this but I don't want to visit it – 3; I don't know anything about this – 4). Thus, by averaging all the answers received regarding different attractions we can rank them, with the one closest to 1 being the most well-known.

Table 3

The landmarks analyzed, ranked in descending order by notoriety

Landmark	Average
Piața Unirii	1.0505
Piața Victoriei	1.0606
Piața Libertății	1.0606
Parcul Copiilor	1.0909
Parcul Rozelor	1.0909
Parcul Central	1.1313
Parcul Botanic	1.1818
Bastion	1.2727
Catedrala Mitropolitană	1.2828
Muzeul Satului	1.3434
Muzeul Banatului	1.3737
Parcul Poporului	1.4545
Muzeul de Artă	1.4646
Domul Romano-Catolic	1.6465
Biserica din Elisabetin	1.9596
Sinagoga din Cetate	2.0101
Biserica din Iosefin	2.0909
Catedrala Ortodoxă Sârbă	2.2020
Catedrala Millenium	2.2222
Sinagoga din Fabric	2.3232
Copacul breslelor	2.5253
Biserica Piaristă	2.5556
Casa cu axa de fier	2.5556

The most known attractions in the city are the squares in the city center, with the least known being „Casa cu axa de fier”, Biserica Piaristă and Copacul Breslelor.

Lastly, we also enquired about what is the most important factor when picking a destination to travel to.

Table 4

Most important factors when picking a tourism destination

	Frequency
Price levels	13
Cultural events	16
Quality of services	9
Nature	21
Tourism attractions	38
Other people's opinions	1
Moods	1
Total	99

Being the most picked answer, attractions play a significant part in picking a tourism destination for the respondents.

CONCLUSIONS

Since tourism attractions were ranked as the most important factor that influences traveling decisions and 67,7% of all respondents strongly agreed with the notion that Timișoara disposes of an enhanced potential due to its architecture, a prime conclusion would be that in order to develop tourism in our city, great care must be taken in order to preserve and augment what we already have, the heritage that consists of buildings, parks, squares and so on. On a related note, a good strategy would be to promote the lesser known parts of Timișoara, starting with „Casa cu axa de fier”, known to some as the most beautiful house in this city, together with churches and other unique landmarks.

After observing the words that first come to mind when thinking of Timișoara, a major point is multiculturalism. Again, our heritage is not only made up of building but also of stories and experiences. This element can be used effectively in a tourism campaign, underlining the cordial relations between different nationalities or ethnic groups that are sharing a common history centered around our city.

Cultural events are another major point that are a strong point for our city, although this does not mean that they shouldn't be improved upon, as approximately 85% of respondents described positive feelings concerning them.

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