Full Length Research Paper

Strategic image management: The image of the City of São Paulo/SP

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Tourism has become increasingly important in the world due to its relevant role in economic and social development. As a result, this sector is now a battle ground for fierce competition between places interested in developing it. In this highly competitive scenario, tourism marketing is now important and critical to places and organizations that wish to facilitate the process of economic exchange, stay in business, and try to differentiate themselves from their competitors. In addition, the image of a tourist destination plays a vital role in obtaining satisfaction, the process of choosing the place, and possible repeated visitation to the destination area (VALLS, 1996; GUTIERREZ, 2005; MOYA and SANCHEZ, 2005). Although there are other variables that influence the buying decision of a destination by tourists, tourism centres are sold primarily through image. This paper aims to analyze the practice of strategic image management in the development/management of tourism marketing. Its specific objectives are: to discuss image as a perceived quality, as well as its popularity and relevance to the contemporary market, especially tourism market; to identify the marketing of images applied to tourist locations as part of a strategy to attract visitors (tourists), as well as its market context, features, steps, and relevance to the tourism industry; lastly, to observe the appropriateness of the images broadcast by SPTuris - Sao Paulo tourism and events office - with regard to the perceptions of tourists. We made use of a case study. Following the methodology proposed by Yin (2001), we analyzed the work done by Sao Paulo tourism and events office, São Paulo Turismo - SPTuris, with the aim of observing the marketing practices used by that office and figuring out the elements related to the city's image for tourism. The paper notes the complexity of the study of image, being a subject of several studies across different areas of knowledge, and in understanding it as a major factor for the acquisition of destinations. The characteristics of tourism product, especially its intangibility, can prevent consumers/ tourists from acquiring the product otherwise. Considering the work on tourism marketing done by Sao Paulo Tourism – SPTuris, official tourism office in Sao Paulo, we infer that it is currently engaged in creating an image of leisure and entertainment to improve tourism development by attracting tourists who travel on leisure.

Key words: Tourism, strategic image management, image, destination.

INTRODUCTION

The growing importance of tourism all over the world is due to its role in economic and social development. The countless direct and indirect benefits and advantages brought on by tourism contribute to local development and, consequently, this segment is currently the target of a fierce competition between locations interested in

developing it.

This scenario of great competition demands efficient marketing management which includes the incorporation of marketing strategies and marketing focused on tourism: *tourism marketing*, which plays a key role as a mechanism for coordination between supply and demand. In this context, we emphasize the fact that unlike other products, the so-called "tourism product" consists of goods and services with unique characteristics since it is an experience rather than a physical product.

Understanding the image of a location as "(...) the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that people have of it" (Kotler et al*.,* 1994, p.153), we see it as the simplifications of several associations and information related to the location. Image is a product of a mind that tries to process and take the essence of a series of data on the site. The strategy of   locations image is to leave positive memories in the minds of tourists, so as to make them future sales agents of that location.

Alongside that, the characteristic of contemporary consumption has the image virtually overlaying the materiality of the good; people consume dreams, images, and these become the starting point for the conquest of the consumer market.

The scenario is one in which the image of a product, the way the product is presented or the promise, idea carried by it, is critical to the buying decision in today's society. This is a fact that widens when considering the unique characteristics of the "tourism product" and, hence, the relevance and interest to connect tourism marketing to strategic image/image marketing (Kotler et al., 1994).

With the increasing competitiveness of destinations, it is important to transmit a favorable image to the target market. Considering image as an important influential resource in the decision process of choosing a destination, the need of communication strategies in various existing vectors is evident. This research provides tools for applying differentiation approach to target. The employment and strengthening of these elements in destination management may lead to increased competitive position (Melo, 2013).

Basically, the issue under consideration is: what is the connection of tourism marketing with strategic image management for acquiring destinations? Finally, as a means of verifying and seeking improved legitimacy to the study, we explored the tourist image of the City of São Paulo - SP, directing our investigation to the work of institutional marketing promoted by the Tourism Office of São Paulo – SPTuris. We aim to identify and observe the

adequacy of the images broadcast by SPTuris – São Paulo tourism and event office – based on tourists' perceptions.

This article aims to analyze the practice of strategic image management for the development/management of tourism marketing.

This study will allow one to comprehend the influence of image on tourists' decision process, and will permit deep understanding of image building for marketing planning. Despite the importance of this area of research, few studies have been done on it. Some studies have focused on different cities, but none have dealt with Sao Paulo City, specifically. Due to its importance for the Brazilian and South American economies and its actual positioning, it is important to analyze the components of its image formation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The image of destination

The tourism sector is becoming much sought after by the localities given its ability to generate foreign exchange which leads to an increase in competition among tourist destinations. In this competitive scenario, a destination must seek differentiation and in this sense, the image of a tourist destination seems to play a vital role in the selection process (Acerenza, 2002; Bignami, 2002; Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; Gallarza et al., 2002; Haider et al., 1994; Moya, 2005; Valls, 1996; Cruz, 2006), satisfaction and possible repeated visit (Valls, 1996; Moya, 2005).

Researches related to the image of destinations have become important to understand the tourism business. International studies on the subject started in the 70s (Hunt, 1975; Crompton, 1979). In Brazil, though still few and recent, they are conducted by researchers like Santana (2001) and Bignami (2002). The importance attributed to the image of destination, both by professionals and academics, and the fact that in Brazil this matter has generated a few studies, may represent one of the factors responsible for the low level of benefits from tourism development in the country (Leal, 2004; Chagas, 2007, 2008).

According to Perez-Nebra and Torres (2010), before the trip, tourists make predictions based on the emotions that the destination evokes in their memory, through friends' comments, by reading brochures, advertisements, etc..; so that their decision will be based on the image they have about a particular locality. Thus, the

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choice of destination will depend on favorable images that consumers have of the place (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; and Perez-Nebra and Torres (2010).

A study aimed to discuss the importance of intentional image by using text of printed materials. The researchers analyzed tourism materials edited by the government in three Northern Coastal Portuguese towns: Vila do Conde, Povoa de Varzim and Esposende.

According to the researchers, what underlies the construction of this type of document is the behaviourist principle in which a neutral stimulus, when associated with pleasant, positive stimulus, immediately becomes positive stimulus (Tojal, 2014). In this sense, the choice of the tourist destination may also be influenced by the image formed by those small prints. One can perceive that perceptions are influenced by different stimuli, all which are important for the consumer's perception.

There is as strategic advantage to be developed from the mastering of image formation process.

Formation of a destination image

The process of forming images of tourist destinations by consumers can be divided into two main dimensions: organic and induced (Gunn, 1972; Chagas, 2008). The organic dimension refers to information with no commercial or tourist nature. This information is not primarily intended to sell or promote a particular tourist destination. The organic image is therefore formed by non-commercial sources, such as, history, artistic events, friends, family, world knowledge, whose intention is not to sell the destination to prospective tourists. The second dimension, induced is loaded with commercial appeal, with the main objective of forming an attractive image of the destination in order to sell and profit from it. Thus, the induced image aims at selling a certain destination to consumers, whether actual and/or potential, making use of marketing tools, such as advertising, sales promotion, merchandising, commercial ads, among others.

Gunn (1988) and Chagas (2008) also conceive a third dimension in the process image formation of destination: the "complex" image, which is formed after visiting the tourist destination and trying the product purchased. In the first two stages (induced and organic), consumers create their image based on external information, whereas in the latter, they enjoy it, forming a more complex and real image. According to Gunn (1988), the image, that was initially organic and then turned into induced, becomes more differentiated and, thus, becomes complex after the trip.

The three dimensions presented above are based on the work of Gunn (1972) on the seven stages of the tourist experience: accumulation of mental images of a site during a lifetime; amendment of the images during research prior to the decision to travel; the decision to travel based on the effectiveness of the image; travel to the destination; participation in the destination; the trip back, and re-accumulation (Figure 1).

An important point that must be highlighted in this study is the case an individual who does not have an organic image and is exposed to campaigns that incite purchase of certain locations; that image, which would be called an induced image, becomes internalized as an organic image with regard to the destination (Gunn and Bignami, 2002). Thus, marketing activities have great significance, especially with regard to the uptake of niches that have not already formed an image of the destination. However, all marketing variables such as product, price, place and promotion (4Ps) must be considered to form an organic image. They must be integrated in order to outline a synergy and endorse the messages that are targeted.

Considering the above, we can conclude that the image consists of a set of impressions taken from the information that the individual has at hand, from diverse sources, including marketing communications, and also from many others that are not controlled by the market process. According to Echtner and Ritchie (1991), every tourist has an image of a destination, without even visiting it or having been exposed to a campaign. So to develop tourism, it is very important to regularly monitor the images travelers form. This is because the appearance of the motivation factor to take a trip arouses an affective interest in the consumer, forcing him to define a framework of this trip based on personal factors and the set of information collected, beginning the process of image formation (Rodrigues, 2009).

The model based on induced and organic sources is the most used in the analyses of the subject. However, another significant model of image formation of destination is the one carried out by Baloglu and McCleary (1999), based on the relationship between stimulus factors and personal factors. According to the authors, the formation of the image of a destination is influenced by two main forces: stimulus and personal factors.

The model has three levels of evaluation: cognitive, affective, and connotative (as previously mentioned), whose determining evaluation criteria are the stimulus and personal factors. Personal factors correspond to psychological characteristics (values, motivation, and personality) and social characteristics (age, education, marital status, etc..) and the stimulus factors correspond to sources of information and prior experience, referred to as external stimuli (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999).

According to Figure 2, the stimulus and personal factors are related to the formation of the image of the tourist destination.

The various stimuli are formed by external sources of information such as advertising, word-of-mouth, travel agencies and previous experience. Information sources refer to the promotion made by the destination. It is noteworthy, however, that the process of acceptance of
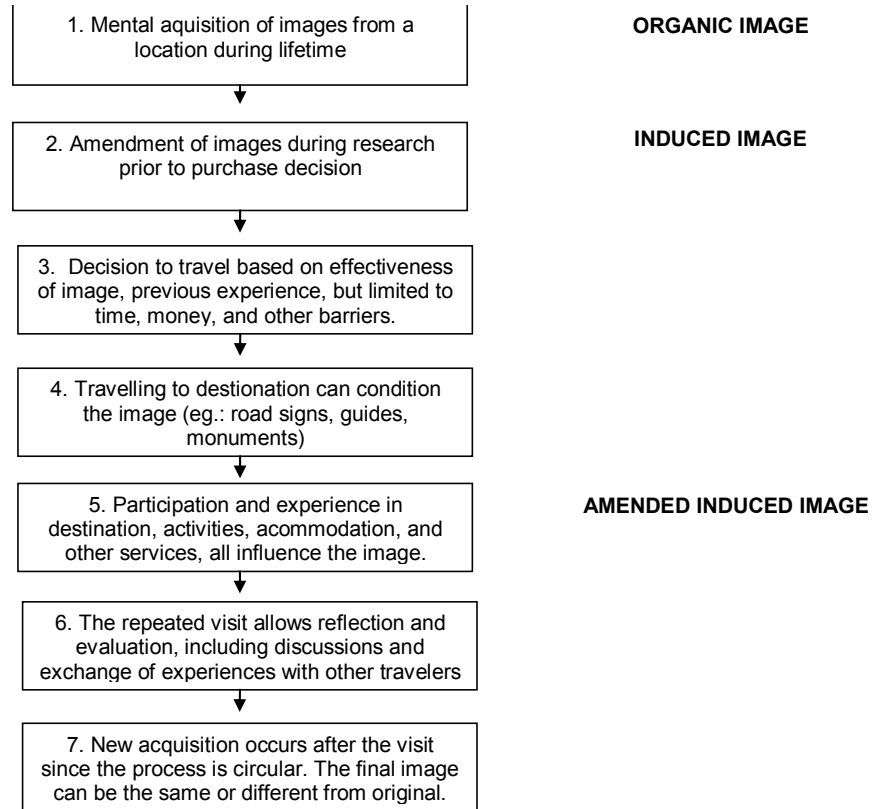
Figure 1. Theory on the stages of the destination image. Source: Gunn, 1972, p.120.
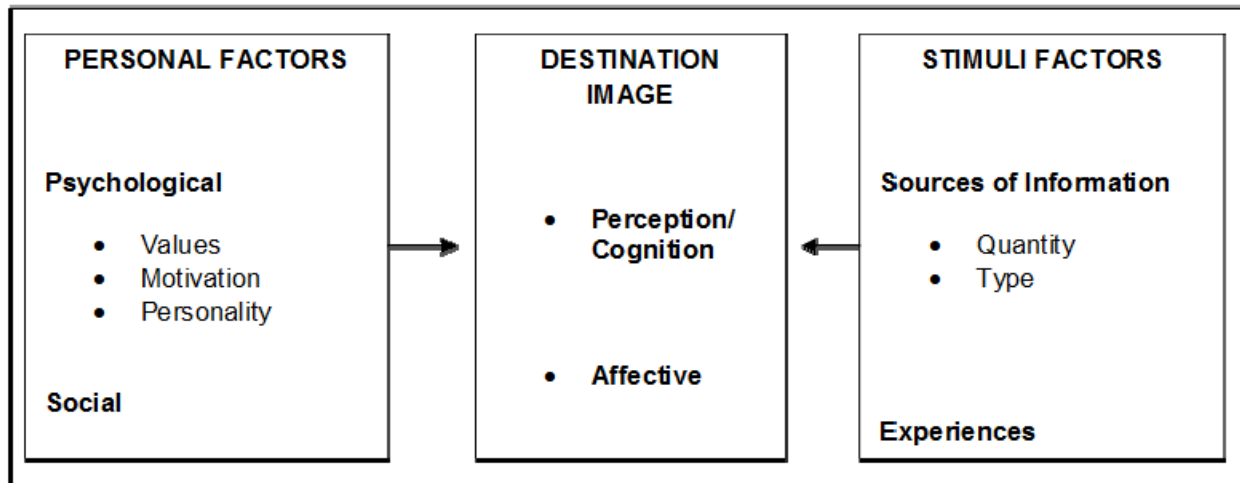

Figure 2. Factors related to the image formation of the tourist destination. (Baloglu, 1999 p.101).

the information goes through perceptions filter. This means that even with a big role in shaping the image of destinations, the means of obtaining the information are not fully passively accepted by tourists, since they handle the information they receive based on their perception, prior knowledge, and always tend to leave aside that which is not supported by their prior knowledge.

Gartner (1993) further argues that among the stimuli factors, word-of-mouth is perhaps regarded as the most reliable of all possible sources of information.

The role of agencies and operators, according to Chagas (2008), is also significant as they are a relevant source of information and, consequently, influence the image of destinations, especially with regard to international destinations.

Santos (2013) studied the influence of communication media on imagery, using a hotel in Brazil as a case study. The hotel chain uses website, travel agency and facebook as the main communication channel to get to customers. It is found that at the first time, guests get information from word of mouth; also, basically they use online social media, travel agents and websites. Businessmen use primarily travel agents. So it suggests that the media influence depends on customers' motivation to visit (Santos, 2013).

Thus, we conclude that the existing theory is mixed, since the same elements are used to explain the formation of the destination image in the minds of consumers, and especially as they demonstrate that image formation is the consequence of several variables that culminate in the creation of an image. This image represents the mental destination of travelers, gives them a pre-trial of the destination (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991) and determines the likelihood of choosing the location. Citing Crompton (1979), Echtner and Ritchie, 1991, tourists will choose, among their possibilities, a destination that is compatible with their most favorable images.

Another study with the objective of analyzing the image of several South American countries was conducted by a group of Brazilian researchers. According to these researchers, country image is one of the aspects that interferes with tourists' loyalty before a given destination is choosen. Consequently, it directly depends on the way communication in the country is conducted abroad. ''Therefore, a favourable image not only serves to induce desire of visiting the country but also to do so repeatedly" (Souza et al., 2014, p. 13). This study also points out that a positive image must be always preserved for present and future planning success.

Planners follow a two-step process to evaluate the image of a location: the selection of a target audience and the measurement of the image itself (Kotler et al, 1994).
The image of strategic management requires examining five issues (Kotler, et al., 1994):

1. What determines the image of a site?
2. How can we measure the image of a site?
3. What guidelines should be followed for rapid development of a local image?
4. What Q instruments are available to transmit an image?
5. Can a local image correct a negative message?

The answers to these questions will allow adequate strategic choice. It should be remembered that the strategic administration of image requires a constant upgrading of the image for proper positioning.Kotler also suggests criteria to be followed in order to form good image (Kotler, 1994):

Validity: the disclosure of a very different image has minimal chances of success.

Credibility: even that the image is properly transmitted it may not immediately be accredited

Simplicity; Many images cause confusion. Iimage messages must be simple

Attractiveness: suggests why people would want to visit the place

Distinguished: image work when mellhor is distinguished from other common themes.For Bignami (2002), the selection of the target audience that is economically interesting generates positive results in the strategic positioning, and also the more specific the audience is, the more specific the results will be, and that will determine the strategic decisions about the image.

We analyze the case based on the theory and factors related to the formation of a destination image and the theories on its stages (Gunn, 1972), as well as (Baloglu, 1999) the interview statements.

RESULT

Case study

Using a case study and following the methodology proposed by Yin (2001), we analyze the work done by the office responsible for promoting tourism and events in the City of São Paulo, São Paulo Turismo - SPTuris, aiming to observe their marketing work and obtain elements related to the image formed by tourists for the city.

To this end, we made use of secondary material: research and indicators obtained and supplied by SPTuris; and primary material: interview with two (02) of their directors. That gave us a comprehensive view of tourism in the City of São Paulo, as well as the identification of the location positioning, promotion strategies and image consolidation, among other elements, that will be presented herein.

São Paulo Turismo - SPTuris is the office that promotes tourism and events in the city of São Paulo. It performs tourism planning, research, fosters the creation of new products and itineraries, maps attractions, encourages new events or consolidates those with tourism potential, develops relationship with businesses focused on tourism, and promotes destination in Brazil and abroad, among various integrated initiatives (SPTuris, 2008).

The official bureau of tourism and events in the City of São Paulo (Figure 2) was established since July 11, 1977

when the Department of Tourism and Development of the City of São Paulo was eliminated. SPTuris then took on all responsibility for the initiatives related to tourism in the city, from structuring tourism to the promotion of São Paulo as a tourist destination. In addition to representing the city's tourism initiatives, it is also responsible for managing and renting facilities such as Parque Anhembi, Interlagos Racetrack, and the Tourist Shopping Terminal, on 25th March (PLATUM 2007-2010). PLATUM is the Municipal Tourism Plan that sets the initiatives to foster and promote tourism growth in São Paulo. To perform the planned initiatives, SPTuris is responsible for their implementation, and Comtur's legal department establishes partnerships with the private sector (Comtur, 2010).

The image of the City of São Paulo promoted by SPTuris

Initially, as can be read in SPTuris publications, "positioning the city as a major hub for leisure and entertainment, SPTuris has obtained favorable results that reveal the greatness of São Paulo as a tourist destination" (SPTuris, 2008, p. 6). However, considering the image of a location as the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that people have of it (Kotler and Andreansen, 1991) and that the image of a destination, in principle, plays a vital role in the selection process (Acerenza, 2002; Bignami, 2002; Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; Gallarza et al., 2002; Haider and Kotler, 1994; Leal, 2002; Ryglova and Turcinkova, 2004; Moya and Sanchez, 2005; Valls, 1996 , Cross and Camargo, 2006), we have to admit, although empirically, that it is a big challenge when we think of Sao Paulo, a city whose image is invariably associated with labor and business.

This becomes clear when we consider the data relating to tourist demand in the municipality. While they show a decreasing trend, both with regard to the amount of tourists and the revenue obtained, the motivation of visits to the city is primarily linked to business (Figure 3).

According to Figure 3, 56.1% of visits to the municipality are mainly motivated by business; leisure accounts for 10.9%.

This is corroborated by Mr. Fabio Montanheiro (courtesy interview) who argues that "drawing a general profile of the tourist, one can see that the share of businesses and events is much larger than that of leisure."

Considering the theoretical aspects related to the formation of tourism image of a destination, we conclude that personal and stimuli factors are responsible for forming image. Based on motivation, which is influenced by significant personal and stimulus factors coupled with the advertising and promotion of the city as a business destination in Latin America (Figure 4), we can assume that the image of the city is basically related to business

and that the objectives set out in Platum 2007/2010 consist of ambitious goals, requiring a significant marketing effort to change the perception of tourists into an image of leisure.

Other factors are also considered as having an influence over the formation of the image of the city of São Paulo, such as the concentration of large companies and economic investment decision-making centers, the movement resulting from executives travelling on business, the large influx of people coming for technical trade events, in addition to an appropriate infrastructure for such events, involving convention centers, exhibition halls, etc., forming a set of conditions that end up representing the main factor.

Still, the finding of the business image meets the assumptions of Kotler et al. (1994), who state that the image of a place consists of a basic determinant of how citizens and businesses react to a place, which is the case of São Paulo and its image linked predominantly to business. The city faces difficulties in attracting a significant demand for leisure travel tourists, although it has a wide range of attractions linked to that.

Vaz (1999) argues that in order to make the most out of a location's tourism potential, other attractiveness factors should be worked on and, thus, "along with the principal and broader picture of the location, other images should be cultivated among specific smaller audiences, but important to boost tourism" (Vaz, 1999, p.96).

Besides the above, research conducted in the city's Tourist Information Centers points leisure as the main travel motivation (57.9%), while businesses are left with 17.2%. The contradiction is explained by Mr. Fabio Montanheiro (courtesy interview) who shows that the data obtained through TICs do not reflect reality as visitors seeking the centers and who make up the sample are leisure tourists. This invalidates the research in a way, serving only to point the profile of the public seeking information in the centers. Figure 4 shows the main motivations for visiting Sao Paulo.

However, making use of the data we can consider the TICs an important information and distribution channel of the city attractions, and that they must be used in order to promote the image of leisure and entertainment, intended by SPTuris. And also that the centers represent an important source of information for tourism marketing, as they can provide data related to the needs and desires of leisure tourists, allowing efficient and targeted market initiatives.

One difficulty pointed out by Ms. Andrezza Serra (courtesy interview) regarding image is that research conducted to identify tourists' perception has shown a wide range of results, making it difficult to establish a single reference. There are countless images that permeate visitors' minds with regard to the city, which complicates the identification of a single element, be it visual or sensory.
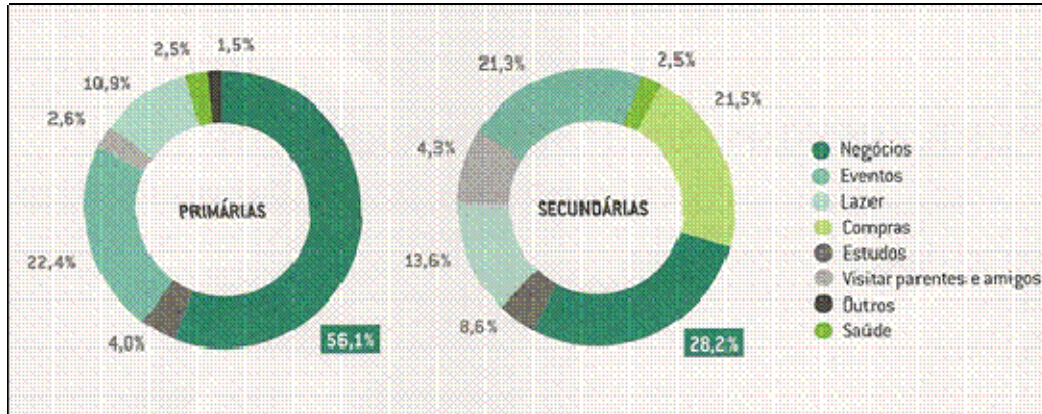
Figure 3. Motivations to visit Sao Paulo. Source: Observatório do Turismo da cidade de São Paulo – SPTuris, 2009.
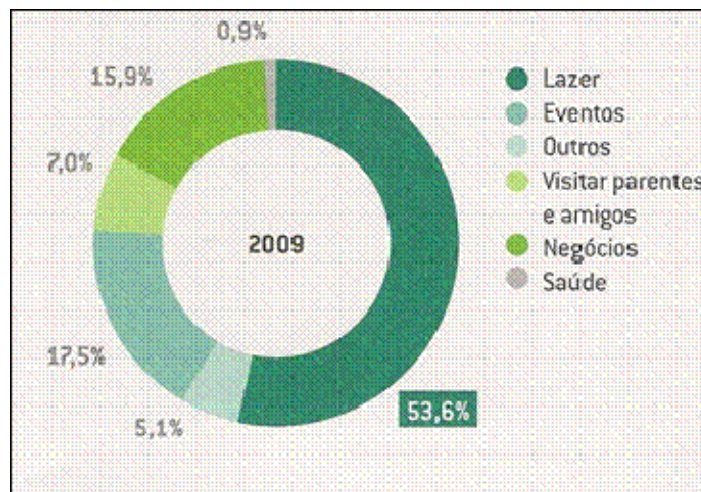

Figure 4. Motivations to visit São Paulo obtained at Tourist Information Centers – TICs. Source: Observatório do Turismo da cidade de São Paulo - SPTuris, 2009.

Some events have been adopted by SPTuris towards strengthening the image of leisure and entertainment and the initiative called "Stay another day" is one of them. According to Ms. Sierra Andrezza, a tourism promotion analyst at São Paulo Turismo (courtesy interview), considering that the main motivation for visiting the city is business and / or events linked to business, the initiative focuses exclusively on the business and event tourist, aiming at motivating them to extend their time in the city and enjoy a selection of attractions available in an activity guide.

According to Ms. Andressa Serra (courtesy interview), "the project was developed based on the perception that this type of tourist did not know what the city and its real dimension was. During the visit, tourists went from the hotel straight to the event." Observing that it is incomplete

for those visitors, SPTuris, in partnership with Abril publishing, developed a guide that offers a number of attractions related to the city's cultural and natural wealth: food, museums, parks, nightlife, etc.

Considering the above, the strategy aims to turn the business tourist into a leisure tourist and, thus, develop a more representative demand for the segment in the city. And, we infer that, through this strategy it is possible to present them with leisure and entertainment options in the city, changing their perception, as solely linked to business, labor and industry.

SPTuris (courtesy interview) finds it difficult to convince people not to spend their vacation or holiday in a significant tourist destination and come to São Paulo instead, especially in light of the business image that the city has. So, the office encourages those visitors, who are

coming to Sao Paulo anyway to close a deal or attend a trade show or event, to know a little bit of the city and realize that it offers interesting attractions; and consequently awaken in those visitors the possibility to include the city in their vacation itinerary.

The program "Stay another day" is a strategy for promoting the image of leisure in the city, and it falls within the concept of Gunn (1988), who conceive a third dimension in the process of destination image formation beyond the organic and induced dimension: the "complex" image, which is formed after the visit to the tourist destination and trial of the product purchased. That represents a more complex and real image of the destination.

Through SPTuris (courtesy interview), the city also has a strong concern in offering a total tourist product, which, according to Mrs. Andrezza Serra, requires work with the tourist trade, in order to prepare it to receive the visitor.

Corroborating that, tourism service providers influence and / or can significantly influence visitors' image formation especially when we consider that there is a wide variety of variables responsible for that formation. As acknowledged in the literature review, all marketing variables must be considered to form an organic image and must be integrated in order to outline a synergy and endorse the message .

In this sense, according to Mr. Fábio Montanheiro (courtesy interview), SPTuris prepared a manual entitled "Destination of São Paulo – A Handbook for Tourism Professionals"; it focused on operators and travel agencies , where the service provider is encouraged to sell the location and receives relevant information about the city (its history, climate, food, culture, etc), and alternative itineraries (theme itinerary and itinerary for specific audience).

Seeking to form the second dimension that forms images (the induced image of the city) (Gunn, 1972), SPTuris also invests in leaflets seeking to highlight the attractions of the city. It uses both bright colors and objective writing to attract and convey a modern, avant-garde and distinctive character, as described in the macro-program "Marketing and Tourism Promotion" in Platum 2007/2010.

(...) In official advertisment, avant-garde, economic importance, and center that generates trends in various segments will always be considered. This is because the dissemination of all segments connected to visitors may encourage their extended stay and consumption. This will help the city to present itself as real quality destination, and as a result generate more revenue from visitors' extended stay (Platum 2007/2010, p. 46).

SPTuris' marketing and tourism promotion work also includes the production of maps of São Paulo as a destination, which are distributed free of charge in tourist information centers. The maps are attractive, sophisticat-ed, and easily handled and put away. This initiative reverberates Tojal (2014)'s finding that small print can also influence image of tourist destination.

Another market initiative by Sao Paulo Tourism is "TurisMetrô". This project involves the creation of six itineraries involving the use of the subway as the mode of transportation. The most recent project implemented by São Paulo Turismo aiming at strengthening the city's image as a destination for leisure and entertainment is "SPExperience" and "Map of Sensations". "SPExperience" consists of a city guide whose itineraries are based on the five human senses: sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. Thus, we can find, for example, tips and addresses of parks, avenues, buildings, museums (vision), concert halls, nightclubs, and festivals (hearing), massages, therapies (touch), bars and tastings, regional cuisine (taste), and cafeterias, flower shops, markets (smell).

Dozens of tourists were taken to those places and had their level of emotion "measured".

The realization of "tests of emotion" occurred in partnership with Truster Brazil, specialized in vocal decoding technologies. After visiting the attractions, tourists gave testimonials about their feelings as they were tested with software that translates, through voice, physiological changes and generates a graphical representation of the variations of emotions. This initiative is also congruent to Tojal (2014)'s in the sense that it corresponds to a behaviourist principle, or a neutral stimulus, which when associated with pleasant, positive stimulus immediately becomes positive stimulus.

Based on the above, we consider that São Paulo has been developing consistent initiatives to strengthen its image of leisure and entertainment, and that they are not formed from a distorted view of tourism marketing. That is the positioning of the city has been achieved through a marketing effort that involves the entire marketing mix.

Conclusion

One of the objectives of this study is to identify the connection of tourism marketing with strategic image management for acquiring destination.Overall, the study of the image proved to be quite complex especially due to the amount of variables that are related to the construct; however, it was observed that the image construct is subject to various studies related to several areas of expertise.

Essentially, it is assumed that the image is an essential factor for the acquisition of destinations, since the characteristics of the tourism product, especially its intangibility, prevent the consumer/tourist from purchasing the product otherwise. Thus, the tourist gets a mental image of the destination, which can only be proven after the acquisition.

In this sense, the destination image becomes an important point to be considered by locations interested in developing through tourism, which generates an extreme competition.

To manage their image, locations must do what Kotler et al (1994) called strategic image management, which consists of the constant process of searching for the image of a place among its visitors, segmenting and targeting its specific image to finally positioning it to the intended audience, conveying its benefits.

It was found that strategic image management covers a larger area of marketing, specifically tourism marketing, in this case.

Thus, image management comes within the context of marketing as an important part of the tourism marketing mix (marketing mix), determining the perception and attitude of tourism demand / tourists towards destinations.

In this context, we emphasize that strategic image management associated with tourism marketing demands that managers understand how destination images are formed, their concept, dimensions, and characteristics.

During this work, the reference showed that the complexity of the image construct and the studies connected to it pointed to different directions; and therefore, there is no precise definition, let alone a formation model and dimension accepted by all.

However, in summary, we conclude that image generally is the mental representation of beliefs, feelings, and impressions that people have about a certain location, featuring complex, multiple, dynamic, and relative characteristics.

Their formation process, as previously explained, does not have a single acceptance among authors. However, we admit that they are formed from the combination of personal factors and the set of collected information that can come from sources with a social aspect, i.e., influence of friends and family and a symbolic dimension, which in turn refers to aspects of promotion and dissemination performed by the interested destination. This combination culminates in the formation of a mental image loaded with affection and cognition and also subjectivity.

In this context, we emphasize that the sources of external information, formed primarily by marketing communication, may in this sense be controlled by the market process, allowing management of at least part of the imaging process. And yet, the influence of marketing communication is considered by many authors as a significant factor for the formation of the image that individuals create from their perceptions towards destinations.

Thus, from the research, two points should be emphasized and that answer the question posed by the research that guided this whole study: the first refers to the fact that when it comes to the market, it is evident that the image of a tourist destination is a key variable for its choice among the range of possibilities offered to consumers today (Acerenza, 2002; Bignami, 2002; Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; Kotler et al., 1994; Leal, 2002; Gallarza et al., 2002; Perez-Nebra and Torres, 2010; Vaz, 2003; Trigueiro, 1999; Cobra, 2004; Cooper, 2002) and also its possible repeated visit; the second is that the image management of destinations requires understanding that it is linked not only to marketing communications, but to tourism marketing in general, requiring that all market process be performed based on the image that the target has been positioned around.

The positioning / image adopted by a location determines how individuals will perceive it and that, therefore, the creation or positioning of images will be guided by the principles of validity, reliability, simplicity, attractiveness, and differentiation as proposed by Kotler (1994). The creation and consequently the diffusion of images that do not strictly follow those principles may have serious market consequences for the destination.

Thus, image management, after the selection of the target audience, requires the measurement of the location's current image through the application of various techniques, which for purposes of these final remarks, we can summarize in quantitative and qualitative analyses. This in time will assist the manager in determining the current image of the locality and finally in preparing the desired position and promotion to the target audience.

Based on what was presented herein and considering the case study on the tourism marketing work done by São Paulo Turismo – SPTuris, São Paulo's official tourism office, we infer that it is currently engaged in a process of creating an image of leisure and entertainment aimed at developing tourism through the attraction of a tourism demand made up by those traveling on leisure.

It is noted, however, that the mental representation of individuals in relation to the city is linked to an image of business and labor, which consequently determines the attitudes of consumers regarding the destination, i.e., around the image of a business city, corporate events and work. The city's tourist flow is basically made up of people in this segment, accounting to approximately 80% of the annual demand of tourists in São Paulo.

However, the city has enough tourist attractions and infrastructure (essential for tourist consumption), capable of offering and attracting leisure tourists; but, due to a perceived image that does not link to leisure, it ends up being underutilized.

Based on the observation and analysis of the work done by SPTuris, we infer that, stemming from the observation of favorable current trends with respect to leisure tourism in several segments, and the finding of a leisure and entertainment offer, that was under-utilized due to a lack of identification of the visitor with the city, the city's official tourism office, through its Municipal

Tourism Plan, set a goal to strengthen the image of the city of São Paulo as a destination for leisure and entertainment, developing comprehensive tourism marketing work.

Thus, it was observed that currently, the city stands in favor of optimizing leisure tourism and that in this sense, it has been developing different initiatives aiming at consolidating an image of leisure and entertainment, and therefore, attract a significant demand for the city.

It should be highlighted that the initiatives taken by SPTuris in order to consolidate the city as a representative tourist destination with regard to leisure, are guided by a Municipal Tourism Plan, which, according to the authors studied, is essential for the success of such initiatives.

Also, when comparing the initiatives outlined in PLATUM 2007/2010 against the initiatives taken to date, we observed that they are in line and mainly that both planned initiatives and those already carried out seek to strengthen the city's image of leisure from a broad view of tourism marketing, involving strategies related to product, place, price, and promotion of the destination. Ultimately, we have to consider that the positioning of the city image is difficult to attain, especially when the size and diversity of the city is considered; however, the initiatives are showing positive results, even though the results have not yet been officially presented by São Paulo Turismo.

Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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