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### A review of studies on the negative destination image<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** Tourism is a vital part of the economy in many countries and its importance is probably going to grow in the very near future. Destination image is one of the key factors affecting tourists' travel decisions. It has been the subject of numerous studies over the last few decades. The aim of this study is to analyze and summarize the literature on the negative image published in journals listed in JCR in the period of 1983-2021. We found that the number of articles on negative destination image published in JCR journals increased in 2017, 2019 and 2021. The biggest group of articles focus on destinations located in Europe, followed by Asia and Africa.

**Keywords:** negative image, tourist destination, destination image, tourists' impressions, terrorism, crises

JEL Codes: R11, Z30, Z32, Z33

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#### **1. Introduction**

The tourist destination image has been a very popular topic of study among tourism researchers for many decades. However, recent discussions have focused on the coexistence of opposite images for some destinations (Campo & Alvarez,

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2013). A country's image can affect decisions of tourists, foreign investors, consumers, entrepreneurs, students, trading partners, etc. (Anholt, 2006; Martínez & Alvarez, 2010; White & Radic, 2014). The tourist destination image is strongly tied to its geographical conditions, such as climate and natural attractions.

Another important factor that affects the destination image is safety, which has been particularly evident in the context of the recent pandemic, when many people chose to stay home for fear of getting infected with the virus. For example, Qiulin Lu and Hilmi A. Atadil (2021) showed that US travelers were reluctant to visit China after the pandemic, mainly because of their concerns over safety and security.

There has not been much research on the negative destination image, as evidenced by the number of articles published in JCR journals. As a result, some cities, countries and continents have been studied either poorly or not at all. The main purpose of this article is to give a complete review of the existing literature on the negative destination image.

# 2. Conceptualizations of the destination image

There are many conceptualizations of the destination image. Tim Hall defines it as "a simplified, generalized, often stereotypical impression that people have of any place or area" (Hall, 2006, p. 119). The image of any destination can be created from different information sources: by visitors (demand side), by the destination itself (supply side), or by an independent source. The study of images has become a significant field of investigation across a number of disciplines in recent years, such as marketing and tourism (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003), psychology (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999) and business strategy (Wang, 2006). Nowadays, it is widely accepted that a destination image is an essential factor affecting tourists' opinions, and therefore, their behaviors (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Gallarza, Saura & Garcia, 2002; Hunt, 1975; Pearce, 1982; Pike & Ryan, 2004). The concept of a country image has also been investigated in international marketing literature in connection with the "made-in" effect, i.e. how consumers' attitudes to products are affected by their country of origin (Laroche et al., 2005; Lee & Ganesh, 1999). These attitudes are not necessarily the same as those people may have when they are considering a country as a potential tourist destination. However, they are certainly related, since a country image influences products which are made there, including tourism products (Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch & Palihawadana, 2011; Essoussi & Merunka, 2007; Lee &

Lockshin, 2011; Martin & Eroglu, 1993; Nadeau et al., 2008). Such impressions can change after visiting the country, as a result of hand-on experiences of the destination (Dann, 1996; Rodriguez-Molina, Frías-Jamilena & Castañeda-García, 2013), or as a result of exposure to additional data from external sources (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Martin & Eroglu, 1993; McCartney, Butler & Bennett, 2008). Research conducted over the last 20 years indicates that the destination image is an important factor in how tourists choose destinations. The competitive advantage lies not in the quality of visible product attributes, but in those that are intangible, such as brand recognition (Bigné Alcañiz, Font & Andreu Simó, 2000). The image of a tourist destination is important because it can directly affect some important variables, such as tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Loyalty is a concept closely related to customer satisfaction: high levels of satisfaction increase customer loyalty. Consequently, loyalty is a central marketing concept, and any discussion about loyalty should take into account factors that influence, including customer satisfaction and brand image (Petrick & Backman, 2002; Baker & Crompton, 2000, Bigné, Sánchez & Sánchez, 2001).

There are a number of studies describing the image formation process. According to Claire A. Gunn (1972), a destination image is formed in two different ways, which produces two kinds of images: the organic image and the induced image. The first one comes from newspapers, movies or books, while the latter is the result of marketing promotions and advertising undertaken by the destination. When tourists visit a destination for the first time or during repeated visits, they develop an impression of that destination (Beerli, Martin & Moreno, 2002); with consecutive visits, this initial impression becomes more objective (Baloglu & Mangaloglu, 2001).

Recognizing the expansion of the tourism economy and the importance of delivering positive visitor experiences to boost a destination's competitiveness in the marketplace (Kim, 2014, 2018; Kim, Ritchie & McCormick, 2012; Oh, Fiore & Jeoung, 2007), researchers started to identify other factors that affect the formation of a destination image: previous visits, direct experience with the tourist destination (Hahm, 2004); cultural background (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 2000); tourist's level of experience (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999); travel agents, guidebooks, tour operators, the word of mouth (Baloglu & Mangaloglu, 2001) and familiarity (Baloglu, 2001). Christine A. Vogt and Kathleen L. Andereck (2003) concluded that as tourists become more experienced, their perception of destinations changes. Paul C. Fakeye and John L. Crompton (1991) argue that many perceptual changes occur during the first visit rather than during multiple experiences or visits. Barbora Cherifi et al. (2014) investigated destination images of non-visitors and found that the first image was persistent and endured over time but secondary experiences have an effect on image formation.

#### 3. Tourists' impressions

Tourists' impressions and the destination image are related in that destinations use their positive image to attract more tourists. The first impression is the most crucial to people's perceptions, judgments and behaviors (Lindgaard et al., 2011). Nowadays, first impressions usually are created by audiovisual content or by word of mouth. Once the first impression is formed, it is preserved in the tourist's mind for a long time. Previous research on travel websites has found that positive first impressions increase the likelihood that people will stay on the site and can increase travel planning (Xiang & Fesenmaier, 2006).

#### 4. Projected vs perceived image

A projected image is "formed through the promotional activities of tourism organizations and tour operators" (Kotler et al., 1993). A projected image can be produced by sources that aim to promote a destination, or from external sources, such as news reports, travel magazines, commercial guidebooks that are not controlled by destination promoters and are created to provide information to potential visitors (Ferrer-Rosell & Marine-Roig 2020). A perceived image is "held by the tourist, which is influenced by the information received through word-of--mouth and experience" (Kotler et al., 1993).

#### 5. Positive vs. negative image

While some destinations have a positive image and attract tourists, others, especially in developing countries, suffer from repeated crises, such as terrorism, crime, natural disasters, political unrest, epidemics, and accidents, which strengthen their negative image (Avraham & Ketter, 2016). Since sources influencing a destination's organic image are normally out of control, its promotors focus on advertising and marketing strategies (Butler, 1999; George, 2004). Promotors of tourist destinations need to know what image they want to project in order to make appropriate marketing decisions. A destination image developed by tourists is therefore based on certain impressions selected from the flood of all impressions of this destination (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). Modern research has shown that products produced by a given country can greatly affect its image as a destination and tourists' willingness to visit it (Lee & Lockshin, 2011). Even

though a negative country image can influence customers' purchasing decisions regarding products made in this country or their intention to visit it, it has been found that a country image can change (Chon, 1991; Gartner, 1994; Heslop, Lu & Cray, 2008).

The change from a negative image to a positive one can happen gradually over a longer period, as result of continuous promotion or the country's economic development. It can also be relatively quick, thanks to an important event, such as the organization of the Olympic Games (Heslop, Papadopolous & Bourk, 1998). Communication campaigns can revitalize a damaged brand in international markets (Andrews & Kim, 2007). However, studies have analyzed the impact of promotional campaigns on country image; to boost the tourism industry and promote tourist destinations, national governments and other destination management organizations visit international tourism fairs, print tourism brochures, and launch marketing campaigns using different media channels.

Several studies on destination image set out to answer questions like "What is the impact of tourism promotion on the image of a destination and, consequently, tourists' intention to visit it?" "Can tourism promotion improve the image of a destination, particularly if the initial image is negative?" "Can the promotion of the country's businesses enhance its image as well?"

The ability to effectively provide information about tourist destinations plays an important role not only in the development of tourism in general but also in the marketing of particular destinations and the creation of their image (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; George, 2004; Corbett, 2006; Hashimoto & Telfer, 2006; Dolnicar & Leisch, 2008; Tasci & Gartner, 2007).

#### 6. Brand repositioning and destination image restoration

With regard to image restoration, two types of negative destination image are usually distinguished (Avraham & Ketter, 2008). The first one is a negative image arising from unexpected crises, such as natural disasters, terrorism attacks, or sudden epidemics. The second one is a prolonged negative image caused by long-lasting problems, such as economic hardships, high crime rates, continuous war, or political instability. As a result, some tourist destinations become less popular and eventually disappear from the tourism map (Seddighi, Nuttal & Theocharous, 2001).

Since image restoration literature (Wahab, 1996; Tilson & Stacks, 1997; Mansfeld & Pizam, 2006; Ritchie, 2009) focuses primarily on destinations that suffer from sudden crises, the proposed marketing strategies do not necessarily apply to tourist destinations with a prolonged negative image. There is not much research or theoretical models which deal with tourist destinations affected by long-term and continuous factors that damage their image (Gertner & Kotler, 2004; Avraham & Ketter, 2008). Furthermore, decision-makers in these destinations often struggle to combat the prolonged negative stereotypes and prejudices associated with their destination; such negative perceptions may have been built over many years and may have been publicly strengthened by superficial and sensational media coverage (Avraham, 2003; Molina & Esteban, 2006; Lahav & Avraham, 2008; Ritchie, 2009). In a study of the image of Dubai, Chris Ryan & Ivan Ninov (2011) discovered that "two homogeneities of image are able to exist simultaneously in the visitors' minds," one referring "the overall, generic image of a place" and another to "site specific locations within the destination." The literature on emotions suggests that negatively valenced emotions leads to stronger memories than positively valenced ones (Kensinger, Garoff-Eaton & Schacter, 2007; Evine & Bluck, 2004).

One way in which the negative image of a destination can be improved is by educating tourists (Séraphin, Butcher & Korstanje, 2016) "because they very often unfairly judge some destinations." In order to eliminate this prejudice, it is necessary to implement information campaigns that target potential visitors.

William C. Gartner (1994) proposed some methods of image formation, which include traditional forms advertising, information announced by tour operators, second-party endorsement through unbiased reports such as newspaper articles, unsolicited information received from friends and relatives; solicited organic agent (solicited information received from friends and relatives) and organic agent (actual visitation). The results of his study showed that tourists build their image of a destination by comparing it with their hometown or other tourist destinations they have already visited or plan to visit. Even though the subject of destination image has been well researched, visual images and their impact on the mental image of a destination require further studies. Brian Garrod (2008) used volunteer-employed photography to compare the way tourists and residents perceived a particular destination, while Kelly J. MacKay and Christine M. Couldwell (2004) examined the utility of visitor-employed photography (VEP) to elicit tourist destination image; Svetlana Stepchenkova and Fangzi Zhan (2013) compared photographs taken by tourists with photographs posted on the website of a destination management organization to investigate the perceived and projected destination image.

Another specific application of brand repositioning has to do with city reimaging, which refers to a deliberate (re)presentation and (re)configuration of a city's image to boost its economic, cultural and political capital. Such activities often involve the use of conventional marketing tools, such as logos, slogans, and promotional literature (Ward, 1998). Other methods include the organization of events, the construction of iconic buildings and implementation of sophisticated public relations strategies. Although there is a large body of research on city reimaging, little attention has been paid to the mechanisms underlying image change, or to unconventional re-imaging techniques. Negative image is a great obstacle to attracting tourists, rich residents, and investors (Bramwell & Rawding, 1996; Beirman, 2003; Baker, 2007; Araña & León, 2008; Govers & Go, 2009; Ritchie, 2009; Jager, 2010). However, in the case of a prolonged image crisis, one cannot expect to attract tourists just by launching an advertising campaign or using other marketing tools (Anholt, 2006). In this context, Eli Avraham and Eran Ketter (2008) propose five main strategies for destination marketing based on the current image of the destination. These strategies are associated with various conditions that motivate the attempt to modify the destination image:

- tourist destinations suffering from an ongoing crisis. These destinations used to receive tourists and are now looking for ways to attract them again, even if the crisis is not over (for example, if terrorist attacks still continue);

 destinations that have started receiving tourists again because the crisis has subsided (e.g. a natural disaster) and want to maintain or increase their tourist flows;

- destinations which have always been visited for a certain purpose or by certain groups of tourists and now are now trying to enlarge their customer base;

 destinations that market themselves regularly without specific image problems and want to maintain their good image

- destinations, which are faced with the problem of over-tourism and want to lower their consumption to restrict the load of tourists (Avraham & Ketter, 2008).

During the past two decades, terrorism has been the main challenge for many destinations, mainly in developing countries in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. More recently, however, the threat of terrorism started to spread to new tourist destinations in Australia, Europe and the USA (Corbet et al., 2019). It is therefore essential that crisis communication strategies should become an integral part of tourism marketing in developing countries (Avraham & Ketter, 2016).

#### 7. Methods

The following study is an example of an integrative review as defined by Trude Furunes (2019), which is used to analyze the body of research on a specific topic from different studies conducted by applying qualitative, quantitative, and combined methods. The review was carried out in three stages. During the first stage the author looked for studies devoted to the problem of negative image in general or those with more specific topics, such as negative perception, terrorism,

Journal	Impact factor
Annals of Tourism Research	9.011
Journal of Sustainable Tourism	7.968
Tourism Management Perspectives	6.770
Tourism Geographies	3.530
Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	7.320
Current Issues in Tourism	6.890
Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes	1.460
Journal of Emerging Trends in Marketing and Management	N/A
Journal of Travel Research	10.310
Journal of Hospitality Management and Tourism	5.440

#### Table 1. Impact factors of tourism journals

Source: own elaboration.

and crisis. Ten journals listed in Journal Citation Reports were selected for the analysis (Table 1). The oldest article published on the topic of negative image appeared in 1983 and was treated as the starting point of the reference period. After compiling the database of potentially relevant articles, the search was narrowed down to those containing selected keywords. Finally, the title, abstract, objectives and keywords of each article were examined to make sure that its subject was the negative image of destinations As a result, 27 articles were identified, which were then categorized. In the third stage, the database created as a result of the categorization process was analyzed. The articles are listed in a separate section above the references.

#### 8. Results

The articles were classified using the following six categories:

- publication year,
- journal,
- geographical area,
- type of negative image,
- topic,
- methodological research approach (qualitative, quantitative and mixed).

These categories were chosen following similar studies conducted in the past, where the same approach was used, such as Richard H. Kolbe and Melissa S. Burnett (1991), V.J. Duriau et al. (2007) and Raquel Camprubí and Lluís Coromina (2016).

#### 8.1. Publication year

Table 2 shows how the number of articles on negative image changed over time. After the first article on this topic, published in 1983, no articles appeared in the selected journals for the next 17 years, until 2000 when the topic was addressed again in an article published in *Tourism Management Perspectives*. There are six years when more than one article on negative image was published, all of them in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Year	Frequency
1983	1
2000	1
2005	1
2006	1
2007	1
2010	1
2013	2
2014	2
2016	3
2017	4
2019	4
2020	1
2021	4

Table 2. Frequency of publications on negative image papers

Source: own elaboration.

#### 8.2. Journal

Nineteen articles (73%) of all articles on negative image published in JCR journals in the reference period (1983-2021) appeared in just three journals (*Tourism Management Perspectives, Tourism Geographies* and *Current Issues in Tourism*).

#### 8.3. Geographical scope

Seven studies used an international geographical scale (26.9%) which means that the article included two or more countries or continents in the study. As can be expected, 23.9% of the studies focused on European countries or on Europe in general as a continent; for one thing, research and academic activity play an

Area	Percentage
Europe	23.9
China	11.5
USA	7.3
Africa	15.7
Asia (excluding China)	19.2
Americas (excluding USA)	15.0
Australia	3.8
Middle East	3.6

Table 3. Geographical area discussed in the articles

Source: own elaboration.

important role in Europe and scholars affiliated with European academic institutions can benefit from a certain prestige. In addition, Europe is ranked as the most-visited continent (58%), followed by Asia (19.5%), North America (16%), South America (2.6%), Africa (2.3%), and Oceania (1.6%). Five articles were related to Asia (19.2%) and four articles were about Africa (15.7%). It is important to note that different types of negative image are discussed in different continents: for example in Europe cases of negative image are due to terrorism; in Asia, negative image is associated with political instability and natural crises. China was treated separately from the rest of Asia on account of its importance and its impact (Table 3).

#### 8.4. Type of negative image

As indicated earlier, negative perceived image can be caused either by an unexpected crisis, such as a terrorist attack, natural disasters, or a sudden epidemic, or by long-lasting problems, such as economic hardships, high crime rates, or continuous instability. In our study, we distinguished between articles that focused on perceived image and those devoted to projected image.

Of the 27 articles analyzed in the study, 12 (46%) focus on perceived image, eight (31%) are devoted to examining the projected image of a destination, and six (23%) deal with both types of image.

#### 8.5. Topics associated with negative image

The topics associated with negative destination image (Table 4) represent a broad spectrum and different backgrounds. As can be expected, terrorism (11.8%) and

Topics associated with negative image	Frequency
Business competitiveness	3.8
Culinary experience	3.8
Industrialization	3.8
Service quality	3.8
Tourism promotion	3.8
Negative symbolism	3.9
Prolonged negative image	5.8
Experience	7.7
Health	7.7
Natural crises	7.7
Environmental	8.5
Crime	8.7
Terrorism	11.8
General approach	19.2

Table 4. Topics associated with negative destination image

Source: own elaboration.

crime (8.7%) and are among the most commonly topics discussed in the context of negative image.

The topics were chosen based on their impact on the tourism industry; for instance good culinary experiences can make a destination very attractive (Seraphin & Gowreesunkar, 2017) and culinary or food tourism has been gaining popularity in recent years. In constrast, industralization, usually associated with a degradation of natural landscapes, has negative impact on tourist destinations.

#### 8.6. Research approach

Fifteen articles (57.6%) in the study used a qualitative approach; six (23.1%) employed a quantitative approach, while the remaining articles (19.2%) used a mixed approach, combining elements of qualitative and quantitative research. In other words, the majority of the studies on negative image were qualitative, using such techniques as interviews and focus groups. While a combination of methods usually gives more reliable results, some topics (e.g. terrorism, tourist's personal experience, prolonged negative image, political and natural crises) were solely analyzed using qualitative techniques. Studies where a mixed method approach was used explored the topics of culinary experiences, crime, or dealt with negative image in general.

#### 9. Conclusions

It was found that the number of articles on negative destination image started to increase in 2013, when two papers were published. The topic received more attention in recent years (2017, 2019, 2021), with four new articles per year. Most articles analyzed in the review focused on the main topics associated with negative image, such as terrorism, crime, natural and political crises, and their impact on the perception of tourist destinations. Other topics addressed in the articles included business competitiveness, tourism promotion and health issues.

As regards the geographical scope of negative image research, almost a quarter of the articles analyzed in the study deal with destinations located in Europe, with Asia and Africa taking the second and third place respectively. The oldest article on the subject, published in 1983, refers to a destination in the USA. In contrast, the Middle East and Australia are clearly underrepresented. Although over a quarter of the studies had an international scope, some authors chose to concentrate on just one region/country/city. Some articles dealt only with the meaning of a negative image as a concept in general wide perspective without explaining the reasons behind the negative image (the general approach category in our analysis).

As already mentioned, various methods have been used to study negative image, although the qualitative approach has been preferred. The most common ways of collecting included interviews, focus groups and questionnaire surveys. When it comes to data analysis; content analysis was the most common method. It is commonly used in social sciences (Berg, 2009; Krippendorff, 1990) and is becoming increasingly popular in the field of tourism.

The main limitations of this review is that it is based on just 27 articles published in ten JCR journals between 1983 and 2021, which is a relatively small number. Articles published in books or conference publications were not included. Another problem is the underrepresentation of certain regions or entire continents, such as Middle East, Africa, and Australia.

Given that there is still debate on the definition of negative image and its impact on the perception of destinations, the topic requires further research.

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#### Przegląd badań na temat negatywnego wizerunku obszarów recepcji turystycznej

**Streszczenie**. Turystyka stanowi istotną część gospodarki w wielu krajach i jej znaczenie prawdopodobnie wzrośnie w niedalekiej przyszłości. Wizerunek obszarów recepcji turystycznej jest jednym z kluczowych czynników wpływających na wybór miejsc wyjazdów turystycznych i stanowi przedmiot licznych badań przeprowadzonych w ciągu ostatnich kilkudziesięciu lat. Celem pracy jest analiza i podsumowanie prac dotyczących negatywnego wizerunku, jakie pojawiły się w czasopismach znajdujących się w bazie JCR w latach 1983-2021. Z badania wynika, że liczba artykułów na temat negatywnego wizerunku obszarów recepcji turystycznej opublikowanych w tym okresie wzrosła w latach 2017, 2019 i 2021. Najwięcej prac dotyczy obszarów recepcji turystycznej położonych w Europie, a w dalszej kolejności w Azji i Afryce.

Słowa kluczowe: negatywny wizerunek, obszar recepcji turystycznej, wizerunek obszaru recepcji turystycznej, wrażenia turystów, terroryzm, kryzysy



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