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## **DESTINATION IMAGE: LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Abstract:** Tourism is one of the most important sectors in world economy. In order to be competitive and attract tourists and income, destinations need a positive image. It must be the result of joint efforts of authorities, local population, tourism professionals, and scientists. This paper provides a review of scientific publications in the field of destination image for the period 2003–2024, focusing mainly on the research from the last decade.

**Keywords:** destination image; tourist destination; literature review; tourist brand; destination perception.

### **Introduction**

Tourism plays a significant role in world economy reaching 7,6% of global GDP and creating 22 million new jobs in 2022<sup>3</sup>. According to United Nations World Tourism Organization, the sector has the capacity to contribute directly or indirectly to all of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals defined by the United Nations in its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>4</sup>.

In Bulgaria tourism is one of the most important economic sectors with its GDP share between 10 and 13% in the decade preceding the COVID-19 health crisis<sup>5</sup>. Reaching the previous levels largely depends on the image of Bulgaria as a tourist destination. The perception of Bulgaria as a safe and quality destination is a very important condition for the motivation to visit the country, both for inbound and domestic tourists. Its destination image is one of the most important factors in deciding to visit and return.

The current paper aims to examine significant scientific studies in the field of destinations image published on the subject. For the needs of the present

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<sup>3</sup> World Travel & Tourism Council [online]. Economic Impact Research, [Accessed: 5 February 2024]. Available at: <https://wttc.org/research/economic-impact>.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations World Tourism Organization [online]. Tourism in the 2030 Agenda, [Accessed: 5 February 2024]. Available at: <https://www.unwto.org/tourism-in-2030-agenda>.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations World Tourism Organization [online]. 145 key tourism statistics, [Accessed: 5 February 2024]. Available at: <https://www.unwto.org/tourism-statistics/key-tourism-statistics>.

research, a review of the scientific publications for the period 2003-2024 was performed, with emphasis on the researches from the last decade.

### **Literature Review**

Qu et al. (2011) state that destination brand strategy should be build and/or enhanced having in mind the destination image formed by the tourists with its three aspects – affective, cognitive and unique. Their research points that the destination image directly affects the willingness to revisit and recommend to other customers<sup>6</sup>. In 2007 Chen and Tsai describe the path between destination image and behavioural intentions as follows: destination image ->trip quality -> perceived value -> satisfaction -> behavioural intentions<sup>7</sup>.

Del Bosque and Martin (2008) point that the destination image affects loyalty and expectations, which, on the other hand, has a positive and significant influence on satisfaction of the tourists. They also state that positive or negative emotions could be influenced by post-experience cognitions and prior beliefs and are very important in the satisfaction formation process<sup>8</sup>.

In 2023 Ahmed argues that the cognitive destination image and the perceived value have a significant influence on travel satisfaction, while the affective destination image does not. According to the study, affective image has the greatest influence on revisit intentions<sup>9</sup>. The positive and significant impact of the destination image on the revisit intentions is also studied by Foster and

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<sup>6</sup> **Qu, H., L.H. Kim, H.H. Im.** A model of destination branding: Integrating the concepts of the branding and destination image. *Tourism Management*, vol. 32, issue 3, 2011, pp. 465-476.

<sup>7</sup> **Chen, C.F., D.C. Tsai.** How destination image and evaluative factors affect behavioral intentions? *Tourism Management*, vol. 28, issue 4, 2007, pp. 1115-1122.

<sup>8</sup> **Del Bosque, I.R., San Martin, H.** Tourist satisfaction a cognitive-affective model. *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 35, issue 2, 2008, pp. 551-573.

<sup>9</sup> **Ahmed, M.** Destination image and revisit intention: the case of tourism in Egypt. *PASOS. Revista de turismo y patrimonio cultural*, vol. 21, issue 4, 2023, pp. 681-697.

Sidharta (2019)<sup>10</sup>, Prayag et al. (2017)<sup>11</sup>, Stylos et al. (2016)<sup>12</sup>, Hallmann et al. (2015)<sup>13</sup>, Chew and Jahari (2014)<sup>14</sup>.

Lever et al. (2022) conclude that national identification is directly related with destination image and tourism ethnocentrism. People that perceive their country as a destination with positive image are willing to travel domestically and to recommend it to other potential tourists, both domestic and foreign<sup>15</sup>. Le Hong and Hsu points that highlighting cultural distinctions and uniqueness can have a positive effect on destination image, while the perceived discrimination will definitely achieve the opposite<sup>16</sup>.

Zakiah et al. (2023) state that sustainable destination image can be an essential factor in the decision-making process. Tourists are more eager to engage with destinations if they are convinced that their values align with the destination's values. Consumer engagement plays a mediating role between tourists' loyalty and destination's brand image<sup>17</sup>.

In research conducted in 2021 Marques et al. test 12 hypotheses in order to illustrate the connection between cognitive, affective and unique destination image and tourism satisfaction, post-trip intention to recommend a destination and post-visit intentions towards products made in the visited country. According to results obtained, affective image strongly influences tourist satisfaction, the cognitive one has no significant influence on it, while the unique destination image has a slight negative impact. The affective and cognitive image significantly influence the willingness to recommend a destination, while the unique image has

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<sup>10</sup> **Foster, B., I. Sidharta.** A Perspective from Indonesian Tourists: The Influence of Destination Image on Revisit Intention. *The Journal of Applied Business Research*, vol. 35, issue 1, 2019, pp. 29-34.

<sup>11</sup> **Prayag, G., S. Hosany, B. Muskat, G. del Chiappa.** Understanding the relationships between tourists' emotional experiences, perceived overall image, satisfaction, and intention to recommend. *Journal of Travel Research*, vol. 56, issue 1, 2017, pp. 41-54.

<sup>12</sup> **Stylos, N., C.A. Vassiliadis, V. Bellou, A. Andronikidis.** Destination images, holistic images and personal normative beliefs: Predictors of intention to revisit a destination. *Tourism Management*, vol. 53, 2016, pp. 40-60.

<sup>13</sup> **Hallmann, K., A. Zehrer, S. Muller.** Perceived destination image: An image model for a winter sports destination and its effect on intention to revisit. *Journal of Travel Research*, vol. 54, issue 1, 2015, pp. 94-106.

<sup>14</sup> **Chew, E.Y.T., S.A. Jahari.** Destination image as a mediator between perceived risks and revisit intention: A case of post-disaster Japan. *Tourism Management*, vol. 40, 2014, pp. 382-393.

<sup>15</sup> **Lever, M.W., S. Elliot, M. Joppe.** Pride and promotion: Exploring relationships between national identification, destination advocacy, tourism ethnocentrism and destination image. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, vol. 29, issue 4, 2022, pp. 537-554.

<sup>16</sup> **Le Hong, V. L. Hsu.** The effects of perceived cultural distance and perceived discrimination on the destination image and behaviour intention of international student tourists in Taiwan. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, vol. 58, 2024, pp. 16-27.

<sup>17</sup> **Zakiah, S., A. Winarno, D. Hermana.** Examination of consumer engagement for loyalty in sustainable destination image. *Cogent Social Sciences*, vol. 9, issue 2, 2023.

a very small effect. All three image factors have positive impact on post-visit intentions towards products made in the country, but are not directly influenced by tourist satisfaction<sup>18</sup>.

Performing 4 experiments and applying the mere association theory, Lee et al. (2021) conclude that country' product image can significantly affect its image as a travel destination<sup>19</sup>.

According to Echtner and Ritchie (2003) destination image should be studied as a combination of holistic and attribute-based components, each of which have functional and psychological characteristics. Images of tourist destinations can also range from those based on common functional and psychological traits to those based on more distinctive or even unique features, events, feelings, etc. In order to capture all these components, while measuring the destination image, a combination of structured and unstructured methodologies should be applied<sup>20</sup>.

Pike and Kotsi (2016) argue that the Repertory Test should be used to identify the salient attributes of a destination image. Unstructured personal interviews and focus groups (brainstorming) need to be performed in order not to omit the qualitative part of a research. They also state that destination image attribute salience might differ across some travel contexts which should be taken into consideration at the questionnaire design stage<sup>21</sup>.

In 2016 Manhas et al. propose a conceptual model in building the destination brand image at 3 stages of consumption – pre-consumption in which the tourists are influenced by the marketing promotion and the word of mouth; during-consumption which is influenced by the personal experience and the post-consumption in which satisfaction/dissatisfaction, positive/negative word of mouth and intentions to revisit are formed<sup>22</sup>.

Tung et al. (2021) state that the negative host-guest interactions can be compensated by the positive tourists' perceptions of other destination resources

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<sup>18</sup> Marques, C., R.V. da Silva, S. Antova. Image, satisfaction, destination and product post-visit behaviours: How do they relate in emerging destinations? *Tourism Management*, vol. 85, 2021

<sup>19</sup> Lee, R., H. Khan, S. Bellman. Mere association of product image and travel destination. *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 86, 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Echtner, C.M., J.R.B. Ritchie. The Meaning and Measurement of Destination Image. *The Journal of Tourism Studies*, vol. 14, issue 1, 2003, pp. 37-48.

<sup>21</sup> Pike, S., F. Kotsi. Stopover destination image — Using the Repertory Test to identify salient attributes. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, vol. 18, 2016, pp. 68-73.

<sup>22</sup> Manhas, P.S., L.A. Manrai, A.K. Manrai. Role of tourist destination development in building its brand image: A conceptual model. *Journal of Economics, Finance and Administrative Science*, vol. 21, issue 40, 2016, pp. 25-29.

(natural, cultural, etc.), so the destination image can be kept positive<sup>23</sup>. According to Kostadinova (2023) tourist destination with its narrow specifics influences positively the tourist product of the destination. However, some local obstacles need to be overcome such as ones in the local public and private sector<sup>24</sup>.

For the purposes of studying the tourist destination image Gosheva (2012) suggests to separate the emotional (climate, landscape, culture, similar mentality, etc.) from the rational aspects (accommodation, food, prices, accessibility, proximity to home, etc.) of the tourists' perceptions<sup>25</sup>. Alexandrova (2018) states that of crucial importance for the formation of destination image is the creation of preferences for the specifics of the regions and, accordingly, the development of unique and not interchangeable products<sup>26</sup>.

Chi and Qu (2008) propose a nine-factor model of a destination image that includes travel environment, natural attractions, entertainment and events, historic attractions, infrastructure, accessibility, relaxation, outdoor activities and prices, detailed by 34 sub-factors. They also suggest 7 general dimensions of attribute satisfactions – shopping, activities and events, lodging, accessibility, attractions, environment, dining, supported by 33 sub-factors<sup>27</sup>.

Alqahtani and Makki (2023) suggest a cause-and-effect grouping of the factors that impact the image of the destinations. In the cause group they include (starting with the one with the highest rank of influence) tourism infrastructure, environment, safety and security, information and communication technology, policy rules and regulations, fairs, exhibits and festivals, economic development and affluence, political stability. The effect group of factors includes (starting with the one with the highest rank of influence) human resources, quality of

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<sup>23</sup> **Tung, V.W.S., S. Tse, D.C.F. Chan.** Host-guest relations and destination image: compensatory effects, impression management, and implications for tourism recovery. *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, vol. 38, issue 8, 2021, pp. 833-844.

<sup>24</sup> **Костадинова, Н.** Бизнес хотели и конгресен туризъм – взаимодействия и практики, Велико Търново: Ай анд Би, 2023. // **Kostadinova, N.** *Biznes hoteli i kongresen turizam – vzaimodeystviya i praktiki*, Veliko Tarnovo: Ay and Bi, 2023.

<sup>25</sup> **Гошева, Б.** Брандът България. Въвеждане на интегриран бранд мениджмънт. Годишник на департамент "Масови комуникации", НБУ, брой 17 (1), 2012, с. 176-196 // **Gosheva, B.** *Brandat Balmariya. Vavezhthane na integriran brand menidzhmant. Godishnik na departament "Masovi komunikatsii"*, NBU, broj 17 (1), 2012, s. 176-196.

<sup>26</sup> **Александрова, Е.** Събитията като инструмент за брендиране и позициониране на градските дестинации. Туризмът – изследване, развитие и обучение. В: Сборник с доклади от XV Международна научна конференция, София 15-16.06.2018 г., с. 119-130. // **Aleksandrova, E.** *Sabitiyata kato instrument za brandirane i pozitsionirane na gradskite destinatsii. Turizam – izsledvane, razvitie i obuchenie. V: Sbornik s dokladi ot XV Mezhdunarodna nauchna konferentsiya, Sofiya 15-16.06.2018 g., s. 119-130.*

<sup>27</sup> **Chi, C.G.Q., H. Qu.** Examining the structural relationships of destination image, tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty: An integrated approach. *Tourism Management*, vol. 29, issue 4, 2008, pp. 624-636.

services, health and hygiene, prices, hospitality, friendliness and receptiveness, transport infrastructure, natural and cultural resources<sup>28</sup>.

In research published in 2017 Dimitrov et al. measure 8 factors of the destination image – services, natural, cultural, hospitality, prices, accessibility, infrastructure and recreation, together with 28 sub factors<sup>29</sup>. In 2018 Dyankov et al. evaluate country brand identity by using 11 factors and 79 sub-factors, conducting a survey amongst inbound tourists<sup>30</sup>.

In study from 2008 Hristov describes 12 factors that influence the tourist destination image – demographic-economic and social profile of the potential user, perceptions, motivation, personal experience, needs, preferences, expectations, other users' opinion, education, media, personality, marketing mix<sup>31</sup>. Temelkova (2018) suggests 9 groups of attributes that form the destination image – natural resources, recreation, environment, general infrastructure, culture, history and arts, social factors, tourist infrastructure, political and economic factors, entertainment<sup>32</sup>.

Rodrigues et al. (2023) investigate the digital marketing role in creation of interest and engagement to tourist destinations. If conducted strategically, professionally and with high quality content those marketing activities will have a significant impact on destination image<sup>33</sup>.

The importance of big data (social media, press, travel platforms, etc.) research for the image of the destination, both positive or negative, is presented in studies conducted by Galiano-Coronil et al. (2023)<sup>34</sup>, Kasapoglu et al. (2023)<sup>35</sup>,

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<sup>28</sup> **Alqahtani, A.Y., A.A. Makki.** A DEMATEL-ISM Integrated Modeling Approach of Influencing Factors Shaping Destination Image in the Tourism Industry. *Administrative Sciences*, vol. 13, issue 9, 2023.

<sup>29</sup> **Dimitrov, P., M. Stankova, I. Vasenska, D. Uzunova.** Increasing attractiveness and image recognition of Bulgaria as a tourism destination, *Tourism & Management Studies*, 2017, vol. 13(3), 2017, pp. 39-47.

<sup>30</sup> **Dyankov, T. V. Krastev, K. Yancheva.** Evaluation of brand identity of Bulgaria as a tourist destination. *Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 16, issue 1, 2018, 19-34.

<sup>31</sup> **Христов, И.** Имидж на туристическата дестинация – същност и инструменти за неговата креация. *Народностопански архив*, брой 1, 2018, с. 89-101. // **Hristov, I.** Imidzh na turisticheskata destinatsiya – sashtnost i instrumenti za negovata kreatsiya. *Narodnostopanski arhiv*, broy 1, 2018, s. 89-101.

<sup>32</sup> **Темелкова, С.** Образът на туристическите дестинации през призмата на туристическите възприятия, мотивация и удовлетвореност. *Годишник “Икономика и Бизнес”*, НБУ, бр. 1, 2018, с. 129-135. // **Temelkova, S.** Obrazat na turisticheskite destinatsii prez prizmata na turisticheskite vazpriyatiya, motivatsiya i udovletvorenost. *Godishnik “Ikonomika i Biznes”*, NBU, br. 1, 2018, s. 129-135.

<sup>33</sup> **Rodrigues, S., R. Correia, R. Goncalves, F. Branco, J. Martins.** Digital Marketing's Impact on Rural Destinations' Image, Intention to Visit and Destination Sustainability. *Sustainability*, vol. 15, issue 3, 2023.

<sup>34</sup> **Galiano-Coronil, A., S. Blanco-Moreno, L.B. Tobar-Pesantez, G.A. Gutierrez-Montoya.** Social media impact of tourism managers: a decision tree approach in happiness, social marketing and sustainability. *Journal of Management Development*, vol. 42, issue 6, 2023, pp. 436-457.

<sup>35</sup> **Kasapoglu, C., A. Ramazan, M. Baskol.** Assessing destination brand associations on Twitter: The case of Istanbul. *Advances in Hospitality and Tourism research*, vol. 11, issue 4, 2023, pp. 443-475.

Lyndon (2023)<sup>36</sup>, Tham et al. (2023)<sup>37</sup>, Irfan et al. (2022)<sup>38</sup>, Farhangi and Alipour (2021)<sup>39</sup>, Garcia-Haro et al. (2021)<sup>40</sup>, Guo et al. (2021)<sup>41</sup>, Varadzhakova et al. (2021)<sup>42</sup>, Lam et al. (2020)<sup>43</sup>. All authors agree that the destination marketers should take into serious consideration the digital channels as a chance to enhance the destination image or to overcome the negatives. Wang et al. (2023)<sup>44</sup> state that online travel information quality has a four-dimension impact on cognitive resonance (value-added, relevancy, completeness and design) and a three-dimension effect on emotional resonance (interestingness, design and amount of information), amongst which completeness (cognitive) and design (emotional) have the greatest influence.

Several researches have been performed in the field of how travel journalists' materials (Freire and Curvelo 2021)<sup>45</sup>, fiction movies and online video games affect destination image and travel intentions: Dela Cruz and Lacap

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<sup>36</sup> **Lyndon, N.** How Do Destinations Relate to One Another? A Study of Destination Visual Branding on Instagram. In: *Springer Proceedings in Business and Economics. 30th Annual International eTourism Conference, ENTER 2023, Johannesburg, 2023*, pp. 204-216.

<sup>37</sup> **Tham, A., S.H. Chen, L. Durbidge.** A pentadic analysis of TikTok marketing in tourism: The case of Penang, Malaysia. *Tourist Studies*, 2023, pp. 1-29.

<sup>38</sup> **Irfan, M., M.S. Malik, S.K. Zubair.** Impact of Vlog Marketing on Consumer Travel Intent and Consumer Purchase Intent with the Moderating Role of Destination Image and Ease of Travel. *Sage Open*, vol. 12, issue 2, 2022.

<sup>39</sup> **Farhangi, S., H. Alipour.** Social Media as a Catalyst for the Enhancement of Destination Image: Evidence from a Mediterranean Destination with Political Conflict. *Sustainability*, vol. 13, issue 13, 2021.

<sup>40</sup> **Garcia-Haro, M.A., M.P. Martinez-Ruiz, R. Martinez-Canas, P. Ruiz-Palomino.** Benefits of online sources of information in the tourism sector: The key role of motivation to co-create. *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research*, vol. 16, issue 6, 2021, pp. 2051-2072.

<sup>41</sup> **Guo, X., J. Pesonen, R. Komppula.** Comparing online travel review platforms as destination image information agents. *Information Technology and Tourism*, vol. 23, issue 2, 2021, pp. 159-187.

<sup>42</sup> **Varadzhakova, D., N. Kostadinova, O. Mancheva-Ali.** The tourist experience of visitors of "Tsarevgrad Turnov – sound and light" show /Bulgaria/: Content analysis of the online reviews. In: Silva, U.C. (eds.). *Turismo & Hotelaria No Contexto da Experiencia*, Editora do CCTA Joao Pessoa 2021, pp. 41-74.

<sup>43</sup> **Lam, J.M.S., H. Ismail, S. Lee.** From desktop to destination: User-generated content platforms, co-created online experiences, destination image and satisfaction. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, vol. 18, 2020.

<sup>44</sup> **Wang, X., X. Wang, I.K.W. Lai.** The effects of online tourism information quality on conative destination image: The mediating role of resonance. *Frontiers of Psychology*, vol. 14, 2023.

<sup>45</sup> **Freire, J., R. Curvelo.** Story creation and the impact of travel journalists on destination brands. *Geojournal of Tourism and Geosites*, vol. 37, issue 3, 2021, pp. 972-980.

(2023)<sup>46</sup>, Sharma et al. (2023)<sup>47</sup>, Gupta et al. (2020)<sup>48</sup>, Spears et al. (2013)<sup>49</sup>, Mestre et al. (2008)<sup>50</sup>. Researchers agree that fiction movies and online games “silently” give information about destinations’ cultural, environmental, infrastructural, political, ethnical, economic, etc. characteristics and their influence of destination’ image is significant.

## Conclusions

The results of the literature review show scientists’ significant interest on the destination image and, in particular, in its study and measurement, the factors that form it, its aspects, its interrelationships with travel intentions, tourist satisfaction, the recommending possibility, etc. Once formed, the positive image must be maintained and enhanced, and the negative image must be changed. This should be the result of the joint efforts of authorities, local population, professionals and scientists. Modern technologies (digital marketing, social networks, travel platforms, media) are of great help in this regard. Those in charge of building destination image should closely monitor the content in them, as well as what information is presented about the destination through movies, video games, etc. A limitation in the present research was the lack of studies in the field of nonfiction and documentary movies influence on destination image.

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<sup>46</sup> **Dela Cruz, J.A.M., J.P.G. Lacap.** Film-Induced Effects and Intention to Visit: The Intervening Role of Country Image of South Korea. *Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Research*, vol. 11, issue 1, 2023, pp. 1-27.

<sup>47</sup> **Sharma, S., D. Styliadis, K.M. Woosnam.** From virtual to actual destinations: do interactions with others, emotional solidarity and destination image in online games influence willingness to travel? *Current Issues in Tourism*, vol. 26, issue 9, 2023, pp. 1427-1445.

<sup>48</sup> **Gupta, S., M.M. Foroudi, J. Vaatanen, S. Gupta, L.T. Wright.** Nations as brands: Cinema's place in the branding role. *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 116, 2020, pp. 721-733.

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<sup>50</sup> **Mestre, R., A. del Rey, K. Stanishevski.** The image of Spain as tourist destination built through fictional cinema. *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, vol. 24, issue 2-3, 2008, pp. 185-194.



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