

DESTINATION VISUAL IMAGE AND EXPECTATION OF EXPERIENCES

Helen Ye
Iis P. Tussyadiah

ABSTRACT. A unique experience is the essence of tourism sought by tourists. The most effective way to communicate the notion of a tourism experience at a destination is to provide visual cues that stimulate the imagination and connect with potential tourists in a personal way. This study aims at understanding how a visual image is relevant to the expectation of experiences by deconstructing images of a destination and interpreting visitors' perceptions of these images and the experiences associated with them. The results suggest that tourists with different understandings of desirable experiences found different contents and notions of images inspired them to visit a destination. Several managerial implications are discussed.

KEYWORDS. Visual image, experience, expectation, travel destination

INTRODUCTION

Experience is the essence of travel destination offerings. Before visiting travel destinations, potential visitors tend to seek communication cues to find whether the destinations fit their own tourism desires. Visual communication is regarded as vital for delivering these cues. It is posited by Urry (1990) that “photographic images organize our anticipation or daydreaming about the places we might gaze on” (p. 140). Visual images provided by destination marketing organizations (DMOs) not only play a crucial role in attracting potential visitors to visit the place, but they also act as signifiers to stimulate the imagination and to communicate with tourists in a personal way.

An individual tourist might have his/her own relation and interpretation with photographs of destinations as well as his/her own motivation to go and visit the place. This study, therefore, aims at understanding how image appeal is relevant to expectations of the tourism experience by deconstructing images of a destination and analyzing visitors' perceptions of the image appeal and their interpretation/imagination of tourism experiences at the destination. Aided by visual content analysis of images and theme analysis of textual data, this study uses Philadelphia as a research context, with 12 selected images representing different aspects of Philadelphia as stimuli for respondents to describe the images that inspire them to visit the city. This study found that respondents

Helen Ye is a PhD Student in the National Laboratory for Tourism & eCommerce of the School of Tourism & Hospitality Management at Temple University, 1810 North 13th Street, Suite 393, Philadelphia, PA 19122, USA (E-mail: yeyihelen@temple.edu).

Iis P. Tussyadiah is Assistant Professor in the National Laboratory for Tourism & eCommerce of the School of Tourism & Hospitality Management at Temple University, 1810 North 13th Street, Suite 305, Philadelphia, PA 19122, USA (E-mail: iist@temple.edu).

Address correspondence to: Helen Ye at above address.

with different expectations of experiences in Philadelphia tended to be inspired by different images and image contents. Further, linking their expectation of experiences with the descriptions of appealing image contents using the chi-Square test, it is suggested that potential visitors with different likings and expectations would respond differently to visual marketing communication. Thus, this study provides some implications for DMOs to direct their marketing communication based on specific experiential perceptions of potential visitors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism Product—Experience

Sternberg (1997) asserts that hotel rooms, meals, admission tickets, souvenirs, and tour-bus rides sold by tourism enterprises are the incidental purchases tourists make in search of something more important, which is the tourism experience. For tourists, the primary goals of a pleasant trip are likely to be experiential (Botterill & Crompton, 1996). Indeed, tourists today are seeking unique, innovative, and imaginative experiences (Azevedo, 2009). Consequently, tourism destinations have to appeal to tourists' fond desires and imaginative associations (Sternberg, 1997, p. 951). Pine and Gilmore (1999) and Gilmore and Pine (2002) suggest that selling experiences requires a unique marketing strategy that involves engaging customers in a personal, memorable way. They assert that providing an experience should involve a company using services as a stage and products as the props to engage consumers in a memorable way. In the tourism context, a destination can be considered a stage for the tourism experience.

The concept of experience-based management has been applied by North American outdoor recreation in the form of the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS), where managerial inputs are translated into outputs, which are subjectively experienced by participants (Manfredo, Driver, & Brown, 1983; Noe, 1987; Wyman, 1985). "The end product of recreation management is the experience people have"

(United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service, 1990, p. 2). Tourists are guided to the stage(s), the destinations, and actively take the roles of the "play" to gain tourism experience. The ideas for the staged experience are created to fit the needs and expectations of the tourists. Since the expectation versus the actual experience determines tourists' levels of satisfaction, the first step for DMOs to design tourism experiences is an understanding of the needs, expectations, and choice behaviors of potential tourists. Haahti and Komppula (2006) suggest that in the process of destination selection, first impressions of a destination often fully determine tourists' evaluations of the quality of the stage (i.e., the destination), the staging (i.e., the destination management), and the hosts' competence in staging. This requires DMOs to meet and keep their promises to the tourists. These promises evoke mental images conveying the ability to gain the very experiences and the values expected from the chosen trip. For a potential tourist, these promises are represented through communications and advertising vehicles.

Destination Image and Visitation Expectation

In the early conception of destination image, Crompton (1979) defines an image as an attitudinal concept consisting of the sum of beliefs, impressions, ideas, and expectations that a tourist has about a destination. In tourism research, the destination image has been defined as an individual's perception of the characteristics of destinations (Coshall, 2000, p. 85); the visual or mental impression of a place, a product, or an experience held by the general public (Millman & Pizam, 1995); and an overall perception of a destination formed from information and past experience (Assael, 1993). In his study on image formation, Gartner (1993) also draws on a definition from Boulding (1956), that images are the feelings we have of anything that is cognizant. Gunn (1988) and Fakeye and Crompton (1991) propose that destination images are formed at different stages: organic, induced, and experiential. The organic image is developed through an individual's everyday

assimilation of information, which includes a wide range of media, from school geography readings to mass media such as local news reports to actual visitation. The induced image, on the other hand, is formed through the influence of tourism promotions by DMOs such as destination brochures, advertising, and travel editorials. Finally, the experiential component is based on the personal experience of visiting the destination. It is argued that the induced image forms the expectation before a visitor experiences a destination (Santos, 1998).

In marketing and psychology literature, the definition of *consumer expectation* is somewhat diverse. From a realistic viewpoint, an expectation is defined as a belief about a product's attributes or performance at some time in the future (Spreng, MacKenzie, & Olshavsky, 1996). Another viewpoint suggests that consumers' expectations will be replaced with experience-based norms as the standard for the comparison of a brand's performance (Woodruff, Cadotte, & Jenkins, 1983). Some researchers view expectations as subjective beliefs (Olson & Dover, 1979), while others view expectations from a highest ideal, standard (Wilton, 1988), or desire (Swan & Trawick, 1980), to a minimum tolerable level (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1993). In this study, it is the subjective belief of expectation that is considered most appropriate. Olson and Dover (1979) consider expectations as pre-trial beliefs about a product. Expectations are subjective notions of things to come or a type of hypothesis formulated by the consumer.

Further, Santos (1998) argues that induced images and related expectations appear to have very few differences and they are easier to change by marketers than attitudes and the general and organic images. Since an image has a less direct linkage with experience, it can be defined as a general attitude toward a destination, while the expectation can be seen as a pre-consumption attitude before the visit. Expectation may, but not necessarily need to, involve experience. In situations where there is no experience involved before the service encounter, image determines expectations. Therefore, image is the antecedent of expectation, and expectation determines performance

perceptions of products and services as well as perceptions of potential experiences (Gnoth, 1999).

The Role of Visual Image in Destination Image and Visitation Expectation

The primacy of the visual representation of places in the construction of tourism destination images and visitation expectations has often been noted. Tourism is uniquely visual; pictures are regarded as vital to successfully creating and communicating an image of a destination (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997). In tourism research, results of pictorial advertising research indicate that visual stimuli are more readily recalled and affect attitudes toward products (Laskey, Seaton, & Nicholls, 1994). In addition, visual reinforcements of text are known to produce superior learning and to be more persuasive (Stewart, Hecker, & Graham, 1987). Research also suggests that visual information has shown an advantage over words in terms of memories and impressions (Anderson, 1995). One specific finding by Fiske and Taylor (1991) indicated that memory for the color in colored pictures is almost 20% higher than memory for the color in colored words. Pictures are considered to be the more effective tools for memory stimulation and personal association. Indeed, the fundamental motivation of tourists traveling to destinations is to visit the panoramas, landscapes, buildings, people, and sceneries of places they have been exposed to in tourism advertisements, brochures, travel magazines, and postcards (Garrod, 2009). Visual images are an established approach for inducing imagination. The use of images facilitates tourists' evaluations of a destination by reducing the set of attributes considered (MacInnis & Price, 1987). In other words, potential visitors might make travel decisions based on their imagination of what they see from the pictures of the destination. Therefore, it is crucial for DMOs to understand the visual images they promote, whether they are attractive and appealing to their target customers.

Trauer and Ryan (2005) recognize the importance of photos in the media to generate a familiarity of "sign" for potential tourists and to form

their visitation expectations. It is also posited by Lawton and Paige (1997) that destination imagery is an important determinant of visitor expectations. "Tourism is an industry based on imagery, its overriding concern is to construct . . . an imagery that entices the outsider to place himself or herself into that symbol defined space" (Buck, 1993, p. 112). Ryan (2005) also suggests that tourists are able to locate themselves within expectations as to places, activities, and experiences through visual images such as photos and TV programs. He sees tourists as "the actors about to fulfill a role seen many times previously on their TV sets" (p. 13). Tourism experiences are typically evaluated against images tourists derived from these media. An individual tourist might have his/her own relation and interpretation with photographs of destinations as well as his/her own motivation to visit the place. Hence, it is significant to understand how image appeal is relevant to tourists' anticipated experience at destinations.

Destination Visual Image Appeal and Tourists' Expectation of Experience

In consumer photography, image appeal is defined by the interest that a picture generates when viewed by third-party observers (Savakis, Stephen, & Loui, 2000). Visual image appeal in a tourism setting is defined by the interest that a picture generates when viewed by potential visitors and inspires them to visit the destination whether they are first-time visitors or repeat visitors. It is argued by researchers that visual content of advertisements affects the perception of travel experiences through the association of a certain type of picture, which is considered appealing, with a certain type of experience (Olson, McAlexander, & Roberts, 1986; Scarles, 2004). Tourists who have different expectations of experiences tend to view different types of images as appealing. In a study of the constituents of a destination image from a promotion segmentation perspective, Ahmed (1996) identified four components of destination image constituents. Potential visitors might respond to various constituents of a destination's image differently due to their personal expectations (Ahmed, 1996).

Destination visual image has the ability to stimulate consumers to create a mental imagery of experience in order to develop purchase intention and behavior. Researchers in psychology and advertising propose the term "mental simulation" (Escalas, 2004) and "consumption visions" (Phillips, Olson, & Baumgartner, 1995) in which consumers form self-constructed mental simulations of future consumption situations. It is further argued that the process of mental simulation typically involves the self; consumers will be able to relate to experiences of which the properties are relevant to them. In other words, an experience that is detailed and self-enacting is more imaginable for consumers. Therefore, it is important for destination marketers to learn how tourists perceive and define visitation expectations from their perspectives of self. It is also argued that the propensity to visit a destination depends on a match between the destination perception and the tourist's self-concept (Westwood, Morgan, Pritchard, & Ineson, 1999). Similarly, Sirgy and Su (2000) argue that a destination's brand image influences the kinds of visitors who typically visit the destination.

Researchers suggest that in promoting a destination DMOs must first construct the essential qualities of that place (be the qualities real or imagined) into imagery that will be attractive to tourists (Jenkins, 1999; Tasci, Gartner, & Tamer Cavusgil, 2007). Cornelissen (2005) emphasized the importance of DMOs as agents in the collation and presentation of the signifiers of place on which the tourist is directed by means of the imagery and particularly the photography it employs in its brochures and other marketing materials. To do so, it requires DMOs to provide photos which are attractive and stimulate tourists' imaginations in a personal way so that tourists' fond desires and imaginative associations will be linked.

Therefore, understanding tourists and matching destination visual image appeal with their experiential profiles are significant for DMOs' marketing strategy decisions. The goal of the study is to understand how visual image is relevant with tourists' expectations of experience. Specifically, the aims of this study are to: (a) identify potential tourists' perceptions and

anticipation of experiences associated with a destination; (b) identify potential tourists' perceptions of appealing images and image contents of the destination; and (c) match the appealing image contents with the perception and expectation of experiences, thus providing implications for DMOs to generate attractive visual promotional materials for different experiential target markets. Philadelphia was selected as a context because the city is rich in history yet it is modern and hip, making it open to a wide experiential interpretation for potential tourists.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Data Gathering Method

In order to gather images that are regarded as the best representatives of the city, a preliminary focus group organized by the Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation (GPTMC) was held with 20 invited participants. GPTMC is a private, non-profit organization founded (and funded) in 1996 by the City of Philadelphia, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the Pew Charitable Trusts, with the mission to make Philadelphia and The Countryside™ a premier destination through marketing and image building that increases business and promotes the region's vitality. The participants of this focus group were selected from GPTMC's contacts consisting of tourists, residents, and businesses. Each participant was required to rate 50 pictures from GPTMC's pressroom based on four criteria identified as important elements for their marketing campaign: "excitement," "fun," "my place," and "negative." Four different colored round stickers were distributed to each participant, which they could use to put next to the pictures. Red represented exciting, blue meant fun, green represented my place, and yellow meant they have a negative feeling toward the picture. Each participant had up to five stickers in every color they could use to rate 50 pictures. Later, the top 12 positive photos (see the Appendix) were identified for further discussion and categorized into three types based on the typology

developed by Olson et al. (1986): natural landscapes and scenery, people involved in recreational activities, and manmade landmarks and buildings.

Morley (1992) advocates unstructured and open-ended discussions as appropriate approaches to capture the sense people make of the visual images. The discussions offer access to linguistic terms and categories through which respondents construct their words and their own understandings of their visual meanings. Therefore, for convenience and for a wide reach, an online survey was administered to gather tourists' interpretation of the images for this study. Respondents were asked to select up to three pictures that inspired them the most to visit Philadelphia and then write down their explanations of why these pictures inspired them. Before selecting the pictures, respondents were also asked to describe their perception and expectation of the tourism experience in Philadelphia in an open-ended question format.

The survey was conducted in collaboration with the GPTMC right after the focus group. Using convenience sampling method, potential visitors to Philadelphia who visited their website (<http://www.gophila.com>) were invited to participate in the survey. This approach indicates that participants in the survey had already shown interest in Philadelphia so that they would have at least some level of expectation or imagination of Philadelphia. For an incentive, participants in this survey had the opportunity to be in a drawing to win one of five different gift certificates from American Express. From an estimation of 2,000 web browsers per day (based on GPTMC's historic records of their website), the survey appeared as a pop-up invitation to every 10 visitors in order to reduce antipathy for repeat browsers. The pop-up survey was posted on the website for a 3-month period, from February to April of 2009. That is to say, the pop-up survey appeared about 200 times per day, 6,000 times per month and 18,000 times during this 3-month period. The data gathered 508 responses, which is equivalent to a response rate of 2.8%. There are two reasons for the low response rate. First, the same respondents could browse the website more than once within the survey period, but would only respond to the survey once. Second,

website browsers could view pop-ups as distractions and simply ignore them. However, this sample size is acceptable due to the explorative nature of this study. In order to derive meaningful text analyses, 303 completed data sets were used in this study.

Data Analysis

First, image content analysis proposed by Rose (2001) was used to analyze the nature of the images. This study follows the procedure of image content analysis in a previous study by Tussyadiah (2010), whereby images were analyzed by looking at the settings, objects, positions, and notions. The top selected images were ranked and respondents' explanations about these images were analyzed.

Second, theme analysis was conducted using the descriptions of tourists' travel perceptions and anticipation in Philadelphia in order to identify different types of experience expectations. The data management was conducted with the assistance of text analysis software (ATLAS.ti, Berlin, Germany) with the following procedure: (a) the textual data from respondents' descriptions were carefully read to derive a preliminary understanding toward the text; (b) from each individual textual data, significant statements, sentences, or quotes were highlighted; overlapping, repetitive, and vague expressions were eliminated or presented in more exact descriptive terms; the horizons that remained were the invariant constituents of the experience; (c) from the horizontalized statements, the meaning or meaning units were formulated and listed; the formulated meanings were clustered into common categories and labeled as themes; the clustered and labeled constituents were the core themes of the tourist experience expectations; (d) the clustered themes and meanings were used to develop individual textural descriptions of experiences, and further, a composite structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience; (e) a synthesis of the essences of the experience expectations was provided, which involved tying together and integrating the list of transformed meaning units into a consistent and systematic general description of the experience

expectations. To reduce the subjectivity of analysis, the process of theme analysis was performed separately by two researchers on the same data. The researchers then compared the two codebooks to find the commonalities from the results and make some necessary adjustments (i.e., deleting, restructuring, rewording, etc.). Based on these results, seven experiential expectation types were identified. They are touring experience, historic experience, unique dining experience, city experience, diverse culture and arts experience, relaxing experience and sport experience.

Finally, researchers tried to find out whether a certain type of photos and photo contents were considered more attractive by a certain type of tourists with a different expectation of experiences using the chi-square test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the number of selections, the top five images perceived as inspiring to visit Philadelphia were image E (portraying people walking outdoor near historic shops, 161 votes), image I (portraying fireworks on the parkway on top of the Art Museum, 112 votes), image C (portraying an outdoor scene of a gallery, 92 votes), image D (portraying a night street view of South Broad Street, 89 votes), and image G (portraying a dining scene in a restaurant, 82 votes). These top five selected images (i.e., E, I, C, D, and G) were described as representing these elements of the city: historic and cultural aspects of the city, shopping, bold and patriotic, symbol of freedom for the fireworks on July 4th, fine art galleries, nightlife in the energetic city, friendly community, and diverse dining environment. Specifically, images E and C were associated with peace and tranquility, and quaint and artistic settings. Images I, D, and G were interpreted as fun, exciting, energetic, and vibrant.

The image content analysis identified a list of low-level elements/objects (i.e., local concepts) in each image based on their appearance in the pictures. Based on the element arrangement, some low-level elements often appearing together were merged to generate a higher-level semantic (i.e., global concept). For example,

“water,” “marine animal,” and “glass” often appeared together. Hence, it can be concluded that these low-level elements can be merged into a higher level semantic, which is “aquarium.” The arrangement of high-level semantics in a picture is then used to extract a global concept such as “tourist attraction.” The perceived appealing elements of each image were identified from respondents’ explanations. Respondents articulated not only the low-level and high-level elements, but also the notions associated with the pictures. Using the previous example, respondents who selected image A not only identified “blue water,” “animal,” and “aquarium,” but also the notion of “excitement” and “fun.” Table 1 showed the list of local and global concepts and the perceived appealing elements of the pictures.

As presented in Table 1, respondents tended to express the image appeal with a global concept or a notion and association. In addition, even though some of the global concepts were not explicitly shown in the image, respondents tended to look at it as it was the element that attracts them.

Based on respondents’ description of anticipation and expectations of Philadelphia experiences, seven experiential profiles were identified. They are touring experience, historic experience, unique dining experience, city experience, diverse culture and arts experience, relaxing experience and sport experience. Different perceptions and imaginations of the tourism experience are associated with their perceptions of image appeal based on image selected frequencies (See Table 2).

Based on the analysis, Image E was perceived as appealing by all of the different experiential profiles except for sports experience. However, respondents suggesting different experiences gave different interpretations for it. Respondents in the touring experience profile regarded it as a point of interest to visit; historic respondents focused on the historic style of the buildings and the idea of preserving them well; respondents in the unique dining and city experience considered it as another aspect of demonstrating a city scene besides tall buildings; the diverse culture and arts respondents appreciated the artistic and tranquil elements in the image while respondents in the relaxing

experiential profile emphasized the comfortable and relaxing atmosphere the image suggested.

This study further identified the significant image elements in the global concept for each experiential perception using a chi-square test. First, seven image content categorizations of global concepts emerged across the 12 pictures. They are natural landscapes and scenery, people involved in recreational activities, manmade landmarks and buildings, museum and art galleries, food and restaurant, peaceful and relaxing feeling, and excitement and fun. The first three categories are in accordance with Olson, McAlexander, and Roberts’ (1986) vacation image advertisement study. The last two categorizations are similar to the concept of arousal as emotional experiences associated with the images. Arousal refers to the degree to which the person feels stimulated or active (Bitner, 1992). High arousal means exciting, highly active, and stimulated while low arousal means relaxing and peaceful. The other two categorizations emerged from the destination specific attributes and visual images, attractions such as museums and art galleries, and the restaurant scene. Examples of image contents in each categorization are provided in Table 3.

Based on these seven image content categorizations and seven tourist experiential profiles, forty-nine 2×2 chi-square tests were conducted to find out the significance between image content and experiential profiles. One tourist might have multiple expectations of experience based on their descriptions of anticipation and expectations of Philadelphia experiences. The result is illustrated in Table 4. Forty-nine individual chi-square tests with a significance level of .002 came up with an overall chi-square significance level of .1. Table 4 also includes significant image content categorizations in .05.

It is interesting to find that visitors in touring experience not only enjoy various activities and have a feel of local tasting and cultural activities, but they also seek for a community feel and social interaction. Their perception of appealing visual cues ranges from sightseeing (e.g., historic architecture, heritage sites, galleries, and parks) to other social activities (e.g., boating, listening to jazz bands, and going to theaters). In addition, they do not want to miss the dining experience in the city. A scenario

TABLE 1. Objective and Perceived Local/Global Contents of Images
















Image frequency (N = 303)	Local concept		Global concept/Notion	
	Contents	Perceived appealing elements	Contents	Perceived appealing elements
A (78, 25.7%)	Blue water, stone, people, children, adult, shark, glass can	Blue water (2.6%), children (2.6%), animal (7.7%)	Aquarium, family	Aquarium (34.6%), museum (6.4%), family activity (20.5%), educational (6.4%), exciting (2.6%), fun (6.4%)
B (66, 21.8%)	Waitress, food, tables and chairs, building, people, smiling face, lights	Food (54.5%), waitress (13.6%), smiling face (4.5%)	Restaurant, dish, People talking and socializing, indoor dining, outdoor dining	Restaurant/café (15.2%), variety of food/lots of choice (21.2%), local specialty (6.1%), friendly service (18.2%), outdoor dining (4.5%), with friends/social (4.5%)
C (92, 30.4%)	Trees, people, house, oil painting display, stone street, advertising plate	Street/stone front (3.3%), trees/green (5.4%)	Art gallery, people relaxing, small town	Outdoor scene (2.2%), summer (2.2%), park (3.3%), escape (1.1%), gallery/art show/sidewalk event (8.7%), artsy atmosphere (16.3%), shopping (13%), quaint (13%), café (1.1%), historic architecture (13%), heritage site (2.2%), small town (7.6%), community feel/family (5.4%), peaceful (7.6%)
D (89, 29.4%)	Cars, street, street lights, buildings, shops, theaters, cars moving	Cars (5.6%), old buildings (10.1%), lights (4.5%), movement/action (3.4%), theaters (1.1%)	Nighttime, street scene	Activities (3.4%), vitality (4.5%), nightlife (19.1%), city life (24.7%), busy/hustle bustle (10.1%), energetic (4.5%), Exciting (6.7%), fun (3.4%)
E (161, 53.1%)	Buildings, people, flower, trees, windows	Buildings (12.4%), quaint shops (26.7%), café (1.2%), flower (3.1%), trees (1.2%), street (8.7%), people (13.7%), walking (23.6%)	Outdoor scene, historic shopping area, crowd of people	Outdoor scene (1.9%), Old Town (8.7%), history (18.6%), cultural (2.5%), town style (2.5%), weather (6.8%), preservation (1.2%), good old times (1.2%), relaxing (3.1%) friendly (2.5%), escape (1.2%)
F (68, 22.4%)	Boating, water, river, trees, houses, sky, clouds	Boating (17.6%), water (11.8%), river (10.3%)	Natural outdoor scene	Park (4.4%), outdoor activity (10.3%), natural scene (16.2%), beautiful (14.7%), relaxing (11.8%)

(Continued)

TABLE 1. (Continued)

G (82, 27.1%)	Food, drinks, people, tables and chairs, cabinets	Good food (6.1%), Couples (2.4%)	Restaurant, outdoor dining	Restaurant (20.7%), bars (4.9%), fine/local dining (13.4%), outdoor dining (20.7%), social/friends (12.2%), friendly (3.7%), cozy (15.9%), relax (6.1%), fun (4.9%)
H (44, 14.5%)	Waterfalls, boy, trees, stone	Waterfalls (9.1%)	Natural scene, kid playing	Natural scene (22.7%), getaway (13.6%), tranquility (22.7%), fun (6.8%), relaxing (6.8%), family activity (6.8%)
I (112, 37.0%)	Fireworks, building, crowd, lights	Fireworks (3.6%), center piece building/art museum (17%)	Celebration, special event	Special event (1.8%), birth of America/July 4th (8.9%), celebration (19.6%), nation pride (8.9%), bright (6.3%), Philadelphia (8.9%), exciting (6.3%), magic (8%), fun/interesting (3.6%), beautiful (1.8%), summer (3.6%)
J (36, 11.9%)	People, musical instruments, stage, microphone, table, food and drinks	Vibrant sounds (27.8%), live music (50%)	Band, live music venue, bar/restaurant	Jazz band (5.6%), music venue (16.7%), nightlife/club (11.1%), intimate (2.8%), different/interesting (5.6%)
K (35, 11.6%)	Building and stairs, tall trees, lights, tables and chairs, people, food	Great food (5.7%)	Restaurant/bar	Color/lighting (14.3%), intimate (11.4%), nice dining (8.6%), pretty décor/tropical (11.4%), nightlife (14.3%), fun/interesting (8.6%), relaxing/safe (5.7%)
L (43, 14.2%)	Food and drinks, curtain, people, window, sky, building, tablecloths, a couple	Significant other (4.7%), delicious food (7%)	Fine restaurant	Fine dining (11.6%), great view (14%), romantic/intimate (9.3%), great restaurant (14%), nightlife (2.3%), authenticity (4.7%), relaxing (7%)

TABLE 2. Image Appeal Associated with Experiences

Experiential profiles	Inspiring images (based on frequency)		
Touring experience			
Historic experience			
Unique dining experience			
City experience			
Diverse culture and arts experience			

(Continued)

TABLE 2. (Continued)

Experiential profiles	Inspiring images (based on frequency)		
Relaxing experience			
Sports experience			

TABLE 3. Image Content Categorization Examples

Content categorizations	Image contents
Natural landscapes and scenery	Water, tree, flower, river, natural scene, outdoor scene, summer, weather, park, waterfall
People in recreational activities	Family activity, children, friends, social, boating, shopping, city life, nightlife, walking, people, special event, couples, celebration
Manmade landmarks and buildings	Street, stone front, quaint shops, historic building, heritage site, small town, old building, preservation
Museum and art galleries	Museum, gallery, art show, artsy atmosphere, theater, jazz band, music venue, live music
Food and restaurants scene	Food, waitress, variety, local specialty, outdoor dining, fine dining, restaurant, café, bar
Exciting and fun	Exciting, fun, interesting, energetic, busy, hustle bustle, vitality, movement, action
Relaxing and peaceful	Relaxing, peaceful, escape, friendly, beautiful, cozy, community feel, safe, getaway, tranquility, romantic/intimate, authenticity

for visitors in touring experience could be illustrated by an example respondent named Mary. Mary just arrived in the city; she begins to seek the city’s landmark buildings, walks around and tries to see something new and probably meets with friendly local people and enjoys good local cuisine. As she feels a little tired, she goes into a café. While feeling exciting about the pretty décor in it, she begins watching others. She needs to feel safe and intimate as she is touring a new city.

History and culture are important elements for tourists in historic experience. For them, historic architecture and heritage sites are more than merely places of interest. They are living elements that could give them a sense of pride. Historic tourists enjoy the artsy atmosphere of a small town and listen to the preserved local music. They also enjoy the tranquility and peace the destination offers. However, it is also interesting to find that the history buff in this study has their other side in terms of travel

TABLE 4. Tourism Experiences and Significant Image Content Categorizations

	Touring experience	Historic experience	Unique dining experience	City experience	Diverse culture and art experience	Relaxing experience	Sports experience
Natural landscape				.031		.039	
Social activity	$\chi^2 = .000^*$.006	.000*		.003	.000*
Manmade buildings		.039			.000*		
Museum and art galleries	.000*				.001*		
Food and restaurant	.022		.000*			.035	
Exciting and fun						.033	.000*
Relaxing and peaceful		.003				.037	

Note. * χ^2 significant level below .002.

experience; they are also romantic. They see images of couples in romantic/intimate moments as appealing. Authenticity is also an important element for them.

Unique dining experiential visitors are attracted to restaurant scenes; they would like to see a variety of food choices and different dining environments such as local dining, fine dining, and outdoor dining. However, it is unexpected that other activities besides food and dining are also significantly appealing to them. For example, they also enjoy visiting a museum or going to a special event, or the nightlife of a city. Another important element for them is the social interaction with friends or other diverse local people, which offer them the feeling of being in the community while enjoying its local cuisine.

Nightlife and fun, exciting, and energetic feelings are associated with visitors in the city experience. They enjoy nightlife and music as an inseparable part of their tourism experience. They enjoy being in the city and discovering every aspect of a city, from the exciting special events and vibrant sounds, to its historic old buildings. The romantic side of being in the city is also an important visual cue for them; the color and lighting of a photo which creates the intimate feeling is a magic fit. However, the city indulgents have their quiet and peaceful inner side too. They also enjoy the tranquility of the city, from the quiet early morning to the natural scene of waterfalls and rivers.

Tourists in diverse cultural and arts experience like to explore the local culture of a destination. They love to shop in the quaint

shops of small towns and to walk on stone streets, which remind them of the good old times. They enjoy local music venues, galleries, and special restaurants. Summer might be a good season for them to stroll around the preserved heritage sites and attend some cultural special events. However, it is also interesting to see that cultural folks also enjoy natural scenes and the environment. They love greenery, trees, and flowers, which give them the feeling of escape. Additionally, they enjoy the local cuisine a destination has to offer. However, they emphasize the special and unique aspect of it. They want to find something different which caters to their perceived personal taste of culture and arts. This reflects Richards and Wilson's (2006) view of creative tourism as an alternative to conventional cultural tourism. Many consumers, tired of encountering the serial reproduction of culture in different destinations, are searching for alternatives. The visual image cues of uniqueness and localized attractions and products are significant.

Smiling faces and friendly services, which indicate the cozy atmosphere, and blue water, boating, flowers, trees, and parks, which indicate the outdoor setting and the feeling of escape, are all vital for tourists expecting a relaxing experience. They also enjoy family activities and good food and restaurants with a casual and intimate feeling. Walking around an old town on a Sunday afternoon with nice weather is perceived as a pleasant tourism experience for them. Tourists in sport experience are active and loyal. They love anything active such as the aquarium, nightlife, bars, cars,

boating, etc. In addition, they would like to have the feeling of belonging, whether to a sports team or a community. They would like to interact with other people and search for the pride of being a part of a community. Summer is also a good visual cue for them since they might go out to enjoy the sports and celebrate the victory of their favorite sports team. It is also interesting to note that sport tourists are also attracted to music venues and the interior décor of a place.

Even though tourists have a stronger tendency toward a specific element of experience, they show plurality in their imagination and expectation. Hence, it is argued that destinations should not homogenize their market when deciding on marketing strategies.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The results confirm that destination visual images convey different meanings for tourists with different experience expectations. Therefore, in order to stimulate visitors' imagination and motivation, it is suggested that DMOs apply custom marketing strategies for different target markets. It is understood from the analysis that visitors who are more inclined to touring tend to be inspired by images portraying a combination of different aspects of the destination, from natural scenery to landmark buildings to people in recreational activities. Historic visitors are more inclined toward natural scenery and landmark buildings as icons with an emphasis on their historic meanings. Tourists in relaxing experience are likely to be attracted by natural scenery that creates a comfortable and relaxing atmosphere. Tourists with a unique dining experience tend to seek more dining scenes portraying people interacting with each other. Visitors in city and sports experience are seeking fun and excitement. They are more likely to be attracted by photos that arouse exciting feelings, fireworks, nighttime shots on the street, or people having fun. Different from historic tourists, who prefer nature, landmark buildings, diverse culture and arts visitors prefer images that stimulate their curiosity to explore the city's art scenes and different culture.

Further, the results also suggest the necessary shifts in a destination's focus on the tourist experience. Akin to the developments in the tourism experience argued by Uriely (2005), this study shows the shift from "the homogenizing portrayals of the tourist as a general type to pluralizing depictions of tourists that capture the multiplicity of the experiences" (p. 200). Recent research by Park, Tussyadiah, and Fesenmaier (in press) points out that the traditional way to segment travelers is out of date. Therefore, it is significant for destinations to convey an effective personal visual message by understanding the pluralizing aspects of the tourist experience of the target visitors. This study identifies different expectations of experience from potential visitors, in that one tourist might have expected to gain multiple types of experiences in one destination. Likewise, the images and image contents are also perceived to be appealing to different experiential profiles. Therefore, it is important for DMOs to keep in mind that tourists' needs are indeed pluralized when designing visual communication cues.

In addition, the study also supports the shifted focus in the tourism experience from the displayed objects provided by destinations to the subjective negotiation of meanings as a determinant of the experience (Uriely, 2005, p. 200). No one picture is interpreted the same in this study. Even though respondents perceive the top five images as inspiring, the aspects of these images that inspire them are interpreted differently. For example, some respondents regarded image E as inspiring because of the historic buildings; others perceived the people portrayed in the image to look nice and friendly, while others thought that the image portrayed the city as relaxing and walkable. It is also interesting to see the results of image C; even though there is a sign that says "New Hope," indicating the location of the galleries outside of the City of Philadelphia, respondents associated the image with their memory and imagination of the Rittenhouse Square Art Show and other parks in Philadelphia. Furthermore, the appealing elements of different pictures are bound to subjective interpretation of different tourists. For instance, even though some of the global concepts are not explicitly shown in the image,

respondents tended to look at it as if it was the element that attracted them. This indicates that there was a subjective meaning negotiation of the purely displayed objects to tourists' own narrative. Future research in understanding tourists' own narrative as they construct a meaningful tourism experience will be useful.

The potential subjectivity of the analysis and the nature of the case might limit the generalizability of this study. However, it empirically confirms the concept linking the images of destination and people's imagination of the tourism experience. It also raises several implications for destination marketing practices. As an example, the DMOs that would brand its destination as a place offering touring experiences should use visual tools to communicate a combination of different aspects of the place. In summary, as visual communication tools carry objects and notions that can stimulate people's imagination and perception about the tourism experience, the visual tools should be designed as personal experiential suggestions, which should be relevant with the destination branding. In addition, as a practical tool for DMOs' marketing communication, it is suggested that marketing research should first identify the experiential perceptions of their target market group. Then, they will be able to identify significant visual elements for each experiential group, thus generating effective visual communication.

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APPENDIX

Stimuli of the Study



A



B



C



D



E



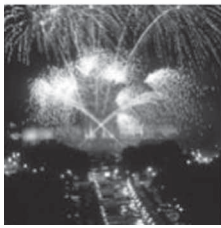
F



G



H



I



J



K



L