

HOW TO FRAME THE HUMAN PORTRAIT OF A TOURISTIC CITY?

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Abstract

The destination image of a city should be an important aspect to be approached by local administrators. Concepts related to the destination image applied to cities might be indicators for the local tourism strategies. The aim of this paper is to frame the portrait of the city of Iasi from Romania, as it is perceived by students living in Iasi. The research method was the quantitative survey on a sample of 190 university students. The city of Iasi was evaluated through traits of a human portrait. If the portrait of the city would be framed using dimensions, these dimensions are: features generated by work, physical features, artistic features and financial features.

Key words: *city portrait, destination image, factor analysis, human features, touristic city.*

JEL Classification: *M39*

I. INTRODUCTION

The destination image only recently became the focus of researchers in the tourism field (Pike, 2002). The topic became very popular after 1970 (Pike, 2002). The image of a destination involves various concepts that might be different when investigating different types of segments (Correia et al, 2009).

In Pike (2002) review of 142 papers on destination image published between 1973 and 2000 we find some interesting results: (1) only 23 papers measured the destination image; (2) the hierarchy of popular types of destination analyzed in the 142 papers is: countries, States, cities (26 papers), resort areas and provinces; (3) from the research methodology point of view, the qualitative research is presented in less than half of the papers; factor analysis is most frequently used by researchers.

Hosany, Ekinci and Uysal' study (2007) conclude that the image of a destination is related to the personality of a destination. The research findings pointed among other aspects that when positioning a destination, promotions can rely on rational and emotional benefits.

The concepts of motivation, expectation and perception are multidimensional measures of the perceived destination image; the construct of motivation consists of three factors while the constructs of expectation and perception consist of four factors (Correia et al, 2009).

Most of the research is focused on destination image and city brand personality. Starting from this

conclusion, our idea is to investigate the perceived human features of a touristic city, framing its portrait.

II. PERCEIVED DESTINATION IMAGE

The destination image is often analyzed using the concept of brand personality. Aaker (1997) first developed the brand personality construct that has been used by most of the studies for brands of conventional products (Kaplan et al, 2010). The brand personality measure has also received some critics. In response to these critics, Geuens, Weijters and De Wulf (2009) supply a new measure that only include personality items. In recent studies thought, the concept of brand personality is approached for touristic destinations as well.

San Martín and Rodríguez del Bosque (2008) study the connection between the psychological factors and the perceived image for a destination in tourism. Researchers indicate that the image is a multidimensional construct of cognitive and affective dimensions and that the perception of a destination depends significantly on psychological factors.

There is a connection between satisfaction of tourists with a certain destination and the perception of that destination. Quintal and Polczynski (2010) research focused on composing a model that included satisfaction with attractiveness, value and quality of the destination on one side and revisit intentions of the destination on the other side. According to their study, satisfaction positively influences the revisit intentions. Researchers suggest that perceptions of the destination are extremely important when it comes to achieve customers' satisfaction and loyalty.

The symbolic aspects of the destination brand and the brand loyalty are correlated. In Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk and Preciado (2013) study, the research reveals that tourists' loyalty for a specific destination is based not only on functional attributes, such as quality of service, but also on symbolic attributes (such as enhancement of lifestyles).

According to Nicoletta and Servidio (2012), the image of a destination influences the tourists' behaviour. Considering previous studies, stating that the formation of an image of a destination influences travellers' manner of feeling and thinking, they explored the opinion of tourists when selecting touristic images. This matter is important for promotional objectives.

III. STUDENTS – A SPECIFIC CATEGORY OF TOURISTS

Students can be considered a specific market segment for various reasons. Although the crises reduced the total number of students, they still represent an import segment for the tourism industry. As the crises effects started to disappear, the number of students tended to slightly increase. In Quintal and Polczynski (2010) literature review, there are mentioned some reasons for which university students represent an important target: (1) students usually don't have many personal commitments; (2) students have more than 20 weeks of spare time that do not include university semester duties; (3) universities directly or indirectly encourage travelling for educational benefits; (4) a significant percent of the total international travellers are students.

There are regional studies on students as a particular category of tourist. In Carr (2005) research, university students from UK were investigated from the tourism activity point of view. Despite the official states from media and student unions that declare financial difficulties for this category of tourists, students are very active in this sector, with over 16 days vacations period during one year, spending an important amount of the personal budget to support the travelling activities.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of our research is to frame the portrait of the city of Iasi – Romania, as it is perceived by students living in Iasi. From this perspective, Iasi was evaluated through traits of a human portrait.

The objectives of this study are:

(1) to identify the average age of the city of Iasi as it is perceived to have by the students living in Iasi;

(2) to identify the sex of the city, as it is perceived by the students living in Iasi;

(3) to identify the occupation of the city, as it is perceived to have by the students living in Iasi;

(4) to identify the important determinants that frame the portrait of the city of Iasi.

Research methods

This quantitative research was preceded by a qualitative step. We conducted four focus groups with the purpose to understand young tourists' perception and to create a questionnaire for the quantitative part of the research. The qualitative research generated the items for the occupation and the human portrait traits in the questionnaire, as presented in the Appendix A. The portrait items were evaluated on a seven point scale.

The sample

The questionnaire was tested using a sample of 20 students that were not included in the analysis.

The final sample consists of 190 university students randomly selected from the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, University "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" of Iasi. This sample was selected as it was a convenience sample and also because students represent an important part of the population of Iasi, with a distinct perception of the city comparing to other categories of inhabitants of this city. Data was collected in the Faculty's seminar rooms. Only 181 questionnaires were valid. Content validity and construct validity were verified using the opinion of five university teachers and the factor analysis that groups items into factors In Table 1 we present the sample structure.

Table 1. Research sample

		Student		Total
		Bachelors' degree	Masters' degree	
monthly income	< 850	25	72	97
	851-1500	5	53	58
	1501-2000	2	17	19
	2001-2500	0	3	3
	>4000	3	1	4
Total		35	146	181

V. RESEARCH RESULTS

Objective 1 - identify the average age of the city of Iasi as it is perceived to be by the students living in Iasi.

In order to assess the perceived age of the city of Iasi, we created an item derived from the focus groups. If Iasi was a person, this person had the age corresponding the interval:

- (1) < 20 years
- (2) 20 – 25 years
- (3) 26 – 30 years
- (4) 31 – 35 years
- (5) 36 – 40 years
- (6) 41 – 45 years
- (7) 46 – 50 years
- (8) 51 – 60 years
- (9) 61 – 70 years
- (10) 71 – 80 years
- (11) > 80 years

As a result, the average age of the city as it is perceived by the students living in Iasi is between 38 and 43.

The distribution of the answers varies greatly among the results, as we can see from the Fig 1 from the Appendix B. There is not a majority of students that “agree” upon the age of the city, as some consider it to be young, some perceive it to be a mature person while some consider it to be an old person. Over 20 percent of the respondents consider the city to be quite young (between 20 – 25 years old).

Objective 2 - identify the sex of the city, as it is perceived by the students living in Iasi

As in the case of the first objective, there is no majority considering the perceived sex of the city. Half of the students perceive it as a woman, while half perceive it to be a man, as we can see in Table 2.

Table 2. Perceived sex of the city of Iasi

		Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	woman	50,0	50,8
	man	48,4	49,2
	Total	98,4	100,0
Missing	88	,5	
	99	1,1	
	Total	1,6	
Total		100,0	

Objective 3 - identify the occupation of the city, as it is perceived to have by the students living in Iasi

The situation of the third objective is similar to that of the first and second objective. The answers are distributed among all the answer variants.

We can notice though that most respondents associate the city with a university student (15.8%) and a professor (13.2%). These results conclude that the city is perceived as a University City center, especially when it is evaluated by its’ customers – the students (see Table 3 from the Appendix B).

Objective 4 - identify the important determinants that frame the portrait of the city of Iași

We performed factor analysis in order to identify the determinants that frame the portrait of the city of Iași. The analysis was applied on the trait items generated from the qualitative research, based on focus groups.

The proper size of the sample is very important when a factor analysis is conducted. There are various rules, among which we mention:

- *Rule 100* - the number of the respondents must be five times bigger than the number of variables included in the factor analysis (Hatcher, 1994); the 16 items need at least 80 respondents in order to have a proper sample size;
- *Rule 150* - the size sample is between 150 and 300 respondents (Hutcheson and Sofroniou, 1999); our sample size consists of 190 respondents.

The factor analysis was conducted in SPSS, using the Principal Components Extraction Method. Initially we included the 16 items in the analysis. The KMO test value was 0.856, confirming that the factor analysis is appropriate according to the matrix correlation. The first run of the analysis produced four factors with Eigenvalue greater than one that explain 60% of the total variance. After investigating the Component Matrix and the Rotated Component Matrix, we decided to eliminate the items *wise*, *elegant*, *modern*, *involved* because they load similar on more than one factor in the Rotated Component Matrix.

In the second run of the analysis, the KMO test value was 0.796, indicating the factor analysis is appropriate. The analysis generated four factors with Eigenvalue greater than one that explain 64.45% of the total variance. According to Malhotra (1998), the recommended level for the explained variance is greater than 60%.

The internal consistency of the entire scale measured with Cronbach-alpha coefficient is 0.779, indicating an acceptable reliability. Researchers’ opinions vary upon the acceptable cut-off point for an acceptable scale from the reliability point of view.

While most researchers consider the minimum value of this coefficient to be 0.7, others consider that a value above 0.5 is also acceptable (Fogg. et. al, 2001). A Cronbach-alpha coefficient value over 0.9 indicates an excellent reliability (George and Mallery, 2003).

The identified dimensions are: *features generated by work, physical features, artistic features, financial features.*

The initial scale *features generated by work* consisted of four items (*realized, tall, literate, smart*) but we decided to remove the item *tall* as it has no logical connection to the rest of the items.

The Cronbach-alpha coefficient value of the new dimension features generated by work is 0.675, indicating an acceptable reliability.

The initial scale physical features consisted of three items (*young, svelte, realized*). As the item *realized* has similar loadings upon two factors and also has no logical connection to the other two items, we decided to remove it from the scale. The Cronbach-alpha coefficient value of the new dimension physical features is 0.822, indicating a good reliability.

The scale of artistic features consists of three items (*artistic, ascending, handsome/beautiful*) has a Cronbach-alpha coefficient value of 0.601, indicating a scale of a doubtful reliability. The low value of the coefficients may be due to the reduced number of items within the scale. This aspect suggests there should be conducted a qualitative research in order to improve the scale with new items and validate it.

The initial dimension financial features consist of two items (*poor, tidy*). As the items are not logically connected, we decided to eliminate the item *tidy* and generate a dimension named financial features. This dimension also needs special attention within a qualitative research in order to create and

validate a scale with items to define it more properly.

VI. CONCLUSION

This analysis of the portrait of the city of Iași generates the conclusion that the perception of this portrait depends on the category of inhabitants that assess the city. This study underlines the fact that students tend to evaluate the city through their own situation and personality.

Another conclusion is that the city of Iași has not certain promoted features; the diversity of the city (desirable features combined with undesirable features) brings out various answers that cannot conclude to certain aspects when it comes to perception of age, sex and occupation of the city, if that would be considered to be a person.

In this study, the city is perceived as a University City center when being evaluated by students. This leads to a hypothesis for a new study that the perception of the city features largely depends on the category of inhabitants making the evaluation.

If the portrait of the city would be framed using dimensions, these are: features generated by work, physical features, artistic features, financial features.

The convenience sampling method generated various research limits. In our research, this method generated scales with items not logically connected and a scale with a small Cronbach-alpha coefficient. A qualitative research is mandatory in order to improve the scales with issues in this study.

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APPENDIX A – Questionnaire questions

If Iași was a person, this person’s job would be:

- actor
- antiquarian
- professor
- receptionist
- pianist
- singer
- cafe patron
- specialist doctor
- spiritual doctor
- events’ organiser
- housewife
- touristic guide
- housekeeper
- writer
- sports instructor
- director
- student
- alpinist
- entrepreneur
- D.J.
- fashion creator
- painter
- sales agent
- retired
- mountain saver
- waiter
- cooker
- publicity agent
- important person in government
- other job
(mention which)

If I had to create a portrait for the city of Iași seen as a person, I would say this person is:

1 – the characteristic is not matching at all 7 – the characteristic is a very good match

Trait	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
artistic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
modern	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
elegant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
tidy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
handsome/beautiful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
involved	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
smart	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
wise	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
ascending	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
tall	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
literate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
realised	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
relaxed (no worries)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
poor (no money)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
young	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
svelte	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

APPENDIX B

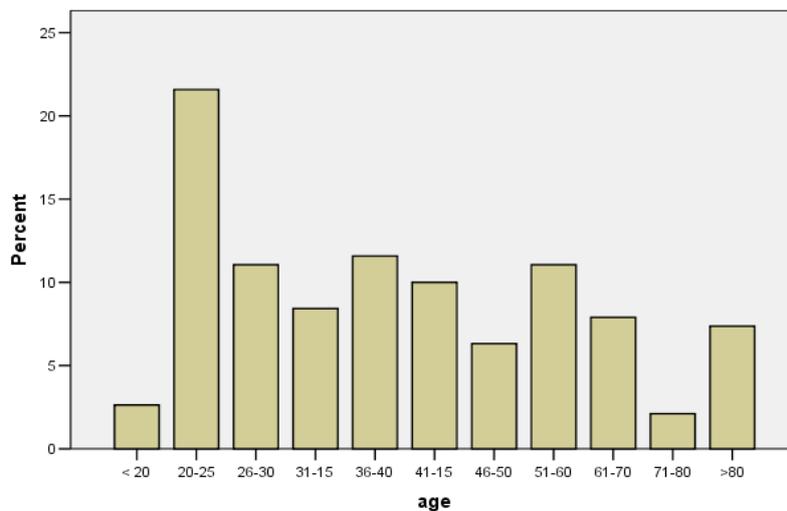


Figure 1 – Answers frequencies on the “age” item

Table 3. Perceived occupation of the city of Iasi

		Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	actor	5,8	5,9	5,9
	antiquarian	5,8	5,9	11,9
	professor	13,2	13,5	25,4
	receptionist	,5	,5	25,9
	pianist	3,2	3,2	29,2
	singer	1,1	1,1	30,3
	cafe patron	2,6	2,7	33,0
	specialist doctor	1,1	1,1	34,1
	spiritual doctor	,5	,5	34,6
	events' organiser	4,2	4,3	38,9
	retired	4,7	4,9	43,8
	touristic guide	9,5	9,7	53,5
	writer	6,8	7,0	60,5
	university student	15,8	16,2	76,8
	alpinist	,5	,5	77,3
	entrepreneur	2,6	2,7	80,0
	DJ	1,6	1,6	81,6
	fashion creator	,5	,5	82,2
	painter	2,6	2,7	84,9
	sales agent	2,1	2,2	87,0
	important person in government	1,1	1,1	88,1
	movie director	3,2	3,2	91,4
	librarian	3,2	3,2	94,6
	unemployed	2,1	2,2	96,8
	photographer	1,1	1,1	97,8
	public finances employee	,5	,5	98,4
	waiter	1,6	1,6	100,0
	Total	97,4	100,0	
Missing	88	2,6		
Total		100,0		