

Evaluation of Destination Image among Foreign Visitors in Tehran

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to determine the image characteristics of Tehran as tourism destination; from foreign travelers' view. It will be tried to determine strong and weak image components of Tehran from foreign traveler's perspective. Furthermore, this study tends to examine the relation between destination image and its components, overall image, and future behavior. The aforementioned relationships were tested by data obtained from foreign travelers.

According to the study the strong and weak cognitive image components of Tehran have been determined. The study indicated that museums, restaurants and cuisine, hospitable and friendly people and low prices are strong image components of Tehran. The weak cognitive components are lack of qualified tours and excursions, the crowdedness of the city and lack of tourism information. The study also will demonstrate the direct effect of cognitive and affective image components of Tehran on overall image. The direct effect of overall image on tourist's future behavior will be discussed as well.

In addition, management implications are provided based on the results of the current study. Furthermore, some information regarding the limitations of this study as well as implication for future research will be presented in this thesis.

Key words: destination image, image components, tourist's behavior, Tehran

ÖZ

Çalışma; turizm destinasyon olarak Tahran'ın imajını belirlemeyi amaçlamıştır. Bu yabancı seyahat perespektifi Tahranın güçlü ve zayıf görüntü bileşenlerini belirlemek için çalışılacaktır. Ayrıca, bu çalışmada hedef imaj ve bileşenleri, genel imaj, ve gelecekteki davranışı arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemek için yönelmiştir. Söz konusu ilişki, yabancı turistlerden elde edilen verilere göre test edildi.

Çalışmaya göre, Tahran'ın güçlü ve zayıf bilişsel görüntü bileşeni tespit edilmiştir. Çalışmada gösterilmiş ki, müzeler, restoranlar, mutfak, misafirperver insanları ve düşük fiyat Tahran'ın güçlü bir imaj bileşenleridir. Zayıf bilişsel bileşenlere; kalite eksikli turlar ve geziler, şehrin kalabalık ve turizm bilgi eksikliğidir. Çalışmalarda ayrıca Tahran'ın genel görüntüsü üzerine bilissel ve duyussal görüntü bileşenleri doğrudan etki gösterecektir. Turistin ireliye yönelik davranışları üzerindeki genel imaja doğrudan etkisi ayrıca tartışılacaktır.

Buna ek olarak, yönetim uygulamaları, mevcut çalışmanın sonuçlarına dayalı olarak sağlanmıştır. Ayrıca, bu çalışmanın sınırlıkları yanı sıra, araştırmalar için, anlamı ile ilgili bazı bilgiler, bu tezde sunulacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: destinasyon imajı, imaj bileşenleri, turist davranışı, Tahran

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Philosophy of research

Destination images can affect travelers' decision making and future behavior among a place as well as levels of satisfaction and experience recollection. Thus, perceived destination images are the basis of the evaluation or selection process and thus provide the link between motivations and destination selection (O'Leary, & Deegan, 2003).

To understand tourists' differences in perceptions, images and motivations toward a destination is essential to comprehend and predict tourism demand and its impact on the tourism location. In fact, this understanding of destination image and visitors' perceptions is critical to a destination and provides the basis for more effective and efficient future strategic planning of the destination (Marino, 2008).

Therefore, it is very significant to understand when the image forms, and at what point the image influences consumers' selection choice of a particular destination (Marino, 2008).

Furthermore, finding out the significant roles of a destination image is an important issue that help to improve destination policy toward destination image and attract more

travelers to the destination. This concept could be more critical in case of Tehran, the capital city of Iran, a wealthy destination in terms of cultural and historical places but it was not concerned enough as a destination to analyze its attributes. This study was conducted in order to investigate the attributes of Tehran by choosing the foreign travelers as sample study and to determine the unique features that travelers associate with Tehran.

1.2 Purpose of the research

The main purpose of this study is to identify the importance of destination image and its components in Tehran by evaluation of foreign tourist's perceptions. This thesis also discussed about unique places and features where foreign tourists are more affiliated with. In addition, it mentioned the main issues of destination image to attract more tourists, and provide a guide to improve the weaknesses of Tehran's attributes as a destination.

As discussed before, there is a lack of information related to destination image elements of Tehran. On the other hand, Tehran as a tourism destination has a great lack of strong and clear image in the tourists' mind. Therefore, it is essential to identify the Tehran image and suggest the suitable strategic planning for attracting more visitors.

This research is based on Marino (2008) theoretical foundation of destination image and Echtner & Ritchie (1991) conceptualization of destination image.

1.3 Contribution of the research

This study would help both governmental bodies and managers to better understand and serve the international tourists, so they may be able to design better the destination products and marketing focus, and eventually increase the suitable strategies for Tehran.

The current study is conducted to understand main strengths and weaknesses of attributes of Tehran and to make recommendations for policy makers and researchers.

1.4 Methodology of the research

This thesis used deductive approach to meet research objectives. In this thesis the target population are foreign visitors in Tehran- Iran which, with the help of questionnaire their perceptions have been obtained.

The data were gathered with time period of two weeks in Tehran's hotels and airports from 100 tourists visited the Tehran- Iran.

1.5 Outline of the Research

This thesis includes four chapters. In this chapter, information regarding the research philosophy and purpose of the empirical study are presented. This chapter indicates information about the contributions of the thesis to the hospitality management and marketing managers, and proposed methodology.

The second chapter includes literature review. It presents a brief definition of destination image, identify the importance of the destination image and its components. Moreover, it discusses the tourists' behavior and lastly it gives general knowledge about the tourism in Tehran.

In chapter three, information about the methodology of the empirical study and deductive approach were presented. The importance of sampling, data collection, and questionnaire structure and measures were discussed.

Chapter fourth provides information about data analysis used in this study and the findings of the research based on the response rate and demographic characteristics.

Finally, chapter five will reveal the discussion and conclusions of the research. Implication for practitioners, future research direction, and limitaion of the study will be discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter 2 is the review of the research literature which critically represents the accomplished studies, and experiments aiming to build a body of knowledge for covering the research problem. This chapter presents literature review about destination image and its elements and their effects on psychological tourist's motivation and tourist's evaluations. This is followed by information related to destination image and its components, and customer's perceptions from destinations and their future behaviors.

2.1 What Is Destination Image?

Based on the existing literature, we can say that the studies and researches about destination image has been a key concern among researchers and scholars. There have been different articles and researchers, especially in the recent years, which have focused on this topic (Naidoo, & Ramseook-Munhurrun, 2012; Yang, He, and Gu 2012; Qu, & Im 2011; Mohan 2009; Stepchenkova, and Morrison 2008, Hosany, Ekinci, and Uysal 2005).

Leisen (2001: 50) states that: "The traveler creates an image by processing information about a destination from various sources over time". He believes that this information

about a destination may be organized into a mental construct that is meaningful to the individual.

Image of a destination is the sum of ideas, beliefs, experiences recollections and impressions that a visitor has of a place (Crompton, 1979; Reilly, 1990). Particularly; image of a destination is total influence of all impressions, objective knowledge, bias, ideas and emotional thoughts that a person or group might have of a specific destination (Lawson & Baud-Bovey, 1977). More over; Della Corte and Micera (2007) defined image of a destination as sum of ideas, beliefs and impressions a place can make in actual and potential individual's minds.

According to Marino (2008) "image is the mental structures (visual or not) that integrate the elements, the impressions and the values that people have about a specific place; and, it is based on a series of more or less material knowledge of those people, and on a series of perceptions of a more emotional and effective nature".

As result; in general destination image is a composite construct, multi-faceted, which includes of interrelated affective and cognitive evaluation generate the overall image (Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2006).

2.1.1 Destination Image and Tourist's Decision Process

As mentioned before the importance of destination image was widely acknowledged by researchers. Hunt (1975) was one of the first people that indicate the significant role of destination image on increasing number of visitors. As a matter of fact; destination

image is an important issue in the potential tourist's decision making process who having lack of knowledge of the place and act based on their image of the location (Gunn, 1988; Hunt, 1975).

Tasci and Gartner (2007) claim that destination image has a significant effect on supply and demand factors in marketing, thus; destination image is an essential factor in order to have a successful tourism development and destination marketing.

Creating a powerful destination image is a way to compete with other destinations with similar attributes and gain competitive advantage among them. In addition; locations with recognizable images and positive perceptions of tourists are more likely to be chosen, moreover; a strong and clear destination image can influence visitor's satisfaction, their intentions to revisit the destination in the future and having positive word of mouth to recommend the place to their family and friends Marino (2008).

In addition; destination image has been presented to be a critical factor in determining visitor choice, because of the increase in competition for tourists and their spending money, thus; definition of destination branding should include the concepts of destination image (Lee, O'Leary, and Hong 2002; Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005).

Other researchers and scholars also focused on the issue of destination image recently. Qu, Kim, & Im (2011) claimed that destination image has various dimensions that have influence on tourist's future behavior. They mentioned that because of the competitive environment in tourism industry, marketers must more focus on establishing a strong

and positive image for locations. Therefore; tourist's intentions to revisit a destination will rise significantly.

Based on Assaker, Vinizi, and O'Conner (2011) claims if a tourist is not satisfied or happy about the destination that he has visited, improving the destination's image is an essential solution and method in order to generate future revisits. They also approve that "a positive image can suggest that the traveler's poor experience was a rare exception" (Assaker, Vinizi, and O'Conner, 2011: 899). Therefore; it must be attempted to improve the image of a destination, so tourists will have more tendencies to visit the destination and intention to revisit will be increased.

Konecnik (2004) believes that a destination's image has been recognized as a complex and crucial concept in the destination selection process (Konecnik, 2004). A positive place brand encourages internal investment; tourism is a magnet for talent for professional jobs, and if it is properly managed, it can create a renewed sense of purpose and identity for the inhabitants of the country, region, or city (Anholt, 2004).

2.2 The components of destination image:

Various researches mentioned several components for image of a destination. This part includes the review components of destination image based on the existing literatures.

Many researchers' such as Baloglu and Brinberg (1997); Walmsley and Young (1998); Chen (2001); Hong, Kim, Jang, & Lee (2006) mention three significant components for image, which are "cognitive", "affective" and "unique image".

2.2.1 Cognitive, Affective, Unique image and Overall Image:

A cognitive or perceptual component, also known as the designative component is “beliefs and knowledge about the perceived attributes of the destination” (Alcañiz et al. 2009: 716).

The cognitive component of destination image has been investigated by scholars more rather than affective component (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; Walmsley and Young, 1998; Chen and Uysal, 2002).

O’Neill & Jasper (1992) claimed that affective image is the component that deals with the emotional reaction of travelers to a destination or product. “Affective or evaluative component is the individual’s feelings towards the destination” (Alcañiz et al. 2009: 716).

Particularly, as Gartner (1993) mentioned, image can be considered as an effective tool that can be applied in some activities such as promotion, advertising, or other similar marketing activities. According to Kim & Yoon (2003) image of a destination is a mixture of both cognitive and affective components that have direct influence on overall image. Baloglu and McCleary (1999) also mentioned that the affective component of image is one of the most effective issues that must be used by destinations for being more influential.

Unique image is another component of brand image which is effective for differentiating through similar destinations in the target consumer’s minds and envisages the

destination overall image (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). In terms of destination branding Qu, Kim, & Im, (2011) claim that “Positive brand image is partly achieved through the uniqueness of brand image to the brand in memory .Thus, the unique image of a destination is critical to establish the overall image in the consumers’ minds. A strong, unique image would increase the favorability of the overall image toward the destination”.

The overall image of a destination which is one of the most important assets to gain unique and successful destination branding is positively influenced by cognitive, affective and uniqueness of image components. According to (Qu, H. Kim, and H. Im, 2011) overall image of a destination that is also called the perceived image is better to be measured in destination branding.

2.2.2 Conative (Behavioral) Component:

Another component of the destination image has been proposed by some other researchers (Gartner 1993, Pike and Ryan 2004, and White 2004). This component is named behavioral or conative element that is related to how visitors act among a destination based on the affect and cognition they have about a destination. According to Pike & Ryan (2004) “conation reflects a likelihood of destination selection, or brand purchase, and can be interpreted as a propensity to visit a destination within a certain time frame”. Both cognitive and affective components affect conative element of destination image.

2.2.3 What are The Organic and Induced Image and Complex image?

As Gunn (1972) mentioned, image of a destination has two basic components that must be considered on a sequence. The elements of this sequence are induced, organic and complex.

According to Gunn (1972) visitor's image stage is mainly dependent on their experience about the destination, due to the fact that organic image arise from a long history of non-tourism knowledge such as newspapers, books, and so forth, visitors who have never been in a destination will have some knowledge in their memory.

O'Leary and Deegan, 2005 believed that induced the difference between organic images and induced images is the last one are formed by espousing to a destination's marketing program Therefore; induced images are those that arise from the place area itself and are gathered from promotional and marketing material such as magazines and brochures designed to attract travelers (Jenkins, 1999). The induced images are generated by a conscious attempt of tourism promotion that is managed by tourism organization. The induced image depends upon colorful brochures and magazines that are distributed in information centers, travel agencies and TV advertisements. (cited in Leisen, 2001).

According to Gunn (1972) the last stage of the sequence that is the complex image is a result of an actual visitation. Chon (1991), Fakeye and Crompton (1991) believed that the complexity of image is the result of direct experience with the destination.

O’Leary and Deegan (2005) claimed that although induced and organic images will be formed prior to visit a destination, actual vacation experience can change induced images.

According to Mayo (1973: 217) “whether or not an image is, in fact, a true representation of what any given region has to offer the tourist, what is important is the image that exists in the mind of the vacationer.”

2.3 Destination Characteristics

Several studies have attempted to identify the brand image attributes of different countries (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993; O’Leary and Deegan, 2005; Stepchenkova and Morrison, 2008; Qu., Kim & Im 2011; Naidoo and Ramseook-Munhurrun, 2012). In these researches, it has been tried to consider some attributes that have been arranged along the functional-psychological continuum, mainly by using the unstructured techniques to elicit the relevant destination image attributes and dimensions, then using these attributes in a structured way to investigate images.

Etchner and Ritchie (1993: 6) in their article suggested a list of attributes that have been arranged along the functional-psychological continuum that consists of 35 physical and measurable as well as abstract items such as tourist sites, historic sites, beaches, hospitality, opportunity for adventure, quality of service, fame. Etchner and Ritchie (1993) believed that in order to have effective positioning and marketing strategy, appropriate and suitable destination image must be created and managed. In

their study they concluded that each destination has some functional components that are more tangible and some psychological components that are more abstract. As a result, “functional characteristics are defined as directly observable or measurable such as scenery, costs, and climate; whereas psychological characteristics cannot be directly measured such as friendliness and atmosphere” (Etchner and Ritchie, 2003: 40).

2.3.1 Functional and Psychological Characteristics:

According to Etchner and Ritchie (2003: 40) “functional characteristics are defined as directly observable or measurable characteristics such as price”. These characteristics are more tangible. Many scholars have tried to determine the important functional characteristics for destinations in their work.

“Psychological characteristics cannot be directly measured such as friendliness and atmosphere” (Etchner and Ritchie, 2003: 40). Different studies have attempted to determine psychological characteristics of destination.

According to Vengesayi (2008), conceptual and empirical studies have examined and focus on the determinants of destination attractiveness. Different destination attributes have been identified as determining the attractiveness of tourism destinations.

Vengesayi (2008) believes that the attractiveness of a tourism destination is often referred to as the opinions of visitors about the destination’s perceived ability to the extent that they satisfy their needs. Research has demonstrated that attractiveness studies are necessary for understanding the elements that encourage people to travel

(Formica, 2002). The more a destination is able to meet the needs of tourists, the more the destination is perceived to be attractive and the more the destination is likely to be chosen in preference to competing destinations (Vengesayi, 2008).

In studying tourism attributes, there are several attributes that are associated with a destination. Zhou (2005) believes that just some attributes are important for attracting the tourists, while the others are not so significant for attracting the tourists to a destination.

According to Zhou (2005: 3) “in order to be successful in the competitive tourism market, tourism planners need to clearly understand the difference between attributes of tourism products and tourism attractions, and how important they are”. In some studies in tourism literature, the word ‘attribute’ and ‘attraction’ were used interchangeably, although they sometimes have different connotations. According to Zhou (2005) for a non-tourism product, the attributes are supposed to be its attractions. Choi, Chan, Wu (1999) tried to investigate destination attributes of Hong Kong that are important and significant in attracting tourists. They used a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches that was developed by Etchner and Ritchie (1991). In their research they collected a sample of numerous tourists at the Kai Tak airport hall in April 1996. Their findings indicated that Hong Kong was considered as a “shopping paradise” by most tourists. The respondents believed that the considerable weakness is the crowded, stressful and busy urban environment.

Choi, Chan, Wu (1999) tried to extract the attribute-base and holistic images of Hong Kong as well as spreading the attributes from functional to physiological characteristics by combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. Their findings were supplemented by images that were distinctive and unique in the world travel market. In their research, they illustrated a more comprehensive view on the image of Hong Kong. They believed that “the attributes identified will help marketers to understand Hong Kong's competitive position as a tourist destination, while holistic impressions will help to find out its unique symbols” (Choi, Chan, Wu, 1999: 346). Furthermore, they concluded that the psychological and functional characteristics of Hong Kong can help to reveal the “pull” factors of Hong Kong as a destination.

Mayo and Jarvis (Becker, 1981: 201) define destination attractiveness as, “the relative importance of individual benefits and the perceived ability of the destination to deliver these individual benefits”. This ability is increased by the specific attributes of a destination that makeup the destination. According to (Hu & Ritchie, 1993) a tourism destination is therefore a combination of destination attributes, mostly including tourist facilities and services. In order to assess the attractiveness of a destination tourists evaluate the perceived ability of the destination attributes to meet their needs (Mayo & Jarvis, 1981). The attractiveness of a destination would fade away in the absence of these attributes. Furthermore, in the absence of destination attractiveness tourism would not exist and there could be little or no need for tourist facilities and services (Kim & Lee, 2002).

Meng and Uysal (2008), in their research, tried to investigate the gender differences about the perceived importance of destination attributes. They claimed that there are significant gender differences about the perceived importance of destination attributes and travel values when potential nature tourists consider destination choices. They tried to investigate the demographic controlling and travel behavior variables such as age, gender, and marital status. They illustrated that gender differences exists in the perceived importance placed on destination attributes. In their research, they concluded that there is a difference in perception of a destination according to gender. Women, in comparison with men put a higher importance on attributes related to the destination. The research also revealed that men put higher performance on resort facilities and related activities such as golf and tennis and so forth.

Chang, Kivela, and Mak (2011) in their research tried to identify the attributes that are related to gastronomy and dining. They believe that various destination marketers have applied gastronomy as a source of activities that may attract tourists to a destination. Local food and travel dining experience are both considered as “attraction” for many destinations (Kivela & Crofts, 2006; Stewart, Bramble, & Ziraldo, 2008). As a result Chang, Kivela, and Mak (2011) claim that the way that tourists evaluate local food and travel dining experiences is so important. In their study they examined Chinese tourists' real life travel dining behavior while they were on holiday in Australia. They tried to identify the important attributes affecting the evaluation of travel dining experience. They identified 15 different attributes that were classified under six main categories which are: tourists' own food culture, the contextual factor of the dining experience, variety and diversity of food, perception of the destination, service encounter, and tour

guide's performance. Some important attributes are as follow: flavor, cooking method, authenticity, variety of dishes, expected service level, service speed and facilitation (Chang, Kivela, and Mak, 2011: 311).

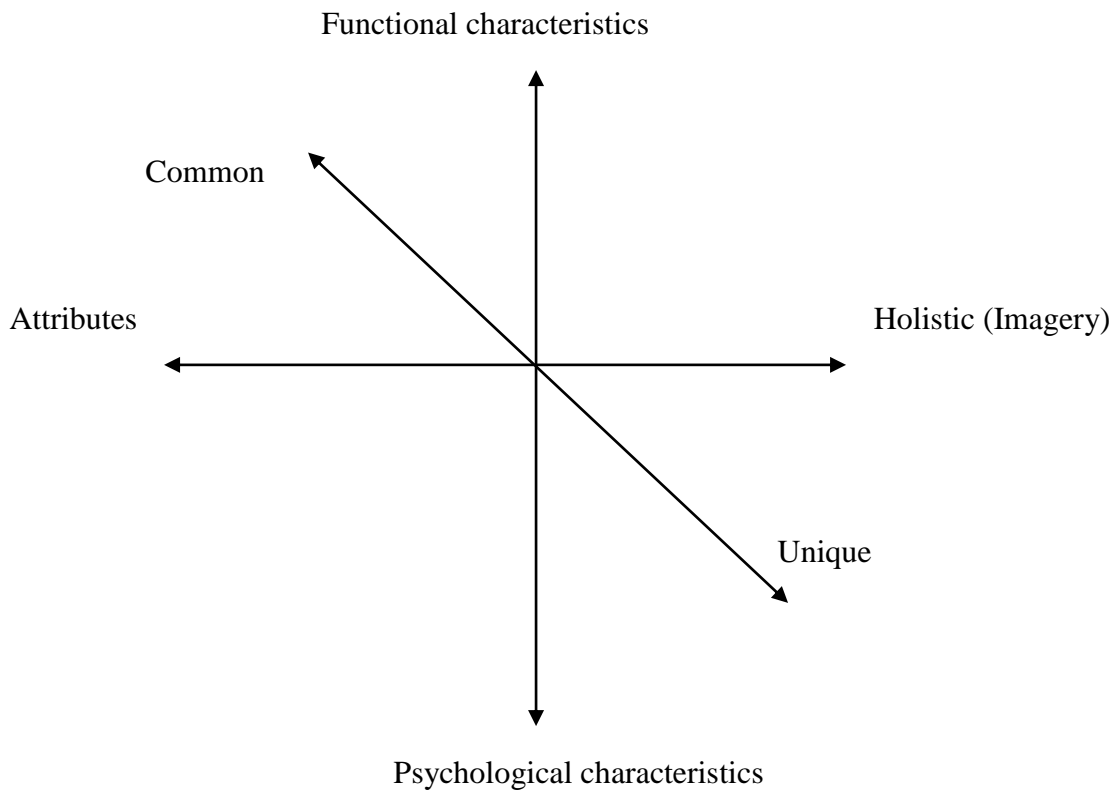


Figure 1: The components of destination image (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991)

Based on Echtner and Ritche (1991) study as shown in Figure 1, images of destinations can range from those based on 'common' functional and psychological traits to those based on more 'unique' features, events, feelings or auras. In other words, on one extreme of the continuum, the image of a destination can be composed of the impressions of a core group of traits on which all destinations are commonly rated and compared. For example, a destination's image can include ratings on certain common

functional characteristics, such as price levels, transportation infra-structure, types of accommodation, climate, etc. The destination can also be rated on very commonly considered psychological characteristics: level of friendliness, safety, and quality of service expected, fame, etc. On the other end of the continuum, images of destinations can include unique features and events (functional characteristics) or auras (psychological characteristics).

2.4 The Influence of Characteristics:

Investigating the influence of tourism characteristics and destination image is an important and remarkable issue. There are some various studies that tried to focus on the role and influence of destination image. The psychological and functional components for studying the characteristics that were suggested by Etchner and Ritchie (1999: 6) exercise a great and significant influence on the overall image of the destination (Alcaniz et al, 2009). According to the existing literatures, we can claim that destination characteristics seem to have various effects. Studies showed different influence of destination characteristics on consumer behavior, image formation, tourist satisfaction, competitiveness of destinations.

2.4.1 The Effect of Characteristics on Behavior:

“Customer behavior is the study of how individuals, groups, and organizations select, buy, use, and dispose of goods, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy their needs and wants” (Kotler & Keller,2012: 190).

There are many studies that confirmed the effect of destination characteristics on behavior intention (Fakeye and Crompton (1991); Ross (1993); Alhemoud & Armstrong (1996); Chen and Kerstetter (1999); Joppe, Martin, & Waalen (2001); Alcaniz et al, (2009).

The importance of destination image in decision making has been universally acknowledged, since it affects the individual 's subjective perception and consequent behavior and destination choice (Stabler, 1988 ; Telisman- Kosuta, 1989 ; Chon, 1990, 1992 ; Echtner and Ritchie, 1991).

As mentioned before, there are various studies that demonstrate the impact of characteristics on post-purchased behavior of tourists. Image has also a great impact on tourist's post-purchase behavior.

Alcaniz et al, (2009) claimed that the psychological component of characteristics have the greatest effect on behavior intention. They concluded that the only variable that has a significant influence and effect on tourists, behavior is the overall image. In this case if the visitors have positive image of a destination, they tend to visit the place again or they may suggest to their friends as well. One other significant issue in this regard is that they consider psychological aspects as important components when recommending the place to other people arises. In other words future behavior in terms of recommending the place to other people is more affected by psychological characteristics than functional ones.

Naidoo and Ramseook-Munhurrin (2012) in their article mentioned that brand image has an impact on the behavior of individuals. They claim that “brand image influences the tourists’ choice of the holiday destination” (Naidoo and Ramseook-Munhurrin, 2012:55).

Brand image “represents tourists’ mental picture formed by a set of characteristics that define the destination in its various dimensions” and “exercises a strong influence on consumer behavior in the tourism sector” (Beerli and Martin; 2004: 623). Tourists usually have limited information about the places and destinations that they have not previously visited; therefore, destinations with stronger images are more likely to be chosen as a tourist destination. Secondly, brand image influences post-purchase decision-making behaviors including evaluation (satisfaction) and future behavioral intentions (Bigné *et al.*, 2001; Chen and Tsai, 2007; Chon, 1990; Joppe *et al.*, 2001).

Assaker, Vinizi, and O’Conner (2011) suggested that destination image has direct as well as indirect effect on behavioral intentions which is considered to be the most important effect in this regard. This finding is consistent with the previous studies (e.g., Bigne *et al.*, 2001; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008). In particular Assaker, Vinizi, and O’Conner (2011) suggest that destination image has great impact on future visit intention. This is completely consistent with other findings by various researchers in this regard.

Another research that tried to investigate the effects and influence of destination image is the one by Tasci and Gartner (2007). In their study, they tried to determine the

effects of destination image by reviewing literature in this regard. They concluded that “destination image is a composite of a wide spectrum of inputs that can be viewed as affecting either the demand or supply side of the image construct” (Tasci and Gartner, 2007: 423). They claim that destination image has direct effect on pre-, during- and post trip consumer behavior. This finding is consistent with the previous findings such as the studies by Joppe, Martin, and Waalen (2001), Chen and Kerstetter (1999), Alhemoud and Armstrong (1996), Ross (1993); and Fakeye and Crompton (1991). They all confirmed that destination characteristics can affect consumer behavior in different steps.

2.4.2 The Effect of Characteristics on Tourist Satisfaction:

“In general, satisfaction is a person’s feeling of pleasure or disappointment that result from comparing a product’s perceived performance (or outcome) to their expectations” (Kotler & Keller,2012: 164).

In tourism literature, it is confirmed that tourist’s satisfaction is determined by his judgment and estimation of different characteristics of a destination (Alegre & Garau 2010; Alegre & Cladera, 2006; Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Kozak, 2002; Baker & Crompton, 2000; Murphy, Pritchard, & Smith, 2000). All these studies confirmed that tourist’ overall satisfaction is determined by how the visitors evaluate the characteristics related to the destination.

One significant study that attempted to investigate the influence of destination characteristics on satisfaction is the one by Meng, Tepanon and Uysal (2009). In this

study, they examined the relationship between destination characteristics importance and performance, travel motivation, and satisfaction in Southwest Virginia for the visitors who took vacation in resorts. They attempted to measure tourists satisfaction by characteristics of the destination. They believe that “destination characteristics plays an important role in tourists’ evaluation of the attractiveness, image, and satisfaction of a particular destination” (Meng, Tepanon and Uysal, 2009: 42). They concluded that for resort destination there are some significant indicators that can result in the overall satisfaction for the visitors. According to their findings the important indicators are friendliness of people, quality service and lodging facilities. These issues are so important and lead to overall tourist satisfaction for the visitors to resorts.

2.4.3 The Effect of Characteristics on Competitiveness:

The Economist (1998, p. 10) noted that “there may be more tourists to go round, but there is also more competition between destinations as cities, countries and continents latch on to the charms of tourist revenue”.

Different studies have studied destination competitiveness. Among them, many of the studies diagnosed the competitive positions of specific destinations such as the studies by Ahmed, Enright & Newton (2005); Vengesai (2005); Papatheodorou (2002); Krohn (1990); Hudson, Ritchie, & Timur (2004) . These studies confirmed that destination attributes have significant effect on destination competitiveness.

Another significant study that examined the influence and impact of attributes is the one by Crouch (2011). According to Crouch, some characteristics affect the

competitiveness of tourism destinations. He claimed that two characteristics, that are physiographic and climate, are considered to be the most important determinant characteristics that affect the competitiveness of tourism destinations.

The result of this study also reveals that there are some other important characteristics that may affect competitiveness. These characteristics are “culture and history, the quality of its tourism superstructure, the creation and hosting of special events, a thriving entertainment sector, and the development of a broad mix of recreation and tourism activities, which to a large extent are the outcome of competitive activity” (Crouch, 2011: 41).

According to Crouch (2011) destination’s image and reputation in the tourism market as well as infrastructure and accessibility also are so significant characteristics that may affect competitiveness in tourism market. He believes that “a destination’s awareness and image is formed and created by many and varied forms of information that shape the perceptions of tourism consumers” (Crouch, 2011: 42).

2.5 The Steps of Image Formation

As we discussed before, locations (destinations) with distinctive images and visitor’s positive impression have more possibility to be chosen. In addition; image of a destination has a great influence on customer satisfaction and intention to revisit the place or spread positive word of mouth. However; gaining this competitiveness between other locations is totally depends on the destination capability to make pleasant

experiences that respond with the image tourists held of the destination (Marino, 2008). Thus; formation of the destination image becomes an important issue which depends on the visitor's perceptions, external and internal resources of the destinations.

2.5.1 Tourist's Perception

According to Marino (2008), there are three types of perceptions a priori, in situ and a posteriori and it is important to make differentiation between them.

She also defined a priori perception as a construction that a tourist makes in his or her mind but without physical connectivity. In other words Marino (2008) "tourists have already "visited" a place before they physically visit it".

The in situ perception was defined as "is a key moment in the tourists' experience, because it contrasts what they have imagined. Tourists never arrive with a null perception: they have a previous image of the place that can be confirmed or not" Marino (2008).

The last perception of tourists is posteriori which demonstrates that a visitor's perception is not limited to the travel only and resources that they use daily is an important issue for generating their perceptions about a destination, for instance; the service they get in a restaurant in a destination is also a significant element in their perception.

2.5.2 Destination Resources

As we discussed before; destination resources which are divided into external and internal have a great impact on destination image formation. Ekinci and Hosany (2006)

mentioned that personality of destination has positive influence on perceived image of destination and word of mouth. Moreover; destination personality depends on its resources. The following table demonstrates the external and internal resources of a location based on Marino (2008) observation:

Table 1: Resources Influencing Formation of Image (Marino, 2008)

OUTSIDE RESOURCES	INSIDE RESOURCES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Natural and cultural attraction of the destination - Political, economical and technological environment - Quality of product and services - Satisfaction during the travel experience - Intermediaries - Information at the tourism destination - Social (word of mouth, phone calls) - Weather - Presence of a brand - Media & Internet - Marketing activities and advertising - Postcards and travel brochures - Movies - Events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Geographic origin - Social and cultural environment - Character - Motivation and expectation - Personal feeling (favorable vs. unfavorable) - Perceived risks - Familiarity with a destination - Previous experience in the destination - Compared to previous travel experiences in other destinations - Lack of information

2.6 Tehran

Tehran is the capital city of Iran with an estimated population of 12,765,238. It is also Iran's largest urban area and city, the largest city in Western Asia, one of the largest in Southern Asia, and the 19th-largest city globally.(Wikipedia, encyclopaedia, 2012)

In 2008 Tehran was the least expensive capital in the world and the second-least expensive city globally based on the presenting the best value for money in the world. Globally it stands 19th by city population, 56th by the size of its GDP (gross domestic product) and 29th by the population of its. (Wikipedia, encyclopaedia, 2012)



Figure 2: Iran Map

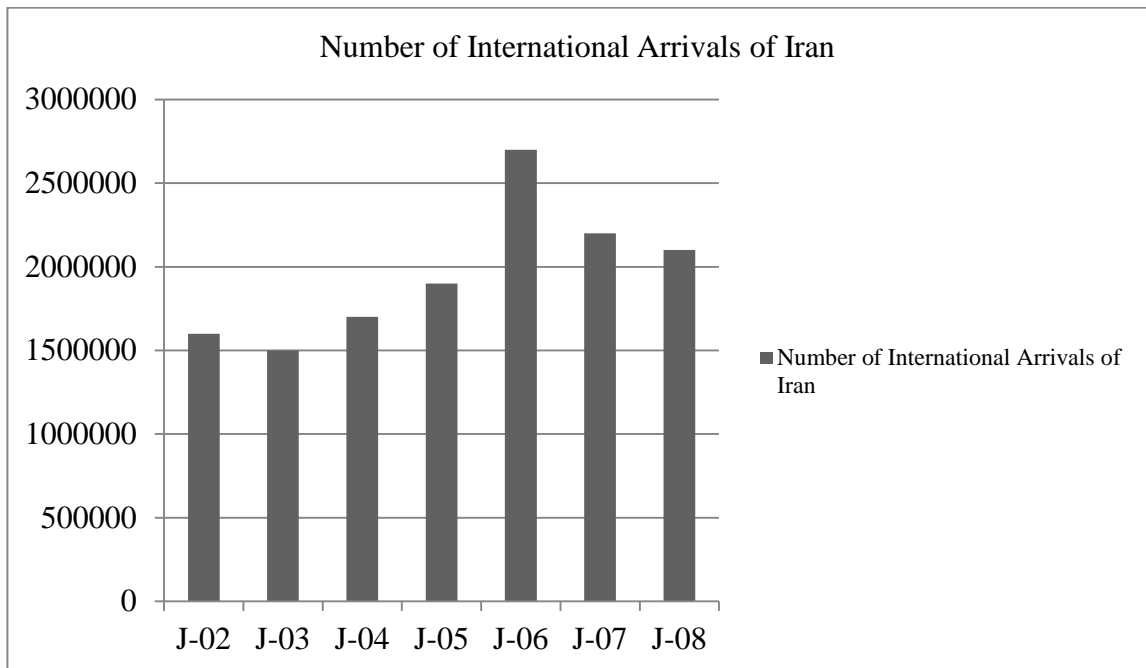
2.6.1 Tourism in Iran/ Tehran

The city of Tehran is known for its rich history and culture. Various rulers have ruled this part of Iran and they have left their distinct impression in this city which today stand

as witnesses of the past. The Tourist Attractions in Tehran mostly consist of grand palaces and museums which are quite beautiful and informative. The palaces in this city include Golestan Palace, Tehran, Green Palace, Tehran, Saad-Abad Palace & Park, Tehran, Sahebqranieh Palace, Tehran and the Niavaran Palace, Tehran. These palaces were built by various emperors and other nobles in the past. The palaces are very lavish and show the power and wealth of these people.

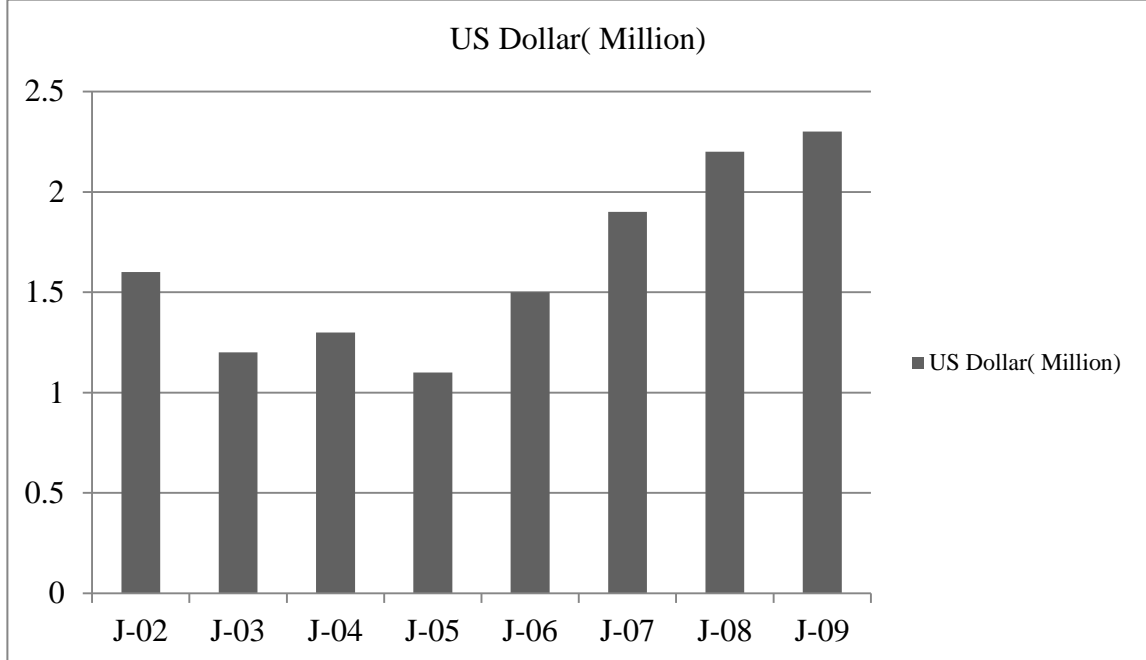
You will find a treasury and several museums as well in this city. The museums include National Jewels Treasury, Tehran, Museum of Ayatollah Khomeini, Tehran, National Museum of Iran, Tehran and the Postal Museum, Tehran. These museums have rare displays which are quite fascinating. You can even visit the famous towers and holy shrines set in this city. You can also shop at the local bazaars of this city while you are on Tehran Tours. You will have a good time sightseeing in Tehran. The good transportation in Tehran will make your trip to the Tourist Attractions in Tehran quite comfortable.

Table 2: Number of International Arrivals (WTO)



As table 2 indicates, the number of international arrivals of Iran during 2002 to 2008 fluctuated smoothly. From 2003 to 2006 the number of international arrivals was raised from 1600000 to 2600000, however; this number was decreased to 2100000 in 2008.

Table 3: International Tourism Revenue In Iran (WTO)



According to WTO, the international tourism revenue in Iran was around 1.5 million dollars in 2002 which decreased to 1.3 million dollars in 2003. The international tourism revenue has been raised to 1.4 million dollars in 2004, however; in January 2005 this number has been reduced to 1.2 million dollars. During 2006 and 2009, the international tourism revenue in Iran has been increased from 1.5 million dollars to 2.3 million dollars.

According to Arasteh, M. Eilami (2011) “in fact Iran has a great ancient tradition but it is as yet little known in the West and there is much to be learnt both from it and the building techniques which are integral with it. Rituals, festivals, ceremonial events and religious buildings are fundamental tourist attractions for devout followers of the particular systems of beliefs as well as for those with a casual interest” (Arasteh, M. Eilami, 2011).

Abyareh (2009) mentioned that “our country Iran is one of the first 10 countries for attraction of tourism in the world and it has the 5th rank concerning biological variety and variety of natural attractions. But unfortunately it has never found its appropriate position in the international scope due to some problems. In a manner that in the ranking table of previous years from viewpoint of accepting tourists and obtaining income it has always has a rank more than 60 from viewpoint of tourism cost its rank has been more than 40. Considering above matters and also this fact tourism industry applies the sources that often seem unusable and they are economized through development of tourism, for example using archeological works, forests, deserts, mountains, sand areas, are phenomena which have no economic value potentially and they are mentioned through development of tourism. Therefore; in our country tourism which has not grown regarding industrial growth and economic development significantly, can be mentioned as one of the infra-structures and as a way for development and occupation” (Abyareh, 2009).

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter indicates different issues related to the methodology of this research. It includes information about deductive approach which is used in this research, and reason for choosing this approach. Information regarding data collection, sample of the study, questionnaire structure and data analysis were also presented.

3.1 Deductive Approach:

There are two key approaches to drawing the methodology of any research: induction and deductive. A commonly held idea of the distinction between these two terms is that induction is a formation of a generalization derived from examinations of a set of particular, while deduction is the identification of an unknown particular, drawn from its resemblance to set of facts (Rothchild, 1994). Deductive research method works from more general to more specific. Some time is called “top-down” approach. A deductive research method entails the development of a conceptual and theoretical structure prior to its testing through empirical observation (Gill and Johnson, 1997).

As mentioned before, the approach for gathering data, developing and testing in this research is deductive approach. Graziano & Raulin (1993) claimed that “The constructs (the ideas) guide the researcher in, making and testing deductions from the construct.

The deductions are empirically tested through research, and thus support for the theory is obtained” (Graziano & Raulin, 1993: 37).

3.2 Instrument Development:

In this research data gathering was done by using a series structured questionnaire which is based on the study by Marino (2008) related to the destination image. Moreover, this study has first reviewed destination image theories and practices used in the Marino (2008) and Echtner and Ritchie (1991, 1993) research in order to pre-select a set of main attributes to evaluate destination image and find an appropriate instrument to measure it.

As mentioned before, it is clear that Echtner and Ritchie (1991, 1993) had successfully developed a conceptual framework in order “to identify ‘true’ images of tourist destinations” (Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001, p. 7).

According to Reilly (1990) and Marino (2008), to fully capture the components of destination image characteristics, holistic, functional, psychological, common, and unique- a combination of structured and unstructured methodologies should be used. Based on their assumptions, with the help of a questionnaire, the primary data have been conducted, and the foreign visitors’ perceptions have been obtained.

A series of open-ended questions that can capture the holistic components of destination image, reliable and set of scales to measure its common attribute based

components have been selected based on the extant literature review. The surveys have been conducted by performing face to face questionnaires. Principal's component analyses have been used to determine the underlying dimensions of the cognitive and unique image components of Tehran. The data have been processed with the statistical package, SPSS 8.0.

The attributes of the questionnaire are focus on the destination image items in English such as, tourist attractions, services, climate, facilities, and safety at low prices.

According to Echtner and Ritchie's (1993) framework for measuring image, the questionnaire is a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions, in order to achieve a through picture of the Tehran image.

According to Marino (2008) about closed-ended attribute questions, a standardized scale was used to measure the attribute based and common components of the destination image. The main holistic and common attributes of a destination were pre-selected with the help of the literature review.

3.3 Population and Samples:

The target population of this research were foreign travelers of Tehran, who stayed in Tehran during a four-week period in July 2012. The total number of questionnaires that distributed and used for analysis was 100. Most of the questionnaires were distributed

at the airport and some of them were gathered from foreign tourists who stayed in hotels.

In addition, before finalizing questionnaire, the questions have been pre-tested among instructors and revised.

The majority of the respondents were male (62%) and the rest were female (38%). 52% of the respondents were between the ages of 25-44, 37% of the tourists had ages between 45-64, 9% of them had ages between 15-24 and the rest of them were above 65.

The preponderance of the respondents (35%) belong to different nationalities (such as: British, French, Swedish, etc.), followed by Turkish respondents (16%), Azerbaijan (14%), German (12%), Iranians (10 %), in equal percentage (4%) Indian and Syrian tourists and the rest were Pakistan (3%) and Russians (2%).

Their income level varied such that 40% of the respondents earned between 20.000-29.999 dollars per year, 21% of them earned 10.000-19.000 dollars per year, followed by 20% of the respondents that got between 30.000-39.000 dollars per year, only 2% of the respondents made between 40.000-49.000 dollars per year and the rest of them made (11%) between 5.000-9.999 dollars or less per year.

Most of the respondents (50%) had a bachelor degree, 40% of them had higher education and only 9% had high school degrees and the rest 1% went to vocational school.

3.4 Data Analysis:

Analysis has been carried out by the means of standards based on realistic, valid, appropriate and measurable norms. The impact of demographic characteristics of visitors on their satisfaction from Tehran image has been tested by gathered data. As mentioned above, SPSS 8.0 was used to analyze data.

3.5 Questionnaire Structure:

The questionnaire was based on the Mario (2008) study which obtained foreign visitors perceptions about Tehran. The advantage of the questionnaire technique is that it allows the information to be collected from large number of people and the findings can be expressed in numerical terms (Veal, 1997). Therefore, this research purpose was obtained through the use a set of questionnaire.

The questionnaire was in three sections, the first part was identified as tourists' profile (tourists' behavior) which focused on the characteristics of the purpose of the visit. In order to define the tourists' profile (purpose of the visit, how they got the information of the Tehran, where they stay, etc.). The second section was used to measure Tehran Image (tourists' perception), related to their knowledge about the destination and the image of the Tehran in their mind. And the last part was related to the socio-

demographic information of the tourists, focused on the characteristics of the tourists themselves.

In this study, destination image characteristics consisting of 18 items (Appendix A) evaluated as five point scale in which respondents answered from (1) very good to (5) very bad was used.

For Tourists satisfaction, the question was: how would you compare your own experience vs. your expectation when visiting the Tehran. This was based on five point scale from (1) totally satisfied to (5) not satisfied at all.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

The current chapter includes information about the demographic profile of the respondents of the study. The results regarding relations between nationality of the respondents and their perceptions related to Tehran, Iran's image and its various attractions are also incorporated.

4.1 Demographic Results of the Sample

As shown in Table 4, the majority of the respondents were male (62%) and the rest were female (38%). Fifty-two per cent of the respondents were between the ages of 25-44, 37% of the tourists had ages ranging from 45 to 64, 9% of them were between 15-24 and the rest of them were above 65.

The preponderance of the respondents (35%) belong to different nationalities (such as: British, French, Swedish, etc.), followed by Turkish respondents (16%), Azerbaijan (14%), German (12%), Iranians (10 %), in equal percentage (4%) Indian and Syrian tourists and the rest were Pakistan (3%) and Russians (2%).

Their income level varied such that 40% of the respondents earned between 20.000-29.999 dollars per year, 21% of them earned 10.000-19.000 dollars per year, followed by

20% of the respondents that got between 30.000-39.000 dollars per year, only 2% of the respondents made between 40.000-49.000 \$ per year and the rest of them made (11%) between 5.000-9.999 dollars or less. Most of the respondents (50%) had a bachelor degree, 40% of them had higher education and only 9% had high school degrees and the rest 1% went to vocational school.

Table 4. Demographic of the sample (n=100)

<u>Gender</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>(%)</u>
Male	62	62.0
Female	38	38.0
Total	100	100.0
<u>Age</u>		
15- 24	9	9.0
25- 44	52	52.0
45- 64	37	37.0
65- Above	2	2.0
Total	100	100.0
<u>Nationality</u>		
Turkish	16	16.0
Syrian	4	4.0
Indian	4	4.0
Pakistan	3	3.0
German	12	12.0
Russian	2	2.0
Azerbaijan	14	14.0
Iran	10	10.0
Other	35	35.0
Total	100	100.0
<u>Income</u>		
Under 5000	6	6.0
5000-9999	11	11.0
10000-19999	21	21.0
20000-29999	40	40.0
30000-39999	20	20.0
40000-49999	2	2.0
Total	100	100.0
<u>Education</u>		
High education	40	40.0
Bachelor	50	50.0
High school	9	9.0
Vocational	1	1.0
Total	100	100.0

Table 5. Factors Affecting Image Formation

Purpose of visit	(%)
Leisure	22%
Business	38%
Family Friends	19%
Education	18%
Other	3%
Total	100%
No .of visit	
1 st time	43%
2 nd /3 rd	29%
Morethan3	21%
Frequently	7%
Total	100%
Source of Info.	
Personal Knowledge	19%
Recommendation	42%
Internet	28%
Travel agency	5%
Advertising	6%
Total	100%
Place of accommodation	
Hotel	66%
Apartment	23%
Other	11%
Total	100%
Main motivation	
Reputation	36%
Activities	1%
Others	63%
Total	100%

Table 5 indicates that thirty-eight percent of the respondents have visited Tehran for business, 22% for leisure, and the rest for either family and friends (19%) or for education (18%); only 3% of them have come for other reasons such as medical issues.

It also shows that the majority of the respondents have visited Tehran for the first time (43%), 29% of the have returned for the second time, followed by respondents who visited Iran for more than three times (21%) and only 7% of them are frequent tourists . Most of the respondents (42%) have learnt about Tehran-Iran by word-of-mouth, as recommended by friends, 28% of them have learnt about it from internet, and 19% of the respondents have known about Tehran from personal knowledge the rest of them from travel agencies (5%) or advertising (6%). Moreover; sixty-six percent of the respondents have chosen hotels as type of accommodation, and the rest of them either apartments (23%) or other types of settlement (11%) like their family's house.

As shown in this Table, most of the respondents had different and various reasons to visit Iran (63%), in contrast to the other respondents who were motivated by Iran's reputation (36%) or by specific activities (1%).

Table 6. Image of Tehran

Components	Frequently	(%)	Ranking
Hospitality	47	47.0	1
Unique	28	28.0	2
Popularity	14	14.0	3
Unorganized	6	6.0	4
Others (Unexplored, Relaxing, Entertaining)	5	5.0	5
Total	100	100.0	

Table 6 indicates the image components of Tehran. As shown above, the majority of respondents that were 47% mentioned the image of Tehran as a hospitable place which is one of the strong image components of Tehran, 28% of the respondents said that Tehran is a unique city in terms of its culture and history, which is a strong image component of Tehran as well.

In addition; 14% of respondents mentioned Tehran as a popular place. However; 6% of them claimed that Tehran is an unorganized city. The rest of the respondents that were 5% mentioned Tehran as an unexplored, relaxing or entertaining place.

Table 7. Tourist's Overall Satisfaction When Visiting Tehran

Measures	(%)
Satisfied	44%
Totally satisfied	28%
To some extend satisfied	28%
Total	100

Table 7 shows tourist's overall satisfaction when visiting Tehran. As this table indicates, 44% of respondents were satisfied with visiting Tehran, moreover; 28% of them were totally satisfied. The rest of respondents (28%) were to some extend satisfied while visiting Tehran.

Table 8. Main Tehran Attributes

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Ranking
Hospitality	4.6800	.4688	1
Museum	4.6000	.4924	2
Low Prices	4.5800	.5538	3
Restaurant	4.5800	.4960	4
Nightlife	4.5000	.5025	5
Accessibility	4.4400	1.0947	6
Bar & Café	4.4300	.4976	7
Safety	4.3100	.4861	8
Architecture	4.2700	.5096	9
Shopping Facilities	4.2600	.5245	10
Natural Attraction	3.9200	.9711	11
Cleanness	3.8200	.7160	12
Transportation	3.6000	1.0541	13
Accommodation	3.4300	.9975	14
Climate	3.3800	1.0128	15
Tour/ Excursion	2.7300	.6645	16
Tourism Information	1.9300	.8196	17
Crowdedness	1.8400	.5069	18

Table 8 shows the means and standard deviations for all the study's variables. As shown above the hospitality of Tehran had high perceived among respondents. The second attribute of Tehran which had high appreciation among respondents was museum. Next;

respondents have highly perceived low prices in Tehran. The fourth attribute in Tehran which respondents were interested about was restaurant.

As this table indicates; the next attribute was nightlife in Tehran which had high perceived among respondents. As far as respondents' perceptions about accessibility in Tehran, as table 8 shows, this attribute was ranked 6. The seventh characteristic of Tehran which gained high perceived among visitors was bar and café.

In addition; safety of Tehran was the next strong attribute in respondent's minds. The ninth characteristic that had high appreciation between them was Tehran's architecture. The next attribute which ranked as 10th was shopping facilities and the next one was cleanness of Tehran. Transportation in Tehran was not strong enough among other attributes and it ranked as 12th attribute. The thirteenth attribute which had well perceived among respondents was type of accommodation. The last attribute of Tehran which had been appreciated by respondents was climate.

However; as table 8 indicates Tehran had three important attributes which they had low perceived among respondents and this research mentioned them as weakness of Tehran's image. Those characteristics are tour or excursion, tourism information and crowdedness of Tehran.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter presents detailed information regarding the discussion and results of this research empirical study. As mentioned before, the current research mainly focuses on determining the benefits of having clear destination image in Tehran. The data was gathered from foreign visitors during four weeks in July 2012 in Tehran.

5.1 Evaluation of Discussion:

Specifying characteristics of a destination is a significant issue that must be discussed by practitioners and researchers. Therefore, they will be able to exert appropriate strategies for attracting more visitors to a destination.

This research shows important image components and characteristics of Tehran. Various characteristics have been rated and mean scores indicate the significant role of various characteristics. The findings of this research shows that the strong and important characteristics of Tehran are respectively, hospitable people (4.68), museums (4.60), low prices (4.58) and restaurants and cuisine (4.58). Mean scores indicate the important characteristics which can be mentioned as cognitive attributes are great issues for visitors.

Other main issues about the Tehran characteristics that are weak and rated very low by the tourists are crowdedness of the city (1.84), weak tourism information (1.93), and tours/excursions (2.73). These low scores indicate that these characteristics are not strong enough to attract tourists and satisfy them.

In this thesis the relationship between image components and their influences on overall image of a destination and tourists' behavior was discussed. As previous studies claimed that both affective and cognitive components of image has a great influence on the overall image perception of travelers (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; Walmsley and Young, 1998; Chen and Uysal, 2002).

In terms of gaining competitive advantage among other similar locations, the concept of unique image of the destination was investigated by researchers. Kim, & Im, (2011) claim that "Positive brand image is partly achieved through the uniqueness of brand image to the brand in memory .Thus, the unique image of a destination is critical to establish the overall image in the consumers' minds. A strong, unique image would increase the favorability of the overall image toward the destination".

The current research indicate that future behavior of travelers is strongly affected by destination overall image. There are various studies that examined the relation among overall image and travelers' future behavior which all confirmed the positive and direct relation between these dimensions (Fakeye and Crompton, 1991; Ross, 1993;

Alhemoud & Armstrong, 1996; Chen and Kerstetter, 1999; Joppe, Martin, & Waalen, 2001; Alcaniz et al, 2009).

Moreover, formation of the destination image which depends on the visitor's perceptions, external and internal resources of the destinations was discussed in this research, and the result shows that both internal and external factors of a destination have great impact on tourist's perceptions from a location.

The purpose of this research was to identify important characteristics and image components of Tehran from foreign visitors' perspective. It has been attempted to determine the strong and weak characteristics of Tehran. A quantitative method by using the questionnaires has been applied in order to examine and determine strong and weak attributes of Tehran.

Based on the outcomes we can deduce that there are significant image characteristics in Tehran which play an important role in attracting more tourists. The strong image attributes and components are hospitable people, museums, low prices, restaurants and cuisines. In addition, according to the outcomes we may deduce that there are also some weaknesses on image characteristics of Tehran which need to be debated on by the marketing planners. These weaknesses are crowdedness of Tehran, lack of tourism information and lack of appropriate tours.

Those image characteristics that were discussed in terms of cognitive and affective have significant roles in formation of a positive overall image. Moreover, tourist's opinions are influenced by those image characteristics. Thus, we can conclude that overall image of a place has a direct impact on visitor's future behavior based on their intention to revisit the destination or their positive word of mouth.

Based on the discussions and results, some implication for practitioners and managers were discussed. Limitation of the study for further research also has been mentioned in this research.

5.2 Conclusion:

The aim of this research was to identify significant characteristics and image components of Tehran from foreign visitors' perspective. It has been attempted to determine the strong and weak characteristics of Tehran. A deductive method by using the questionnaires has been applied in order to examine and determine strong and weak attributes of Tehran.

Based on the outcomes we can conclude that there are significant image characteristics in Tehran which play an important role in attracting more tourists. The strong image characteristics and components are hospitable people, museums, low prices, restaurants and cuisines. In addition; according to the outcomes we may deduce that there are also some weaknesses on image characteristics of Tehran which need to be debated by the

marketing planners. Those weaknesses are crowdedness of Tehran, lack of tourism information and lack of appropriate tours.

Those image characteristics that were discussed in terms of cognitive and affective have significant roles in formation of a positive overall image, moreover; tourist's opinions are influenced by those image characteristics. Thus; we can conclude that overall image of a place has a direct impact on visitor's future behavior, that are their intention to revisit the destination or their positive word of mouth.

According to the results and discussion, some implication for managers and practitioners will be discussed. Limitation of the study and avenues for further research also will be proposed in this thesis.

5.3 Implications for Managers:

According to the discussion and results of this study, several implications for managers and practitioners can be offered. Firstly, friendly and hospitable people, museums, restaurants and cuisines and low prices are some significant image characteristics that can attract more tourists to Tehran. Therefore, related organizations, namely tourism sectors and municipality must pay more attention to these elements and attempt to provide sustainable programs for enhancing these important characteristics of Tehran.

On the other hand, regarding to improve weak image characteristics, this thesis can suggest that planners of municipality must try to plan the city more wisely to reduce the traffic and crowdedness of Tehran. Moreover, providing some appropriate tourism information and distribute them between visitors is suggested to tourism sector in Tehran.

Lastly, Tehran has a significant lack of trained and qualified employee in its tourism sectors and tours operators. Thus; one of the most important issues is to hire more qualified and trained employees in this sector. These weaknesses can easily affect the overall image of Tehran which can decrease revisit intention and recommendation. Therefore, marketers and managers must consider these important characteristics in order to gain the quality and benefit from tourism sector in Tehran.

5.4 Limitation

As mentioned before, this research indicates the impact of destination image from the points of view of foreign visitors in Tehran, however; it did not investigate the accommodations and the service quality of them enough. Moreover; this study suggests that examining the unique places in Tehran is essential for having better understanding of Tehran image.

The last but not the least limitation of this study is the number of questionnaires distributed. Due to Ramazan holiday, less number of tourists in Tehran and time pressure for deadline of the thesis submission affected the number of questionnaires (100) distributed which is not enough for identifying Tehran's strong and weak attributes.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Questionnaire:

Please place a mark into category that describes you, best for the following questions.

Your responses are for research purposes only.

1. What is your gender : Male Female

2. What is your age :

a. 15-24

b. 25-44

c. 45-64

d. 65-above

3. What category best describe your total income level ? before taxes ?

a. Under \$ 5000

b. \$ 5000 - \$ 9999

c. \$ 10000 - \$ 19999

d. \$ 20000 - \$ 29999

e. \$ 30000 - \$ 39999

f. \$ 40000 - \$ 49999

g. \$ 50000

4. How long do you plan to stay in Tehran-Iran ?

a. Less than a week

b. A week

c. Two weeks

- d. 15-20 nights
- e. A month

5. Your Education :

- a. High the university (Master, PhD, etc)
- b. Bachelor degree
- c. High school
- d. Vocational education
- e. Primary school
- f. Other

Please explain

.....

6. What is your trip or holiday type ?

- a. All inclusive
- b. Full board
- c. Bed and Breakfast
- d. Self –Catering
- e. Room only

7. What type of accommodation are you staying?

- a. Hotel
- b. Apartments
- c. Holiday village
- d. Other

8. How would you categorize the hotel in which you are staying ?

- a. 5 star
- b. 4 star
- c. 3 star
- d. C r,

Please explain

.....

9. What is the purpose of your visit to Tehran-Iran?

- a. Leisure

- b. Business
- c. To visit family and friends
- d. Education
- e. other reason Please explain.....

10. Have you visited Tehran-Iran before ?

- a. No, first time
- b. Yes, second/ third times
- c. More than three times
- d. Frequent visitor to Tehran

11. How did you learn about Tehran-Iran as a destination?

- a. Personal knowledge
- b. Recommendation from friends
- c. Internet
- d. Travel agency and tour operator
- e. Traditional advertising
- f. Other Please specify.....

12. What are your main motivation to visit Tehran-Iran?

- a. Reputation
- b. climate
- c. Activities offered
- d. Other reason Please specify.....

13. What is your nationality:

- a. Turkish

- b. Syrian
- c..Iraq
- d. Indian
- e. Pakistan
- f. German
- g. Russian
- h. Azerbaijanian
- i. Iranian
- j. other nationality please specify

14. What is the main motivating attraction for Tehran-Iran for example;

Handmade, Places, Natural attractions, Events ?

.....

15. Which one of the following is identified the image of Tehran-Iran ? (you can choose more than one factor)

1. Climate	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Relaxing	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Unexplored	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Hospitality	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Popularity	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Untidy	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Unique	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Unorganized	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Entertaining	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Please specify

16. How would you compare your own experience vs. your expectation when visiting the Tehran-Iran? when I match my expectation with my experience I find it

- a. satisfied b. Totally satisfied c. To some extent satisfied
 d. Not satisfied very much e. Not satisfied at all

17. Please express your perception about following attributes ranging from Very bad to Very good.

Very bad Bad Unrelated Good Very good

Museums	1	2	3	4	5
Architecture	1	2	3	4	5
Climate	1	2	3	4	5
Natural attraction	1	2	3	4	5
Tours / excursions	1	2	3	4	5
Transportation	1	2	3	4	5
Tourism information	1	2	3	4	5
Accommodation	1	2	3	4	5
Hospitality	1	2	3	4	5
Restaurant	1	2	3	4	5
Bar & café	1	2	3	4	5
Night life	1	2	3	4	5
Cleanness	1	2	3	4	5
Crowdedness	1	2	3	4	5
Shopping facilities	1	2	3	4	5
Accessibility	1	2	3	4	5
Safety	1	2	3	4	5
Low of price	1	2	3	4	5