MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES
OF TARGET IMAGE IN FUERTEVENTURA.
FROM BROCHURES TO THE INTERCOM

Alberto Jonay Rodríguez Darias*
Universidad de La Laguna
jonayalberto@gmail.com

Pablo Díaz Rodríguez**
Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Agustín Santana Talavera*
Universidad de La Laguna

Every tourist destination needs to shape its image to be projected. This will fulfil a mediation role in the interplay of motivations and wishes of tourists with destination features, mainly influencing in (a) the choice of destination, (b) the generation of expectations prior to trip and, therefore, (c) the perception and appreciation once in it, (d) patterns of tourist behaviour, (e) the degree of satisfaction and loyalty regarding the destination and (f) the promotion of a certain form of tourism development. In the last decade, with the emergence of virtual online intercommunication environments, new ways and opportunities arose to spread the attributes of a destination and thus influence on its image. Clients, businesses and destinations get into a dynamic of virtual communication, only limited in principle by the ability to access network technology.

This article presents the results of the analysis of the image generating process of the island of Fuerteventura (Canary Islands, Spain) by businesses and administrations through brochures and websites, as well as the connection with the images shared by citizens and tourists from the discussions on this destination on virtual 2.0 environments.

The work takes the image recognition as one of the most interesting and applicable concepts in the research developed on tourism (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; De Kadt, 1991; Faulkner and Moscardó, 2000; Frías Rodríguez and Castañeda, 2008; Harrison, 2007; MacCannell, 2001; Markwich, 2001; Pastor Alfonso, 2003; Prentice, 2004; Royo Vela, 2005; Ruiz Morales, 2005; Urry, 1996). Since the nineties (Um and Crompton, 1990; Gartner, 1993; Gallarza, et al., 2002) the tourism image tends to be considered as a subjective and complex conceptual construct (Bigne, Sánchez and Sánchez, 2001) which melts emotions and reasoning of the consumer with reviews that compare the experience and knowledge on the destination. That is, a set of mental representations about the attributes of the tourist destination as a whole (cognitive component) combined with the

generated assessments and feelings (affective component) (Baloglu and Brinberg, 1997; Beerli and Martín, 2004; Frías Rodríguez and Castaneda, 2008; Royo Vela, 2006). The image, understood in this way, is conceived as what people perceive about a particular place or destination (Choi, Chan and Wu, 1999). This includes the way it is internalized by visitors, but also by the rest of agents involved in the tourism system. It is necessary to study the image globally including in its analysis, from a processual systemic approach, the different actors and processes involved in the design, formation and transmission of the imagery of the destination. This leads to differentiate between the process of conception, design and implementation of the processes that make up the image created to sell (campaigns in areas of demand and destination, actions to promote the concomitance between what is exposed and what is available, improvements in the profiles presented for each type of consumers, etc.) the processes of perception and internalization ('creation' and individual comparison, Santana Talavera, 2009). The referred processes could be summarized in own image (ways that local people have to conceive themselves and their environment), projected image (includes three phases called built image, promoted image and image recreated by operators), perceived image and memory or shared image.

The strength Internet and its various applications have gained in recent years has impacted particularly on the ways the tourist image is produced, spread and fed back. Its emergence as intercommunication environment has allowed tourists and resident population to amplify their traditional channels of influence as prescribers of the virtues or shortcomings of products, corporate entities or tourist destinations (Abella Gracés, Gorgemans, Martínez Sánchez and Pérez Pérez, 2004; Buhalis and Law, 2008). In this field, the real revolution relies on the new possibilities of interaction that arise with certain 2.0 online tools (Buhalis, 1998; Buhalis and Law, 2008; Buhalis and O'Connor, 2005; Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). Both the emergence of new and more direct forms of imaging and the easiness for transmission (comments, pictures, videos, links, etc.) and extension of the shared image scope are turning this sort of communities into an important channel for loyalty and influence on the emergence of motivations and target selection. But it is here that it could be questioned up to what extent these new dynamics of the image, favouring a quick use, repeatable and on demand, also accelerate their obsolescence, forcing a constant revision and extension of it.

In this text we refer, based on its own image, to two of the elements of the projected image of Fuerteventura, attracting customers and providing information through brochures and websites, as well as its consistency with the images projected and shared through the social networking site Facebook. From its analysis, there will be an attempt to clarify in which of the strategies most often used for image building -joint and participatory policy; grouping of interested selection of available products; or cluster of initiatives on certain attributes assuming the demand- we can frame it and identify potential projection issues.

The work was carried out from five basic sources: (1) random collection of 146 commercial brochures related to the island of Fuerteventura, (2) systematic review of 38 web sites of tourist importance according to Google public rank, (3) 341 surveys conducted in the island's airport stressing the motivation to visit the island, as well as the use and importance of technology in tourist accommodation, contrasted with the Canary Islands Tourism Expenditure Survey referred to the island of Fuerteventura (2000-2006),

(4) analysis of 16 Facebook pages related to Fuerteventura, (5) ethnographic field work -mainly participant observation and 21 in-depth interviews with key informants, local, residents and tourists.

The results of the study showed that:

- Even with the emergence of the Internet for the tourist destination Fuerteventura, the traditional channels of image diffusion (and specifically the printed brochure) continue to be influential.
- None of the websites analyzed are eligible to be identified as 2.0. This suggests that the strategy of imaging of Fuerteventura as a destination does not respond to the new demands and possibilities. Aspects such as interactivity, design on demand, online travelogue and downloadable materials, are still far from the new trends.
- Evidence shows a substantial difference between the brochures and website developed by governments and businesses, noting that the former directs their efforts towards forms of *cultural* tourism, while the rest highlights the interest for the *recreational* type –*sun and beach*.
- A low degree of segmentation of target audience is shown. Establishing a generic model of consumer, real or symbolic, can be considered a major handicap in the design of these materials, since it is considered that the perception of the messages will be different depending on the interests and abilities of each group.
- Compared to the projected image in brochures and websites, in the stated motivations for tourists to visit the island and the subsequent comments on social networking, «climate» and «beach» continue to prevail as main attractions (to a lesser extent «nature and landscape» and «price»), being quite relegated those related to local culture («folklore and traditions» or «cultural offer»).
- It is stated that part of the resident population (non-national and peninsular), rather than local population, makes a special appreciation of the tranquility and landscape, and not of the local customs and traditions (with the exception of folk traditions). In opposition to this, local people and residents from other islands, especially value the cultural heritage linked to processes and practices that are considered ancestral (uses of the coast, livestock and fisheries, etc..) together with the landscaped environments, although they are reluctant to the possibility of tightening the protection of them.

The orientation of local governments to generate an image adapted to the stereotypes characteristic of cultural and natural tourism can be understood as part of a strategy of restructuring and differentiation as a destination. This strategy has, on the other hand, two major difficulties:

(a) it takes the current demand for granted (because it is considered either secure or undesirable), targeting alleged and venerable market segments and, (b) it has not been preceded by collaborative processes with other agents responsible for generating image, that focus their projection on the demand and tradition of the destination. Therefore, it seems that the configuration process of the tourist image of the island of Fuerteventura matches with a conglomerate of more or less compatible initiatives that tend to overestimate the destination attributes as resources, assuming demand.