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The Prentice-O’Gorman Destination Appraisal Matrix: Iranian Case Study

Objectives

1. To demonstrate an approach which operationalises Prentice’s (2006a) model in the context of destination appraisal.
2. To counter the demonisation of Iran that is common in the Western press

Rational

Prentice’s model was designed to challenge a tendency in contemporary destination marketing to emphasise SSPs (Standardised Selling Points) rather than USPs (Unique (or at least Unusual) Selling Points). This process of standardisation is what the French have termed *Banalisation* (Prentice 2006b). Prentice’s model is a hybrid of traditional destination choice sets models (Crompton 1992; Sirakaya and Woodside 2005) with inputs from the Theory of Reasoned Action (Aizen and Fishbein 1980) and from heuristic choice models (Pham 1998). Prentice further differentiates USPs into UUSPs (Unique Utility Selling Points) UESPs (Unique Experiential Selling Points) USSPs (Unique Symbolic Selling Points). These may be thought of as summarising those aspects of generic imagery and product beliefs that are pertinent to destination differentiation. As specified, Prentice’s model is a model of choosing on the part of potential tourists. The question arises as to how destination managers may readily operationalise Prentice’s ideas in both their marketing and market based product development or, indeed, simply to think about their destination. Many managers are familiar with SWOT analysis and the operationalisation of Prentice’s ideas suggested here builds on this familiarity. The demonstrated means of application is in the form of a matrix combining Prentice’s expansion of USPs with a traditional SWOT analysis

Theoretical Context: Reducing Complexity to Manageable Levels

Traditional destination choice sets modelling in tourism emphasises consideration sets as a process. That is a succession of stages are postulated through which options are narrowed down and progressively eliminated as discussed in: Woodside and Lysonski (1989); Um and Crompton (1990); Ankomah, Crompton and Baker (1996); Dellaert, Ettema and Lindh (1998); Wansink and van Ittersum (2004); and Nicolau and Más (2005). This conceptualisation emphasises cognitive and connotative processes. Both rationality and linearity in consumer choice are implied by these models, moving from an inclusive to an exclusive set of options. Explicit information searching is also implied. The question arises if consumers are neither rational nor linear in their thought as to how they in fact they choose destinations; this is highlighted in: Goossens (2000); Prentice and Andersen (2000); Andsager and Drzewiecka (2002); Hyde and Lawson (2003); Bansal and Eiselt (2004); Beerli and Martín (2004); and Petrick (2004). One tenet of Prentice’s argument is that familiarity commonly replaces information searching and that in circumstances of this kind choice is affective rather than cognitive. Prentice incorporates Pham’s (1998) *Affect-as-Information model* as an alternative means of informing choice. Familiarity implies awareness of USPs, whereas affective choosing implies specific awareness and salience of UESPs and USSPs.

Prentice's model seeks to predict behavioural intention, that is propensity to visit a destination. This is what an economist might term latent demand. A challenge in marketing is not only to stimulate latent demand, but to convert this into realised demand that is actual trip making. The latter is what an economist would term expressed demand. Behavioural intentions can be postulated as being dependant upon a series of factors. These include generic imagery and product beliefs (UUSPs, UESPs, USSPs) and their salience when choosing. They also include empathy, fashion, and peer group norms as felt when choosing. From the Theory of Reasoned Action, fashion and norms are in turn dependant not only on the felt opinions of referent others but also on individuals' motivation to comply. Whereas empathy can be thought of as flowing from familiarity, generic imagery and product beliefs flow both from familiarity and explicit information search. Explicit information searching is itself dependant not only on traditional choice sets interpreted as opportunity sets but also on other variables such as travel expertise, trip novelty and competing demands on time. In choosing, behavioural intentions not only depend on the outcome of all these factors but also on constraints felt at this time and on heuristics which may be used as substitutes for processes such as information search. Because of the complexity hereby implied, destination marketers may be best advised to focus on those aspects of their products which are more immediately within their influence, such as suggested USPs and the development of empathy through experiential familiarity. This focus is the core of Prentice's suggested application and in this intended paper this will be developed into an explicit toolkit for application.

Methodology and Operationalisation in Iran

Prentice and O'Gorman have developed a destination matrix which combines the differentiation of selling points (SPs) with a SWOT analysis. This matrix separates SPs into the three categories comparable to the USPs identified by Prentice (2006a). As such the SPs can be USPs or SSPs. The other dimension of the matrix is made up of the four standard SWOT categories. This dimension is used as it is commonly understood by managers in the tourism industry. The matrix is completed by looking first at destination utilities and allocating these to those which are strengths and those which are weaknesses. Destination utilities are then reviewed in terms of the opportunities and threats which are provided by the operating environment of the destination, and how that operating environment might be expected to change in the short to medium term. The same process is followed for experiences, and once completed is repeated for symbols. The matrix provides a systematic approach to considering the SPs of destinations, and is particularly useful when completed in terms of USPs whether these be unique or unusual SPs.

The matrices are normally completed by persons knowledgeable of SWOTs and also of particular destinations. Foremost among such groups are travel intermediaries or destination managers. When used in this way the matrices are a basis for self reflection on a destination as an integrated product. A further application of the destination matrix is to use it as a framework to ensure that the dimensionality of consumer surveys encompasses all types of USPs, and not simply their current relevance but how they might be expected to develop.

Target Market	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
(U)USP (Utilities)				
(U)ESP (Experiences)				
(U)SSP (Symbols)				

Figure 1: Destination Appraisal Matrix

The present paper outlines the preliminary findings of an initial application of this model in Iran, applied as the basis of self-reflection by destination influentials. It is the first of a series of applications which are in the process of being implemented. Iran is a relatively closed society to British researchers and the University of Strathclyde is unusual in being able to teach in Iran, and to undertake associated research to inform that teaching. In 2007 as a key note, O’Gorman presented the Prentice-O’Gorman Destination Appraisal Matrix to the 5th International Conference on Tourism in Islamic Countries, in Tehran. This conference was a meeting of Iran’s leading influentials in hospitality and tourism. These leading influentials were engaged in a workshop to test the matrix in the Iranian context with the intention of informing Iranian tourism development. The presentation of the model was well received and has featured prominently in the key Farsi language tourism journal (Prentice and O’Gorman 2007). The influentials were asked to complete a destination matrix independently of each other and to focus on their own destination within Iran. They were further asked to think of SPs appropriate to European visitors. The follow up from the workshop has been the analysis of the data supplied by the participants and it is the preliminary analysis of this data which is the focus of the intended paper.

Principal themes of work in progress

The first theme of the work in progress is the Prentice-O’Gorman Destination Appraisal Matrix itself. This matrix is shown in Figure 1.

The second theme of the work is how the effectively the participants were able to use the matrices. A summary measure of effectiveness is the number of cells left vacant in the matrices. A second summary measure is the number of items included in different cells in the matrices. A third summary measure is the number of items misplaced in the matrices (for example where utilities are entered as experiences).

The third theme of the work is how these leading hospitality and tourism influentials actually described Iranian tourism in terms both of its USPs and SWOT analyses.

Progress to Date

The destination appraisal matrices completed by the respondents have been analysed using an agglomerative hierarchical content analysis in which individual items have been combined into more generic concepts. This form of content analysis has been successfully applied elsewhere (Prentice and Andersen 2007). The content analysis has been informed by generic hospitality structures and practices as modified for an Islamic context (O’Gorman 2007; O’Gorman et al 2007). Preliminary findings to date emphasise the usability of the destination matrix, but the tendency of influentials in Iran still to think of their destinations in terms of utilities and not necessarily so extensively as experiences. Symbolism is readily understood by these Iranian influentials but focuses on matters which may be less appropriate for European visitors. An emergent concept is Islamic tourism which implicitly challenges a focus on European markets. By the time of CAUTHE it is expected that the three themes identified above will have been explored in the context of the data and that participants at CAUTHE will themselves prove a useful panel with whom to assess the validity of the hierarchical means of data reduction. As such CAUTHE is seen as invaluable means of informing the methodology.

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