

Exploration of the Tourism destination image's determinants on the revisit intention: The case of Tunisia

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Abstract:

The intention of revisiting is essential for the managers of any tourism destination since they aim at creating a special attachment between the destination and the tourist. The revisit intention of tourists is due to the fact that they have fairly good perceptions on this destination. The destination image is a key element in attracting tourists to the extent that individuals' perceptions of the destination image is closely linked with their travel behavior and thus with the destination choice (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993). The aim of this study is to analyze the influence of the destination image's determinants on the intention to revisit, which could help maintain and or revive tourism flows to the destination. To achieve this aim, this study is based on analysis of the Tunisian image to discuss the latest strategic options on how a positive image could be a prerequisite for a successful attraction strategy.

Keywords: Tunisian Tourism; Destination Image; Determinants of Image Destination; Choosing a Destination; Revisiting Intention.

Introduction:

Nowadays, the competition between tourist destinations is very fierce, and this is due to the growth of international tourism. In fact, the trip has become a source of escape for the individuals either to coming off from the daily life accumulated pressure, or to visit and discover new cultures. However, travellers have no reason to visit destinations which have nothing to offer to them. Indeed, the selection of destinations is based on the image that each destination vehicles by the positive and the negative associations it owns (Brezovec, et al, 2004). The image is, therefore, an essential and crucial element for a tourism destination so that this one could be more competitive and well positioned than its competitors destinations. More explicitly, the image of the destination influences the decision-making of tourists and their attitudes toward a specific destination.

Accordingly, the destination image is a key element in attracting tourists to the extent that the determinants that influence individuals' image perceptions about this destination are closely

related to their travel behavior. Thus, this influences on the choice to visit or revisit the destination (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993).

There is no doubt that the marketing decisions as well as the strategic planning concentrated in studying the destination image's determinants in relation to the tourist provisions, require a knowledge of the factors. Consequently, this influences on the choice of destination in order to predict its tourist flows in the short and long term and mainly determine the tourists revisit intentions. Therefore, it is interesting to know how tourists select their tourist destinations for the purposes of visiting or revisiting in one hand; and investigating the factors that determine their choice in the other hand. Thus, a precious image represents a fundamental condition for a destination like Tunisia.

Tunisia is regarded as one of the most frequented countries in the Maghreb through the variety of its contemporary and modern destinations, artisanal and culinary traditions, attractive diversification and its generous and welcoming people. However, because of the political, security and social (strikes to repetition) instability, the expenditures of foreign visitors fell by 37% in Tunisia during 2011 and ensuring thus no more that 29% of international revenues according to the WTO (Pierret, 2012)

This requires a study of the country image as well as tourism destination in order to enhance its added value and encourage tourists to revisit it.

Thus, the objective of this study is to analyze the strategic determinants of Tunisia's image as a tourism destination, and their influence on the tourist making- decision to revisit it. This could help maintain and/or revive the tourist flows to the destination. To achieve this aim, it is necessary to understand the role of an image destination in the tourist's decision-making process and also to perceive how a consolidated and positively shared destination image is really important in the consumers/visitors' minds. For this reason, this research paper is based on the analysis of Tunisia's image in order to exhale the strategic options on how a positive image could represent a prerequisite for a successful attraction strategy.

Furthermore, a tourism destination is considered as an amalgam of places which offers a memorable experience to tourists through its touristic characteristics. Therefore, in this study we would determine the distinguishing characteristics of Tunisia's image; then examine their concordance with tourists' perceptions in order to highlight a stereotype of the destination image. In addition, it is important to measure the influence of this positive image

on the related decision-making process of tourists' revisit. This aims at developing a relevant strategic plan which main lines will be proposed at the end of this study. So, in this context, the main question of this research is formulated as follows:

What are the Tunisia's image determinants that influence the revisit decision-making within tourists?

Similarly, this issue is supported by the following intermediary questions:

- Is the tourists' demand influenced by Tunisia's image as a touristic destination?
- How could the destination image act on the tourists' behavior and on their revisit choice/intention?

Thus, this study aims at exploring the determinants of Tunisia's image as well as the touristic destination and their role in the influence of tourists revisiting decisions or at least intentions. Consequently, this research will focus first of all on the theoretical framework in which the different concepts of the destination image and the revisit intention will be analyzed. Then, we will resort to a quantitative study based on a descriptive analysis of Tunisia's image within tourists. And finally, we will discuss the results and clarify the different contributions of our research.

I. Theoretical Framework

About 30 years ago, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has highlighted the importance of positive images for a country (WTO, 1979). More time before that, Hunt (1975) was the first to demonstrate the importance of "the tourism destination image" with the increase of the tourists' number of visiting different destinations as much or even more than the tangible resources. Thus, the destination image is a key factor in the destinations selection's process within tourists (Gunn, 1988; Hunt, 1975). This is also considered to be a means to differentiate a destination from others using the same related-attributes that can primarily induce the revisit intention to a special touristic destination. These reasons are due to the fact that the destination image is one of the common questions in the attractiveness. Hence, the destination image is one of the most important themes in the promotion of a city or country that requires a special attention in our study.

1. The Destination Image: Theoretical Foundations

In these last decades, Pike (2002) noted the interest of academic literature scope on the destination image. He revised 143 articles published between 1973 and 2000. It should be noted that the studies on the destination image shall take more magnitude in demonstrating the importance of this latter in the tourist decision-making related to the visit or the revisit of the destination. This involves a literature detour on the image concept, its training with the individual as well as its role in the decision-making including its major determinants particularly in the context of tourism.

1.1. The Destination Image

"The place image" is the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that people have about this place (Kotler, et al. 1993). Other authors see the image as an overview or conceptualization in the spirit. They suggest that the destination image is the sum of all the emotional qualities: experience, beliefs, ideas, memories, impressions that a person has towards a destination (Crompton, 1979; Reilly, 1990). More precisely, the destination image is "the expression of all the knowledge, impressions, prejudices, imaginations, thoughts and emotional objectives that an individual or a group of people could have about a particular place" (Lawson & Baud-Bovey, 1977). In the search scope about the destination image, a study has been made with eleven practitioners and academics in the world to answer 23 questions including "what is the destination image? ", One of these practitioners responded that "the destination image is the sum of all the perceptions of tourists and potential visitors and holders of this destination". He explained that "the image evolves through time and events that are controlled or not by the destination". In addition, he pointed out that the destination image depends on the internal and external environmental factors (Dimanche, 2003). According to Gallarza, et al (2002), the theoretical definition of an image must take into account four factors: complex, multiple, relativistic and dynamic. Della Corte and Micera (2007) emphasize the importance of the image in the actual demand for a destination and define the destination image as "the set of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a destination can generate in the minds of potential and real tourists". Hose and Wickens (2004) define the location image (or destination) as a visual, oral or written representation of a touristic place which is recorded and can also be transmitted to others. The image can be an individual freedom, it can also be regarded as a product, and the element of intangibility makes its perception more difficult. Milman and Pizam (1995) have suggested that the destination

image is composed of three elements: the first is the product, for example the quality of the attraction. The second is the behavior and the third is the environment such as the weather, the landscape, and the facilities.

Therefore, it is common to agree about the fact that the destination image is a composite and a multi-faceted construction. This later consists of a cognitive and affective assessment, interdependent and woven in a general impression (Stepchenkova and Morrison, 2006).

1.2. The Steps Followed in Constructing a Destination Image

A destination with a recognizable image and a positive perception within tourists has more probability to be chosen. In addition, the destination's perceived image after being visited influence the tourists' satisfaction, their intentions to make the revisit as well as sharing this impression with relatives (mouth-to-ear). Consequently, the place must offer expected experiences which correspond to the image that travellers have constructed about the so-called destination. Therefore, this depends certainly on the capacity of the destination.

The steps in the image construction are based on the perceptions of different tourists. Of course, the impact of all the internal and external factors that may influence the destination image among tourists must be taken into account. Thus, it is important to make a distinction between the perception *a priori* (mental construct made by an individual on a place without having a physical connection), the perception *in situ* (confronts the perception of tourists of a place to the reality of this place) and the perception *to posteriori* (shows that the experience of tourists does not end with the trip, but they consume certain elements in their daily lives).

In parallel, Gunn (1988) has identified several steps in the process of image construction within tourists: (1) the accumulation of mental destination images - the organic image; (2) the modification of the original image after the acquisition of the information - the inducing image ; (3) the decision to visit the destination; (4) the destination's visit; (5) the sharing of the destination; (6) the return to the house and (7) the modification of the image according to the experience. In this same perspective, according to Fakeye and Crompton (1991) the third level of the image construction is the experience image which is derived from a result of a visit. However, these images are linked to the individual perceptions of each tourist; they are not stable and are also subject to changes according to the construction steps (first visit or revisit, new information, etc.).

On the other hand, Baloglu and McCleary (1999a, 1999b) and Gartner (1993) consider the destination image as a concept formed by three interdependencies and by different components namely cognitive, affective and conative. The cognitive is the sum of what is known about a destination; the affective represents the feelings of a person toward a specific object e.g. a touristic destination- which can be favorable, unfavorable or neutral. The conative can be regarded as the probability of visiting a destination in a certain period of time. In this context, Baloglu and McCleary (1999) added that the affective image is one of the most influential elements and that it should be used more often by destinations managers for a better efficiency. They separate it into two dimensions: positive (arousing, exciting, enjoyable and relaxing) and negative (fast asleep, dark, unpleasant and painful).

These authors argue on the idea of the destination "relative image" which can be determined by comparing several competing destinations that will lead to the identification of the destinations' strengths and weaknesses, and the determination of the related-competitive advantages and the related-distinctive competencies to the characteristics of each place as well as compared to competitors' places. Furthermore, Weaver et al (2007) conducted a study about the evaluation of a destination to reveal the impact of the variables related to previous experiences of travel and rests. The latters were able to bring out two sets of variables in evaluating the destination image: the first set is composed of five variables which are designated as the previous experience of the trip (the number of country visits and the number of countries visited for the pleasure) and the characteristics of the trip (the duration of stay, the number of persons within the stay and the mode of stay). The second set of variables is called the destination assessment variables (satisfaction, quality of service, the value and the probability of return).

Other studies have uncovered further image determinants. As a matter of fact, the study of Baloglu (2001) has argued that "the familiarity with a destination seems to be an important determinant for the destination image". Also, it was deduced in this study that there is a relation between the high degrees of familiarity and positive images. In addition, Laws (1995) stated that the majority of the tourists' perceptions for a specific destination are influenced by their experiences with other destinations. This implies a comparison between the institutions, the attractions and the service standards. Moreover, Sirgy and Su (2000) have highlighted the concept of the "personal congruence" as a determinant of the destination image which is different from the "functional congruence". They defined it as being the link between the public services provided by a destination and what do the tourists expect about this destination. It must be also mentioned that these tourists' expectations are formed by the

received information about the destination: advertising, brochures, WOM (word-of-mouth), internet and in a significant way the Cinema for example the Turkish series. (Yüksel, 2007; Stepchenkova and Morrison, 2006).

In general, individuals create their own destination image by their general knowledge and their feelings, as well as by external influence like for example friends and relatives, advertisements, intermediaries or by their own past experiences. In this way, the touristic destination projected image is a crucial interest issue for the various tourism agencies.

Therefor in the following table we have summarized the internal and external factors which influence the individual image construction:

Table 1: Factors Influencing the Image Construct

External factors	Internal factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The natural and cultural attraction of a destination - The political, economic and technological environment - The quality of products and services - The instant travel experience satisfaction - The intermediaries - The tourism destination information - The social (mouth-to-ear, phone calls) - The Weather - The Presence of a brand - The media and the Internet - The marketing and advertising activities - The postcards and brochures - Films - Events. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The geographical origin - The social and cultural environment - The character - The motivations and expectations - The personal feeling (favorable vs. unfavorable) - The perceived risks - The familiarity with a destination - The experience in the destination - The relationship with previous travel experiences in other destinations - The lack of information.

Source: Di Marino, E. (2008). The Strategic Dimension of Destination Image. An Analysis of the French Riviera Image from the Italian tourists' perceptions. PhD, Tourism Management, University of Naples 'Fredrico II' Faculty of Economics: Naples.

2. The Visit and Revisit Intention within Tourists:

How do images influence the visit/revisit intentions to a particular destination among consumers? To find answers to this question, it is important to discover what factors influence the consumer choice according to the image that he has about this destination. It is therefore necessary to discern the role of the image in the choice of the trip in order to glimpse the main reasons of destination tourists revisit intention in the literature, which will be our basic work in this study about the case of Tunisia.

2.1. The Role of the Image in the Trip Decision-Making Process:

Tourists have a preformed image on many destinations and it is this image which affects their travel decision to a destination rather than to another. Moreover, both the intention and the decision to buy a stay and the choice between different destinations are complex processes that rely on the image of what is called destination. In this same context, Tapachai and Waryszak (2000) stipulate that this choice or more precisely the destination image is generated by the "Value" for which they have established a related-concept based on five determinants: functional, social, emotional, epistemic and finally conditional. Also, Echtner and Ritchie (1991) have developed a measurement system using quantitative and qualitative methods to reveal the determinants of the destination image which includes thirty-five attributes. Among these attributes, we have taken the most important ones including the three opening questions in this study in order to capture the richness of Tunisia's image.

2.2. The Revisit Intention of the Touristic Destination

In studies on the destination image and the factors of influence on the tourist decisions, it has been found that the destination image depends on the previous experience that the traveller has lived in this specific destination, the degree of familiarity that he had, its geographical aspects, social and cultural origin and especially the expectations it has about this touristic destination (Beerli and Martin, 2004b). These factors will surely have an impact on consumers' attitudes toward a destination including the revisit intention. In fact, Ross (1993) argues that if the tourists have a more pleasant experience than expected, they are more likely to return to the same destination. It is also noticed that, as highlighted by Bigné et al. (2001), quality has a positive impact on the satisfaction of visitors, since the satisfaction determines the willingness to revisit the destination. But, the tourists' satisfaction with a destination is not a guarantee of their return (Juaneda, 1996).

Therefore, in general and in most studies, the satisfaction allows influencing the destination choice, products and services consumption, and the decision of repetition (Jang and Feng, 2007). Accordingly, Fornell (1992) and Kozak (2001) argue that the tourists' satisfaction toward a specific destination is a determining factor of the tourism revisit. In addition, satisfied tourists tend to transmit their positive experience to others and to repeat their visit (Alen, Rodriguez & Fraiz, 2007; Hallowell 1996; Kozak and Rimmington 2000; Pizam 1994; Oppermann, 2000).

Thereby, a positive destination image could influence positively on both the satisfaction of tourists and their revisit intention (Chi and Qu, 2008; Alexandris, Kouthouris and Meligdis 2006; Pritchard and Howard, 1997; Yüksel, 2007). This has prompted our

scientific curiosity to explore Tunisia's image determinants as a touristic destination, in this research paper, which could influence the tourist satisfaction and mainly his revisit intention. We will provide further details about the related-empirical study in the coming sections.

II. Methodology

1. The Sampling

To achieve the objectives of our research, we have conducted a quantitative study using a questionnaire. This latter was designed and administered via Google within different tourists who visited Tunisia. Various respondents have a common interest which is linked to their love of trip.

I. The Measuring Instruments for the Image: the Questionnaire

In the questionnaire we have adopted a combination of different types of closed and open questions according to the measurement scale proposed by Echtner and Ritchie (1993) in order to obtain a clear and precise tourists' destination image that those ones would take into account or consider when making-decision for a new visit.

As a result, our study's questionnaire was divided into two parts:

- The motivations of visitors
- The image of Tunisia (the perceptions of visitors), linked to their knowledge of the destination.

III. Analysis of Results:

Our research work deals with a very little discussed subject in the tourism literature. In fact, few research works have been devoted to the study of the reasons that motivate people to travel abroad and to choose a destination rather than another, and more explicitly to revisit a specific destination (Prebensen, 2004; Yoon and Uysal, 2005). In our research, a descriptive analysis was performed with the SPSS® 20 software. This analysis allows especially asserting the influence of certain image determinants on the revisit intention of which we present the results in this part.

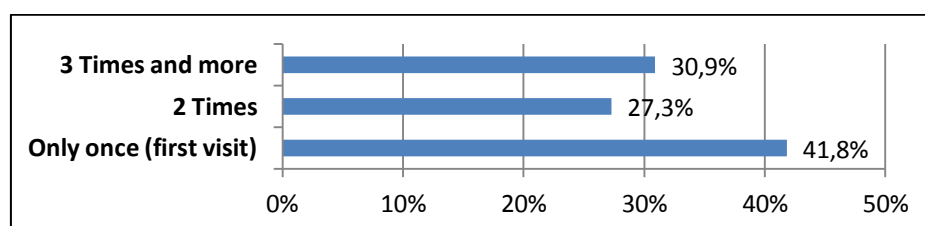


Figure 1: Number of Visits

First, the results obtained following our study showed that more than 41,8 % of respondents have visited Tunisia only once. Whereas 30,9 % of tourists have visited it more than three times. This result may be due to tourists' satisfaction with Tunisia or to other determinants of its image, which are more considered in the following analyzes.

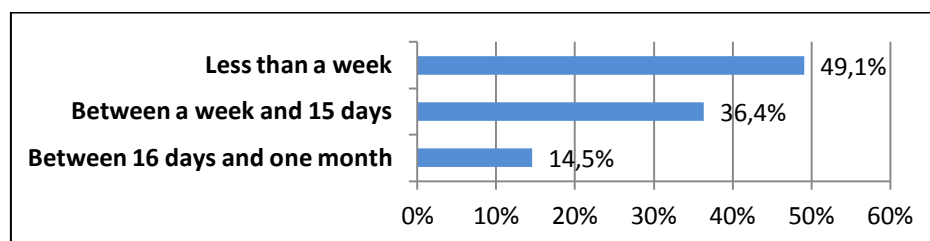


Figure 2: Stay Duration

The majority of respondents (49.1 %) remained less than a week while 36,4% remained more than two weeks. This result confirmed the idea that the image destination is regarded as a process of inference of touristic consumption.

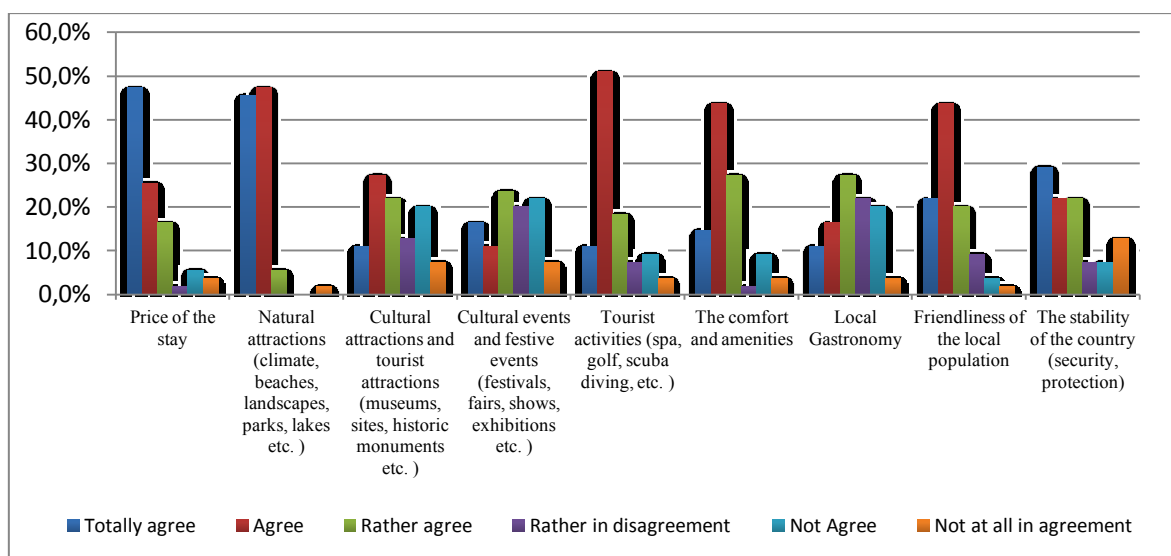


Figure 3: Satisfaction with Tunisia According to the Travel Motivations

The satisfaction level of tourists with Tunisia, based on the analysis of the travel motivations, varies according to the destination characteristics (figure 3). As demonstrated, more than 47% of interviewed tourists chose Tunisia for the price; 45.5% are completely satisfied with the natural attractions of the destination and 47.3% are only satisfied with the cultural and touristic attractions, the satisfaction varies between tourists, so 27.3% are satisfied, whereas 20% are not. In addition, tourists' motivations with cultural and festive events presented in different Tunisian cities lean toward dissatisfaction; 23.6 % are rather satisfied and 20% are dissatisfied, and 21.8% are not satisfied at all. In addition, half tourists are fairly satisfied with

touristic activities at almost 51% ; however, tourists express a majority of satisfaction concerning the comfort and conveniences with 43.6% fairly satisfied. Furthermore, others are satisfied with the local gastronomy, the opinions are shared between satisfied at 54.5% and dissatisfied at 45.5% shared out on different degrees; tourists are predominantly motivated by the friendliness of the local population with a maximum rate of 43.6%; as well as the country stability, although a non-negligible proportion of respondents are do not agree at all, which means therefore that they are not satisfied at 12.7 %.

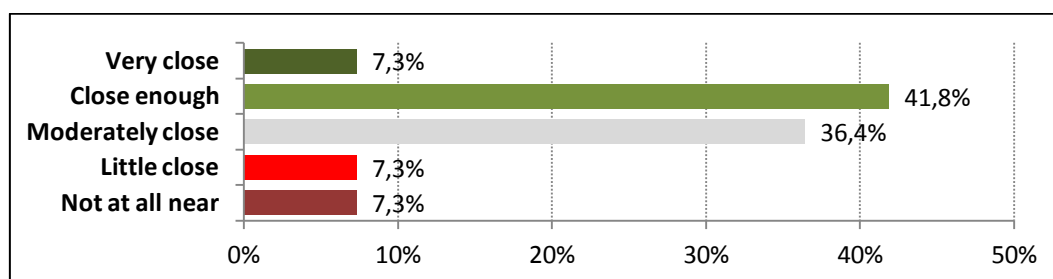


Figure 4: The Degree of Approximation of Tunisia to an Ideal Destination

The presence of several natural attractions, a beautiful climate, hospitality, a good quality of services as well as better protection of people and political stability confirm the positive judgment of respondents concerning Tunisia as one of the best travel destinations. Therefore, it is interesting to note that 41.8% of tourists with their image about Tunisia feel that it approximates the ideal travel destination when taking their travel decision. By contrast, 7.3% of respondents feel that it does not at all approximate.

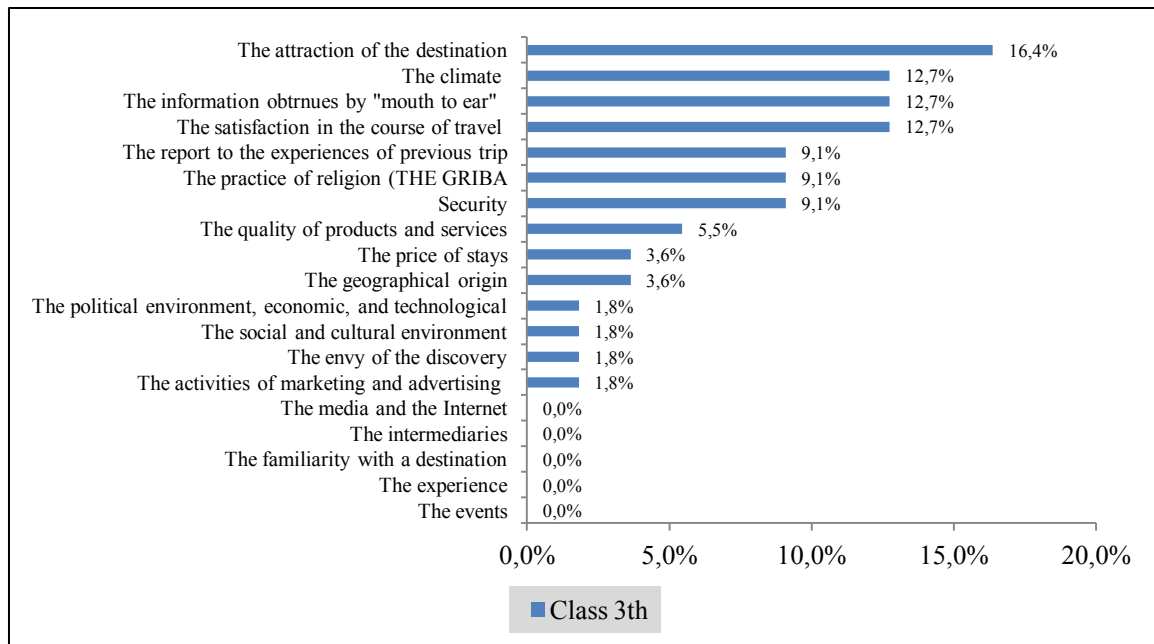


Figure 5: Classification of Motivations in Order of Importance to Tourists

This figure above has just confirmed that Tunisia has succeeded in attracting tourists with more than 16.4 %, and then comes the climate which has an influence on the tourists' choice especially for people who live in cold countries lacking of sun. The rate is about 12.7 %. The satisfaction during the trip as well as the word-of-mouth is not going away from the second criterion (which is the climate) with a rate of 12.7 %. Therefore, tourists communicate between themselves about their travel experiences, so we note that Tunisia has gained a good impression by former tourists mainly through their adventures stories to their friends. Consequently, this encourages them to come and visit the destination. In addition, the practice of the Jewish religion in Ghriba ranks in the 3rd place with 9.1%, which confronts the Muslim Tunisian population to the Jewish community.

As a result, Tunisia is a destination of peace and differences, especially after the terrorist events in the Ghriba and the political overthrow that the country has experienced. The quality of products and services as well as the quality of stay ranks in the 4th position which must be improved to achieve the best rate of satisfaction. Indeed, a rate of 1.8% is a very low percentage for a tourism destination such as Tunisia. The advertising activities and marketing reach the last rate in our research with 1.8% and it requires more efforts to better promote in a remarkable and effective way the Tunisian tourism.

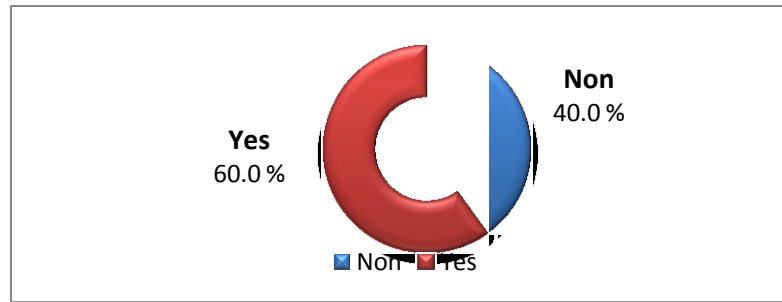


Figure 6: Preponderance of Hospitality

The results obtained have shown that the search for hospitality is an important determinant for tourists in their choice of Tunisia as a touristic destination. In other words, the hospitality is acting positively and significantly on the touristic destination image construction. It is worth noting that among the negative responses concerning the importance of this motivation (40 %), some of the respondents visiting their family or conducting a pilgrimage so that their choice of destination is not motivated by the hospitality of the country.

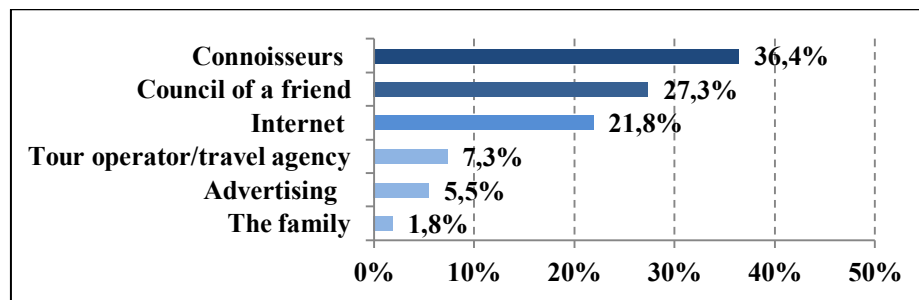


Figure 7: Sources of Information

Connoisseurs (37.4 %) and the advice of friends (27.3 %) represent an important source of information. The Word-Of-Mouth is therefore the main factor in the destination image construction and consequently in the travel motivation. The disparity between the Internet influence (21.8%) and the traditional ads (5.5%) is significant in the tourists' decision-making toward a touristic destination. In fact, the new media constitute an overriding factor in the decision-making of a trip. Also, the travel agencies and tour operators are always a good source of information (7,3%). They guarantee a certain degree of security for travellers.

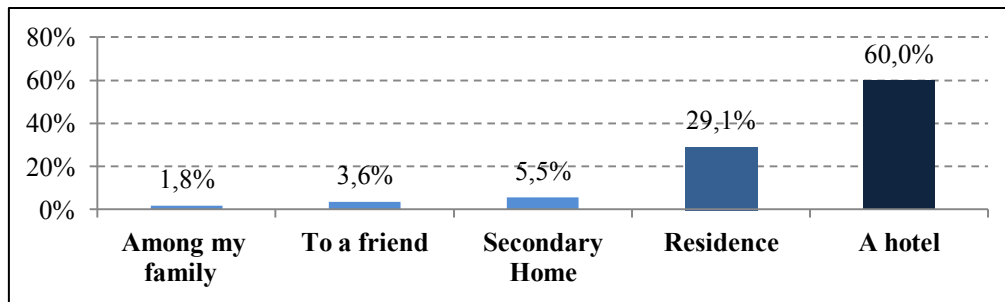


Figure 8: The Convenience

During their visit to Tunisia, most of the respondents (60 %) prefer hotels as accommodation against 29.1% who have chosen residences to spend their nights. Tourists visiting Tunisia therefore focus on the circuit of traditional tourism in hotel accommodation. The accommodation including family, friends or secondary home are in according to them significantly low.

Conclusion

This research deals with the distinctive determinants of a destination image which influence the destination revisit intention. Thus the main objective of Tunisia tourism managers is to revive the positive image which has made Tunisia the tourists preferred destination for years. The study has enabled us to highlight these overriding determinants of the Tunisia touristic image and the revisit intention decision-making.

In fact, the measure of the destination image remains a complex phenomenon characterized by the multiplicity of attributes and inferences, its creation and evolution depend on several factors. To resolve this complexity, this paper has shown first, the importance of the destination image in the visit choice and the revisit intention. In a second step, this research work attempted to examine the effect of different determinants on the satisfaction and the intention to revisit the touristic destination. For this reason, we have adopted a quantitative study using a questionnaire via internet from a convenience sample of 880 respondents. Descriptive analysis has been carried out to verify the role of the image in the visit choice and especially in the revisiting intention.

Thereby, Tunisia's image has experienced a quite remarkable decline in the last period caused by political and security instability expressed by one end of 12.7 %. This rate is meager compared to the rate of tourists' satisfaction with this stability. Nevertheless, we could not neglect the fact that the stability of the country is a major destination image determinant. From the side of the local gastronomy, the relative tourists' satisfaction is much

shared, although Tunisia receives a diversified tourist population. More explicitly, the leaders of the culinary offerings in the various Tunisian touristic regions must have a look at the culinary desires of tourists while promoting the culinary traditions of the country. In addition, Tunisia offers a variety of touristic activities such as the spa, the thalasso spa, golf and scuba diving which seems to satisfy the majority of tourists to more than 70% in total. But the tourist is in continuous search for novelty which must be taken into consideration for innovative ideas in this context. The same applies to the natural attractions, tourist and cultural attractions and cultural and festive events: the majority of tourists are satisfied with the climate, the natural aspect, historical sites, and others; but they are less satisfied with the events because Tunisia does not operate its traditional resources adequately which allows to mediate and especially to assert them as the image traits of the country. Finally, Tunisia's image determinants, although the results of our study show a more than average satisfaction, should be better exploited in order to create enough value to attract new visitors and retain loyal ones by influencing on the revisiting intention.

It is worth mentioning that this research work has led to different contributions. On the theoretical level, it has contributed to the existing research in consumer behavior by studying the process of destination image construct. It has also proved that the good destination image construction will lead to choose a specific destination and to encourage its revisit intention. Therefore, a relevant marketing action must come from a development and a prospective study. Thus, modeling tourists' behavior by integrating the construction of destination image variables is fundamental to both tracing a more coherent marketing approach in the current context of appropriate tourists specificities' offer of each destination, and identifying the variables that influence travel behavior. This thinking also helps to develop perennial attractiveness and long-term strategies to remain in a competitive position within an increasing competition characterized markets.

Separately, the special feature of this study is to highlight the role of the destination image in the study of the tourist decision-making behavior and mainly the related-satisfaction to the revisit intention, which would facilitate the good understanding of the tourist's choice and could improve his perception and attitude. However, the inherent limitations in this research work could be summarized in the difficult political and economic situation that occurred in the country after the revolution.

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