



DESTINATION IN A COUNTRY IMAGE CONTEXT

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Abstract: This paper provides greater substance to destination image research by contextualizing and expanding the scope of relevant constructs through the use of knowledge gained in product-country research. These product-country image constructs are built on an attitude theory framework, and this platform enables the application of them in an examination of effects on touristic intentions. A model is presented which represents a focus on the overlapping areas of product-country image and destination image within the broader country image context. The model is tested to determine the value of this integration of constructs for destinations. Results demonstrate that the broader conceptualization of country image can lead to greater understanding of touristic intentions. **Keywords:** country image, intentions, attitude. © 2007 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Résumé: Destination dans un contexte d'image de pays. Cet article fournit plus de substance aux recherches sur l'image de destination en contextualisant et élargissant la portée des constructions pertinentes par l'utilisation des connaissances acquises dans les recherches de produit-pays. Ces constructions de l'image produit-pays sont basées sur un cadre de la théorie de l'attitude, et cette plate-forme permet d'appliquer ces constructions à l'examen des effets sur les intentions touristiques. Le modèle présenté se concentre sur les zones chevauchantes de l'image produit-pays et l'image de destination dans le contexte plus large de l'image de pays. Le modèle est testé pour déterminer la valeur de cette intégration de constructions pour les destinations. Les résultats démontrent que la conceptualisation élargie de l'image de pays peut mener à une meilleure compréhension des intentions touristiques. **Mots-clés:** image de pays, intentions, attitude. © 2007 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

Images are simplifications of more complex ideas.

Image represents the sum of beliefs, attitudes, and impressions that a person or group has of an object. The object may be a company,

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product, brand, place, or person. The impressions may be true or false, real or imagined, but regardless, images guide and shape behavior'' (Barich and Kotler 1991:95).

Images also guide behavior by providing a cue for information processing. They are knowledge structures that can be used as mental short-cuts for processing information in decisionmaking processes (Kotler and Gertner 2002). Therefore, they are important in research because they influence tourists' decisionmaking and behavior.

Product-Country Image (PCI) and Tourism Destination Image (TDI) are two fields of research that have evolved separately through distinct literature and research communities, yet developments in the former can contribute significantly to the latter. TDI generally refers to perceptions (such as images) of a destination, while PCI refers to the perceptions about countries with regards to purchases whose production is related to them (that is, made in, designed in, head office in, located in). Although the development of these research areas has generally occurred separately, both streams investigate complex perceived images about places and how these affect consumer decisions. They have many overlapping and related interests and constructs. The focus in this paper is how PCI constructs can contribute to tourism destination research.

A desire to draw the two fields together has recently been exhibited. Mossberg and Kleppe (2005) examine generic constructs for country and product-country images allowing for dimensions based on product place, design, brand, and headquarter residence country. They relate these to destination images based on the state, region, city, and attraction. However, the authors do not explore the theoretical underpinnings to assess the multidimensional nature of constructs involved in PCI and TDI research. Indeed, Mossberg and Kleppe initiate the discussion on converging PCI and TDI knowledge yet do not offer or test a model. Other scholars have also missed the opportunity by engaging in PCI tangentially (Anholt 2003; Blain, Levy and Ritchie 2005; Hankinson 2004) without demonstrating how PCI-based knowledge may be incorporated to deepen understanding of TDI effects, or vice versa.

Although Beerli and Martin (2004) criticize the majority of TDI studies as being atheoretical, attitude theory can be the platform to link PCI and TDI research. This has been developed through multiple disciplines, including the psychology and management fields. Attitudes are tendencies in action towards objects or experiences (Alcock, Carment, Sadava, Collins, and Green 1997). They represent a learned way people deal with the complex world around them (Zanna and Jamieson 1989). Attitudes are comprised of cognitions (beliefs), affect (emotions), and conations (actions) (Alcock et al 1997). While Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) conceptualize attitudes on the basis of a sum of cognitions or beliefs about an object or experience, Fishbein and Middlestadt (1995) argue that attitudes can only be understood by examining a person's beliefs and feelings together. This paper provides an important contribution by devising and testing a core TDI attitude-based model situated in the country-image context. Despite the common theoretical grounding, different scales are often used in TDI

and PCI research. Certainly, Beerli and Martin (2004) observe that measurement scale usage in the former studies may be characterized as lacking homogeneity.

OPPORTUNITY FOR IMAGE CONVERGENCE

The two constructs—product-country image and tourism destination image—differ in several ways. Research efforts on these are distinguished by their analytical focus. While their overlapping interests may appear obvious, there has been little crossover of language, research paradigms, or researchers. Conceptually, both areas consider place in broad terms to include various levels (provinces or states, cities, regions). PCI studies are published in marketing and international business journals while those dealing with TDI can be found in tourism-specific journals such as *Annals of Tourism Research*.

Destination Image

Early and more recent research provides evidence that the image of a place influences touristic decisions (Baloglu and McCleary 1999; Goodrich 1978; Hunt 1975; Pike and Ryan 2004; Tapachai and Waryszak 2000). Destination image is defined as “an attitudinal construct consisting of an individual’s mental representation of knowledge (beliefs), feelings, and global impression about an object or destination” (Baloglu and McCleary 1999:870). Indeed, attitudes are argued to be the most appropriate means to represent understandings of place and its impact on decisionmaking (White 2004). The term destination refers to the location visited by a tourist and may be interpreted as a city (Dadgostar and Isotalo 1995; Opermann 1996), region (Ahmed 1991; Fakeye and Crompton 1991), or country (Chon 1991; Echtner and Ritchie 1993).

Complexity is one of the major characteristics of the TDI field outlined by Gallarza, Gil and Calderon (2002). It refers to the multiple components (cognitive, evaluative, conative) involved in representing TDI (Baloglu and McCleary 1999; Cai 2002; Chon 1990; Foster and Jones 2000; Gartner 1993; Kim and Yoon 2003; Walmsley and Young 1998). The conative aspect includes beliefs about the aspects of landscape or destination elements, while the evaluative is representative of destination appraisals, and the conative can include the decision. The measurement of these multiple components varies across different studies. Gallarza et al (2002) provide a recent review of attributes studied in TDI research. The themes can be categorized as pertaining to beliefs about the natural environment, including natural attractions, scenery, climate, and beliefs about the built environment (Echtner and Ritchie 1993); culture (Baloglu and McCleary 1999); modern society Tapachi and Waryszak 2000); friendliness (Trauer and Ryan 2005); as well as evaluations of the destination, including arousing, exciting, relaxing (Baloglu and McCleary 1999); satisfaction (Chon 1990); quality of service (Echtner and Ritchie 1993); and overall assessment (Reilly

1990). From a conative perspective, the decision to visit a destination (Chon 1990; Foster and Jones 2000) or make recommendations to others (Chon 1991) represents a common thread of measuring behavioral intentions.

While a multi-attribute construct is the dominant approach in TDI (Pike 2002), a recent structural equation modeling presents the view that it can be represented through a hierarchical model where affective and cognitive constructs comprise an underlying construct, according to Kim and Yoon (2003). They found a higher-order factor had strong relationships to the primary factors with direct measures reflecting the affective and cognitive aspects of destination image. While finding support for a broader destination image, the existence of an underpinning second-tier construct may also be reflective of other factors previously not considered in TDI research (such as countries and their people).

Product-Country Image

Researchers in the area define these images as mental maps or knowledge structures related to countries (Jaffe and Nebenzahl 2001). People use product-related country images to assist in the processing of information and to aid in the formulation of purchase decisions (Kotler and Gertner 2002). PCI effects are described as the "impact that generalizations and perceptions about a country have on a person's evaluations of the country's products and/or brands" (Nebenzahl, Jaffe and Lambert 1997:28). Beyond influencing consumer decisionmaking about products, country-image-effects research has also explored the resulting influence on decisions relating to organizational buying (Heslop, Papadopoulos, Dowdles, Wall and Compeau 2004) and locations for investment (Wee, Lim and Tan 1993). Due to the importance of product-country images in the marketplace, research suggests that policymakers should consider the images held by foreigners about their country and be cognizant of how the products they associate with their country can impact those perceptions.

PCI theory is a maturing area in the marketing discipline with current research efforts striving to confirm the modeling of theoretical concepts. Although early attempts conceived the country-image construct as one-dimensional (Erickson, Johansson and Chao 1984) and product-centric (Han 1988), more recent publications generally embrace the construct's distinctiveness from products and its multidimensional nature (Heslop et al 2004; Laroche, Papadopoulos, Heslop and Mourali 2005). As such, a key aspect of PCI theory is to explain the effect of both product- and country-people images through an understanding of attitudes. The cognitive, affective/evaluative, and conative phases of attitude formation are represented through the beliefs about a country and its products (cognitive), the feelings towards it and its products (affective), and behavioral intentions to purchase its products and interest in relationships with the country in respect to investments, ties, and immigration (conative).

The first stream of PCI research to focus in greater detail on the dimensions of country- and people-beliefs specifically centered on those beliefs related to capabilities or competencies to create and deliver marketable products. However, more recent conceptualizations have cast a wider perspective on the role of general beliefs about the character of the people and the country to provide a richer understanding of PCI. Beliefs about the products of a country (their performance, aesthetic, value and hence their desirability) are now seen as derived beliefs, resting on a foundation of country-people images and attitudes.

Country- and people-beliefs may be best represented using two groups: character and competency beliefs (Heslop et al 2004). The former refer to the features or traits of the country and people and include measures such as active and admirable in world affairs (Heslop et al 2004; Knight and Calantone 2000; Lee and Ganesh 1999); levels of environmental protection (Heslop et al 2004) aligned with the home country in world affairs (Lee and Ganesh 1999); quality of life (Heslop et al 2004), individual rights and freedoms (Heslop et al 2004): political stability (Heslop et al 2004; Orbaiz and Papadopoulos 2003): and standard of living (Orbaiz and Papadopoulos 2003; Parameswaran and Pisharodi 2002). Competencies that center on capacities directly or indirectly foundational to designing and producing good products and are associated with the country include technically advanced (Heslop et al 2004; Knight and Calantone 2000; Laroche et al 2005; Lee and Ganesh 1999; Orbaiz and Papadopoulos 2003); level of economic development (Lee and Ganesh 1999; Manrai, Lascu and Manrai 1998); stability of economy (Heslop et al 2004); and wealth (Heslop et al 2004; Laroche et al 2005; Orbaiz and Papadopoulos 2003).

Recent studies have also measured beliefs about a country's people. The people-character belief measures include friendliness (Heslop et al 2004; Knight and Calantone 2000; Lee and Ganesh 1999; Parameswaran and Pisharodi 2002); pride in achieving high standards (Lee and Ganesh 1999); trustworthiness (Heslop et al 2004; Laroche et al 2005); and individualism (Heslop et al 2004). The competencies of the country's people can influence product beliefs and evaluations, and these beliefs have been measured as creative (Knight and Calantone 2000; Lee and Ganesh 1999; Parameswaran and Pisharodi 2002); well-educated (Heslop et al 2004; Knight and Calantone 2000; Laroche et al 2005; Lee and Ganesh 1999; Orbaiz and Papadopoulos 2003; Parameswaran and Pisharodi 2002); industrious (Heslop et al 2004; Knight and Calantone 2000; Lee and Ganesh 1999; Parameswaran and Pisharodi 2002); technically skilled (Knight and Calantone 2000; Lee and Ganesh 1999; Parameswaran and Pisharodi 2002), and high work ethic (Heslop et al 2004; Knight and Calantone 2000; Laroche et al 2005; Lee and Ganesh 1999; Parameswaran and Pisharodi 2002).

Cognitions about products themselves also appear in the PCI literature and are gauged against several measures grouped as perceptions about performance descriptors and peripheral features of a country's products. Performance descriptors include quality (Olsen and Olsson 2002), reliable (Orbaiz and Papadopoulos 2003); technical (Knight

and Calantone 2000), attractive (Heslop et al 2004); stylish (Lee and Ganesh 1999); and original (Parameswaran and Pisharodi 2002). Examples of peripheral features include advertised (Lee and Ganesh 1999); available (Parameswaran and Pisharodi 2002); and inexpensive (Knight and Calantone 2000).

The affective/evaluative component of attitudes is represented in the PCI literature through two main constructs for the country and its people, as well as its products. First, the evaluations of the country and people have been measured using culturally similar (Parameswaran and Pisharodi 2002); economically similar (Parameswaran and Pisharodi 2002); ideal country (Laroche et al 2005); likeable (Laroche et al 2005); and similar political views scales (Parameswaran and Pisharodi 2002). Second, the product evaluation construct has involved several measures, including like (Lee and Ganesh 1999); other people like (Lee and Ganesh 1999), proud to own (Heslop et al 2004); satisfied (Heslop et al 2004; Lee and Ganesh 1999); good value (Heslop et al 2004; Parameswaran and Pisharodi 2002); and an overall product rating (Heslop et al 2004; Olsen and Olsson 2002; Orbaiz and Papadopoulos 2003; Parameswaran and Pisharodi 2002).

Finally, the constructs representing the conative component of attitude in PCI research include desired country and people associations and product buying or intentions. Behavioral/conative aspects of country and people are represented through desired associations including closer ties with, more investment from, immigration from, and investing in the country (Laroche et al 2005). Although desired country associations may be considered the country–people terminal dependent variable, PCI investigation also includes the buying decision as a terminal dependent variable. It has been measured with happy to buy as gift (Lee and Ganesh 1999); intention to purchase (Parameswaran and Pisharodi 2002); receptivity to buy (Orbaiz and Papadopoulos 2003); recommend to others (Lee and Ganesh 1999); and willingness to buy (Heslop et al 2004).

PCI and TDI Research

Despite separate publication venues for PCI and TDI outputs, a few touch points have appeared, indicating possible opportunities for convergence. These points exist in the literature in general place-branding, promotion of major events, and the use of tourism as a control variable in PCI research. Place-branding of products involves the use of images associated with potentially any location, including countries and destinations, for the promotion of products. “Every place has an image ... those of nations and other places are not directly under the marketer’s control” (Papadopoulos and Heslop 2002:295). Examples of place-branding in practice include London Fog coats or Napa Valley wines. In the case of wines, Thode and Maskulka (1998) explore the salience of origin to revenues gleaned from the market and the distinctive nature that local imagery can impart. From a TDI perspective, place-branding research investigates the influence of media- and

sport-imaging efforts on the image of the destination. For instance, Mercille (2005) demonstrates that tourists' views of Tibet are related to the portrayal of the place in various media. Smith (2005) also shows that sport-related perceptions can be applied to construct a city image.

The influence of major events on the image of a place is another area of potential touch point for PCI and TDI. Some events may be specifically targeted to increase tourism, such as major sporting events, while organizers also promote them as having spillover effects to other country-image uses, such as exports and investment attraction. TDI research has shown that perceptions of place for a major event, like Korea's 2002 World Cup, form an antecedent for how people interpret their experiences onsite (Lee, Lee and Lee 2005). Other research has drawn attention to the flexibility of images when major events encourage people to reconsider their conceptions of places. For instance, a PCI-based examination of the image of South Korea before and after hosting the 1988 Olympics found that people with high exposure to the Games had an overall improved image of the country (Jaffe and Nebenzahl 1993). In this case, there was a general shift in perceptions that was not confined to only a few attributes. However, major events do not always affect the image of a place. It is proposed by way of explanation that the events that transpired in Tiananmen Square, although viewed negatively by consumers, did not represent a departure from perceptions previously held by American consumers toward China and its products (Brunner, Flaschner and Lou 1993). Similarly, TDI research demonstrates that major events do not necessarily change the image of the place. For instance, Richards and Wilson (2004) found that people's views of Rotterdam were still dominated by modern architecture, water, and its working character despite efforts to reposition the city as a "cultural destination" by linking it to cultural events.

A third prospective touch point between PCI and TDI literature is in the impact of tourism in the PCI literature. Tourism and country images appear to have a two-way relationship. In the one direction, travel to a country is related to the formation or modification of place perceptions, as the image often moves from a simple stereotype to one that more accurately captures the actual capabilities of the country (Papadopoulos and Heslop 1986). This relationship has made tourism a useful control variable in PCI research (Nijssen and Douglas 2004). Further, the image of a country established through the touristic experience is argued to have a positive effect on the export of products and services (Gnoth 2002). In the other direction, the image of a country (including what it produces and the quality of those products) can directly affect the intention to visit (Litvin and MacLaurin 2001).

Destination Images as Products

Few products could rival the complexity of countries and destinations in the images they engender. However, the PCI and TDI studies

construct “product” in different ways. The PCI literature generally models a construct of product representative of tangible goods or services as associated outcomes of a country’s activities. Conversely, in the tourism context, the product construct is defined more as the destination experience itself. This distinction has led to the investigation of several product attributes particular to the tourism context that have not been explored in the PCI investigations (cultural attractions, night-life/entertainment, and shopping).

Similar to layers of a product (core benefits, actual product, and augmented aspects), connecting underlying PCI aspects into the TDI context may be assisted through the organization of destination attributes in a nested framework. Placement in the framework is determined by the extent of human intervention. The outer range represents the natural environment, including the wildlife, forests, beaches, mountains, lakes, and rivers. This level of a destination can be classified at the country level, because it is the country that contains these characteristics of a place to many tourists. In the Australian context, the natural environment would include the outback, ocean reefs, and the wildlife that inhabits the countryside. The mid-range of the framework represents a more geographically focused area that is constructed by human intervention. These are the places people visit such as the cities and towns of a country. It also includes the major attractions of these places, for example, stadiums, museums, and galleries. The core of the framework represents the constructed and controlled environments that provide tourists with predictable and consistent experiences. These places are generally referred to as resorts. An example of this type of environment is Disney World or all-inclusive sun destinations where tourists seldom leave to experience the built or natural environments of their surroundings.

People may choose to go to places with the notion of visiting specific attractions (such as the Australian outback). However, once they reach their destination, the built environment of cities and the simulated environment of the resort are more likely to be their destination. Indeed, once a tourist arrives at the destination, the modified environments become more important (Awaritefe 2004). Depending on the circumstances, the relevant setting can lead to different combinations of beliefs.

In sum, the literature highlights some similarities between PCI and TDI research streams. The common link between the two fields is the application of attitude theory to explain the influence of image beliefs on evaluations and behavior. Therefore, an attitude-based model incorporating PCI constructs may provide a broad explanation to the influence of country and destination images on touristic intentions. The theoretical value of nesting TDI attitude constructs within the larger country-image approach that is more fully developed in recent PCI research is the enrichment of understanding the foundational people and country beliefs behind the traditional beliefs examined in previous TDI models. Additional value of the research will accrue through the identification of specific TDI beliefs constructs in an

adventure tourism context and the measures that are reflective of the constructs.

Proposed Model

In order to test the usefulness of integrating the TDI- and PCI-derived country-image research frameworks, a model is proposed (Figure 1) to deepen understanding of factors that affect tourism beliefs about the natural and built environments of a destination. The model is structured to reflect TDI in a way that has not previously been proposed or tested. The inner box in the figure reflects a traditional TDI model that shows intentions are directly influenced by beliefs about the natural and built environments.

The model builds on the linkage of the two fields using attitude theory to explain the direct and indirect influences of people and country foundation images on consumer behavior regarding tourism. The model is based on the three components of attitude theory: cognitive, affective, and conative. The first component is represented in the model through five constructs: people character, people competence, country character, country competence, natural environment beliefs, and built environment beliefs.

The first four constructs are valuable aspects of this research because they capture the beliefs tourists hold about the country and its people and have not yet been tested in the TDI context. Characteristics of a country’s people are modeled separately from their competence aspects to reflect a proposed differential effect for each on the affective component of attitudes. These constructs are expected to indirectly influence tourist intentions through the beliefs about the destination, an evaluation of the destination, and desired associations with the country. At the affective stage, the overall evaluation of the country as a destination is believed to influence the intentions of traveling to or recommending the country. Desired associations and intentions represent the conative component of attitudes relevant to destinations. The model is tested using data from tourists in Nepal.

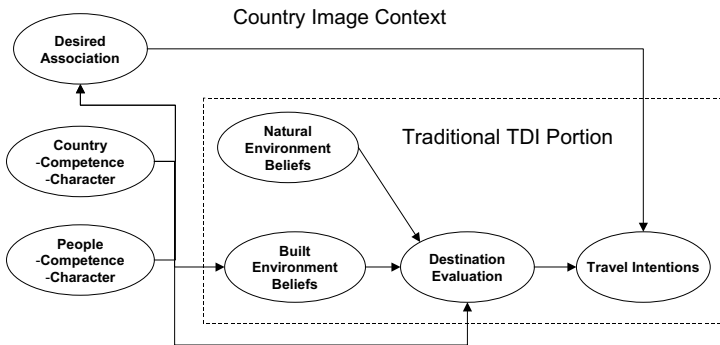


Figure 1. Model of Effects in a Country Context

Study Methods

This paper presents the results of a study of tourist attitudes in Nepal during March 2005. It tests a model of tourism attitudes (beliefs, evaluations, conation) within the broader context of country images derived from PCI research. Nepal is a developing country with about 40% of its population living in poverty (CIA 2005). Agriculture is the main industry, engaging roughly 80% of its citizens and accounting for approximately 40% of its GDP (CIA 2005). The contribution of tourism to the country's economy is limited to about 3–4% of GDP. However, this industry is a major source of Nepal's currency exchange. Its importance to Nepal is accentuated through the action of rebel leaders and the industry itself to reassure tourists of their safety despite a violent uprising (Baral, Baral and Morgan 2004).

Tourists visit Nepal to experience its natural beauty, hike along its rugged terrain, shop in its traditional markets, and gaze upon the world's tallest mountain. While the country features excellent mountaineering terrain, its tourism population contains a range of people including mountaineers (Beedie and Hudson 2003). Further, Nepal is a particularly interesting application because it would be expected that only its natural environment would drive its destination images and attitudes. However, while trekking or climbing may be major activities for many tourists, only 6% of all tourism revenue is generated in the rural environs (Nepal 2000). Thus, the vast majority of tourism money is spent in the urban areas of Nepal.

Street interviews were conducted with international tourists in Kathmandu at major attractions (such as Durbur Square, Pasupatinath Temple, Syambhunath Temple) and within the main tourism neighbourhood of Thamel. Two of the authors and five undergraduate and graduate students from Tribuvan University in Kathmandu conducted the interviews. The survey spanned four days in March 2005, corresponding to a relatively high influx of tourists to the country. Questionnaires were only administered in English. Despite the risk of excluding some tourists, the choice of English as the primary language is suitable given that English is commonly used by tourism operators in Nepal to interact with tourists.

The questionnaire was developed with measures that have been used in previous research highlighted in the literature review. It contains 30 scales regarding respondents' views about the destination and 32 scales to measure views about the people and their country. The 5-point (1 = low/poor, 5 = high/good) scales were selected from both PCI and TDI studies. A few measurement items are found in both research areas. For example, the resident receptivity theme has been measured in TDI research as "friendliness" (Driscoll et al 1994; Muller 1991; Haahti and Yavas 1983). This same measure exists in PCI research (Lee and Ganesh 1999; Knight and Calantone 2000; Parameswaran and Pisharodi 2002; Heslop et al 2004). However, other items are only found in either area, as TDI destination beliefs accommodate the distinct nature of the tourism situation and PCI beliefs provide for the general product context. For example, the touristic intentions con-

struct is measured by asking respondents about whether they would like to visit again, willingness to return, willingness to extend their stay, or willingness to recommend the country to friends. These are parallel measures compared to asking respondents about their willingness to purchase a product from a country in PCI research.

The data collection in Kathmandu resulted in 307 useable responses. The sample is comprised of tourists from Europe (64%), Asia (25%), Australia (6%), North America (4%), and Africa (1%). Of the sample 55% were male, 75% reported they were between 21 and 50 years old, and 74% had visited Nepal once previously or never before.

Study Results

While developing countries may have to deal with the significant disadvantage of having negative or less positive images (Kale and Weir 1986), destination perceptions are typically either positive or negative (Pike 2002). For Nepal, the descriptive results portray a positive picture of an attractive and unique destination experience that exceeds tourists' expectations and one they are proud to have visited (Table 1). The terms shown in the table are shortened from what appeared on the questionnaire due to space limitations. The overall image of Nepal as a destination is positive as evidenced by the responses that give relatively high average ratings to exceeding expectations, overall rating, and overall satisfaction. In addition, all mean responses to these scales are above the scale midpoint, reinforcing the view that a positive overall image exists and is one that encompasses all the aspects measured in the questionnaire. In particular, the attractive scenery leads the positive perceptions of Nepal as a destination based upon its natural attractions of mountains, hills, and rivers, as well as its built environment that showcases the cultural attractions of various temples and palaces. The less positive aspects this destination tend to be related to infrastructure issues, as relatively lower mean scores are attained for ease of getting around, shopping facilities, sport facilities, and night-life/entertainment.

The assessment of mean responses also reveals that participants generally have positive assessments about the character of the people of Nepal. The high mean scores attained on the following scales illustrate the positive view of the people: likeability, friendliness, enjoy being with, helpful, and courteous.

Despite a positive perception of Nepalese, respondents are less positive about the country itself. Even with a strong overall rating of the country, its characteristics and competences receive relatively low mean ratings, including education level, alignment with own country, and quality of life. Indeed, several country scales are below the scale midpoint and represent the lowest scale scores attained in the study. The lowest mean scores are given to character measures of political stability, and role in world politics, acknowledging the political instability at the time. Respondents further view the rights and freedoms of the host population as low, indicated through a rating at the scale mid-point of 2.5. The country scores below the scale mid-point on

Table 1. Mean Responses to Questionnaire Scales

Scale (1 = low/poor, 5 = high/good)	<i>N</i>	Mean
Natural Environment Beliefs		
Attractive scenery	307	4.53
Wilderness	290	4.11
Climate	307	4.07
Variety of activities	305	4.04
Peaceful/quiet	306	3.26
Built Environment Beliefs		
Culturally interesting	306	4.30
Profile of attractions	304	4.25
Ease of finding interesting places	307	4.05
Accommodation	306	4.02
Quality of service	307	4.01
Selection of restaurants	304	4.00
Ease of getting around	305	3.96
Shopping facilities	306	3.59
Safety	306	3.40
For the whole family	298	3.03
Sport facilities	281	2.81
Nightlife/entertainment	287	2.71
Evaluations of Destination		
Proud to visit	304	4.47
Memorability of experience	304	4.46
Relative to expectations	307	4.44
Overall rating	307	4.41
Originality of experience	306	4.39
Overall satisfaction	306	4.18
Value for money	305	4.15
Knowledge of destination	306	3.44
Desired Associations (would like)		
Tourists to Nepal	307	4.32
Imports from Nepal	306	4.06
Visitors from Nepal	307	3.99
Invest in Nepal	304	3.96
Political/Economic ties	306	3.77
Exports to Nepal	304	3.58
Investment from Nepal	303	3.31
Immigration from Nepal	303	3.30
People Character of Nepal		
Likeability	307	4.41
Friendliness	307	4.39
Helpful	306	4.36
Courteous	303	4.14
Trustworthiness	305	3.88
Honest	305	3.87
People Competencies		
Work Ethic	299	3.60
Industriousness	298	3.33

Table 1 (*continued*)

Scale (1 = low/poor, 5 = high/good)	<i>N</i>	Mean
Individualism	301	2.90
Education level	305	2.81
Country Competencies		
Workers skill level	294	2.95
Avail. skilled workers	284	2.88
Technology level	303	2.38
Stability of economy	300	2.33
Country Character		
Quality of life	306	2.72
Rights and freedoms	304	2.50
Wealth	305	2.32
Enviro/pollution controls	302	2.13
Role in world politics	299	1.93
Political stability	302	1.89
Evaluations of People and Country		
Enjoy being with the people	307	4.36
Overall rating	303	4.16
Knowledge of Nepal	306	3.52
Alignment with own country	303	2.79
Travel Intentions		
Willingness to recommend	306	4.67
Like to visit again	304	4.59
Intention to visit again	306	4.45
Willingness to return	307	4.02
Willingness to extend stay	305	3.86

environmental/pollution controls, wealth, stability of the economy, and technology level.

When asked about their desired associations or relationships with Nepal, a conative or response dimension of country attitudes, the same themes dominate respondents' replies. The highest mean among the relationship scales indicates that respondents want to see tourists coming to Nepal, implying that they wish to have others do what they have done. "Imports from Nepal" is the second-leading desired relationship, reflecting the importance of tourist shopping activity when visiting local marketplaces, and provides a linkage to the PCI field by indicating a general receptivity to the country's products. The third-desired relationship epitomizes the likability of the host population, as respondents want to see more tourists from Nepal in their home countries. However, in stark contrast to the desire for more Nepal tourists is the less positive average response for immigration from the country.

The leading response outcomes indicate an overall strong intent by tourists to recommend or return to Nepal. Indeed, these demonstrate that tourists have the greatest willingness to recommend Nepal as a destination, surpassing other mean responses. The mean scores for personal visit to Nepal decline as the level of commitment increases

(that is, like to visit, intention to visit, and willingness to return). The less positive rating given to extending their current stay may be attributable to the difficulty in altering airline tickets or the exhaustion associated with completing an already long stay involving high physical strain of trekking and climbing.

Nested Framework. When considering the model results in the context of the nested framework of environments, the importance of nature to Nepal is quite apparent. This very strong relationship to the destination evaluation in the model coupled with the very high mean scores attributed to natural scales (such as attractive scenery) illustrate the dominant role of this environment on the image tourists hold about Nepal. However, complementary to this is the simulated environment in Nepal. The high mean scale scores awarded on people attributes (likeability, friendliness, helpful, courteous, trustworthiness, and honest) and the significant paths from the people construct in the model indicate that the simulated environment is also important. The latter in the Nepal context relies on the interaction with its people and would include resorts (such as safari), trekking tours, and expeditions). The simulated environment acts as an overlay to the natural one and exists to filter or sanitize tourists' interface with it.

The theoretical nested framework places the built environment between the natural and the simulated environments. However, Nepal receives mixed reviews from tourists in this area. On the one hand, Nepal is viewed quite positively in terms of its cultural attractions (such as temples) that make up part of the built environment. On the other hand, the destination aspects that received relatively poorer mean scores represent the infrastructure of the country (sport facilities, nightlife, shopping). Further, the competencies of the country that help to deliver the tourist experience are related to beliefs about tourism activities in the tested model. These beliefs (technology level, stability of economy, worker skill level) were among the lowest mean scores for the questionnaire.

Structural Model and Testing. While the descriptive results provide insight into the perceptions of Nepal's tourists, the analysis of the structural model delivers an understanding of what drives assessments of the touristic experience. Structural equation model testing involves a two-stage process. The first stage ensures good measurement of the constructs while the second involves an assessment of the structural relationships. Therefore, prior to testing the model, an assessment of the measurement was conducted. LISREL software, version 8.54, was used for the analysis.

The measurement model analysis requires that each construct be evaluated on an individual basis. The covariance matrix of the indicators is examined to determine those variables that are highly related to each other. If the scales defined as measures of the construct are found to be highly related, then this relationship is seen as a reflection of their common link to the construct. Therefore, these associations indicate whether convergent validity exists within the measures. In addi-

tion, a confirmatory factor analysis is conducted to assess the fit of variables within the construct using the reasonable criteria for inclusion set at 0.5 for factor loading values. As a result of this analysis, several scales reviewed in the descriptive results were dropped from the theoretical constructs due to poor empirical support. When this occurred, the variables were tested with alternative constructs where appropriate. In addition, construct items were assessed for reliability using Cronbach's alpha with all receiving reasonable values ranging from .64 to .80. [Figure 2](#) notes the measures of each construct and the path coefficients for the model.

The final construct-specified measures ([Figure 2](#)) were used in testing the proposed structural model. The results of the LISREL model analysis are presented graphically in [Figure 2](#) (path coefficients and measure loadings on the construct) and numerically in [Table 2](#). All paths are significant at 95% and the model converges after 20 iterations. The results show that the more traditional TDI model (inside the dotted line box of [Figure 2](#)) has a very strong relationship to tourism intentions. Of particular note is the very strong indirect relationship of natural beliefs about the destination (attractive scenery, wilderness, variety of activities) to intentions (will recommend, like to visit, intention to visit) through an evaluation of the destination (memorability of experience, overall satisfaction, proud to visit). The strength of this path reveals the importance of the natural environment on tourists' decisions for this type of vacation experience. This is consistent with the Nepal's image based on Mount Everest and other outdoor attractions. Activity-related beliefs (nightlife/entertainment, shopping facilities, sport facilities) also show an indirect relationship with intentions through the destination evaluation, albeit at a more moderate strength. This indicates the importance of these aspects to the touristic experience even in a destination primarily valued for its natural environment. Tourists still want amenities for before and after the outdoor experience.

The demonstration that country and people dimensions are significant influencers of the tourism intention is a key contribution of the model. The country aspects (technology level, worker skill level, stability of economy) are represented through the competencies that are related to the beliefs about the activities offered in Nepal. The people aspects are indirectly relevant to intentions in two ways. First, the competencies (industriousness, education level, work ethic) of the Nepalese people are strongly related to activity beliefs. Second, character features of the Nepalese (trustworthy, courteous, honest) are indirectly related to intentions through a strong relationship with the evaluation of the country as a destination and the level of desired associations with Nepal (political/economic ties, immigration from, exports to, investment from, visitors from).

The numerical representation of the model in [Table 2](#) highlights that all the paths tested exceed the 1.96 critical *t*-value indicating statistical significance. Since there is no sole statistic that can be used independently to assess model fit to the data, absolute and incremental fit indices are reported ([Kline 2005](#)). Absolute fit statistics represent

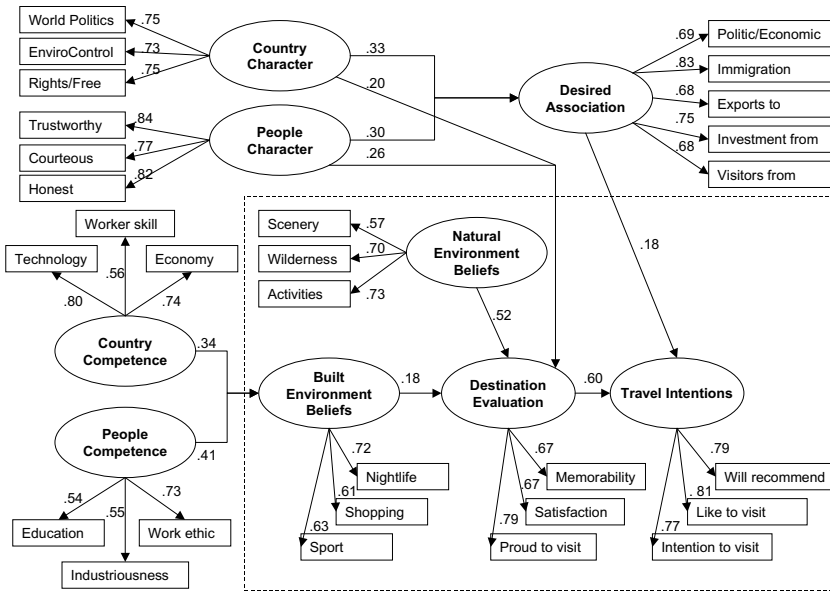


Figure 2. Structural LISREL Model Results

the capacity of the model to replicate sample data. Several common absolute fit indices are reported, including the normed chi-square (χ^2/df), the root mean square error of approximation, and the goodness-of-fit index (GFI). The normed chi-square (χ^2/df) indicates the

Table 2. Structural LISREL Model Results

Path between Latent Variables		Path Coeff.	t-values
People Description	Desired Links	.30	3.76
People Description	Destination Evaluation	.26	3.14
Country Description	Desired Links	.33	3.97
Country Description	Destination Evaluation	.20	2.69
Country Competence	Activity Destination Beliefs	.34	3.48
People Competence	Activity Destination Beliefs	.41	4.15
Activity Destination Beliefs	Destination Evaluation	.18	2.12
Natural Destination Beliefs	Destination Evaluation	.52	5.73
Destination Evaluation	Travel Intentions	.60	6.46
Desired Links	Travel Intentions	.18	2.43

Overall model *p*-value < .001
 Normed chi-square ($\chi^2/d.f.$) = 2.8
 CFI = 0.9
 GFI = 0.8
 NNFI = 0.9
 RMSEA = 0.1

model has a good fit with a numerical value of less than five (Taylor and Todd 1995). Further, the root mean square error of approximation statistic provides evidence that the model is an acceptable fit as this is not above 0.1. There is a range of acceptability for the root statistic with 0.05 at the lower bound indicating an ideal fit and 0.1 at the upper bound (Rigdon 1998). As Kline (2005) suggests, the root mean square error of approximation value over 0.1 indicates poor fit. Using the upper bounds for this study is reasonable given the model's complexity and the tendency for the root to favor simpler models. Although the GFI statistic is slightly below levels that indicate an acceptable model fit, it is important to consider other statistics that take sample size and model complexity into account. This is where the incremental fit indices provide valuable insight as they represent fit improvement, comparing an estimated model to a more constrained baseline model. The non-normed fit index statistic provides a correction for model complexity. The current model is relatively complex as it contains eight constructs and their relationships. The non-normed fit index statistic indicates a good fitting model where ≥ 0.9 is recommended (Hoyle 1995). Alternatively, the comparative fit index statistic provides a measure of fit that is less affected by sample size. The comparative fit index statistic indicates a good model fit by achieving the 0.9 threshold value.

A better fitting model could be achieved by simplifying the model. However, such a change would be at the cost of losing insight gained from the more complex construct that makes use of both TDI and PCI frameworks. To confirm this, a separate LISREL investigation was conducted on its core that represents traditional TDI models to see how it would perform on its own. When only beliefs about nature are included in the core, the process reveals a higher path coefficient between evaluations and intentions but a similar path between natural beliefs and evaluations. Further, this investigation yielded very good fit statistics for the simple three-construct model. When the activity beliefs version is added, the path coefficients are similar and the fit statistics do not demonstrate a substantial improvement over the model displayed in Figure 2. Therefore, while the simple model retains very good fit statistics, the one with PCI-based constructs offers more explanation of the phenomenon than the four-construct solution with similar fit statistics. The country image context demonstrates that beliefs about a country and its people have a direct influence on the beliefs and evaluation of the destination. This finding would be lost using a traditional TDI model.

CONCLUSION

Confirmation of the proposed model leads to significant theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, it demonstrates that factors beyond the traditional TDI perspective are relevant to the touristic decision process. It helps to explain previous research by Kim and Yoon (2003) who found a second order construct of des-

tinuation image underlies destination beliefs and evaluations. This can be explained through the finding that foundation beliefs about the country and its people are directly relevant to destination beliefs and indirectly to intentions through the evaluation of the destination and the desired associations with the country. This is an important result because it situates tourists' intentions in the greater context of the host destination and broader country-image beliefs, evaluations, interests, and intentions. Therefore, constructs developed in the PCI literature about foundational country image attitudes have a direct relevance to the tourism context. In other words, these results provide evidence that PCI and TDI research areas can accommodate theoretical convergence using attitude theory and country image as the common thread. It suggests also that TDI research should include a deeper set of underlying beliefs of a country and its people to explain viewpoints about the destination and its attractiveness. A wider perspective is much more useful in understanding how to affect tourism beliefs and behaviors.

The impact of this finding has practical implications. Nepal's tourism industry may wish to consider four main research outcomes. First, the country's messages about natural beauty and adventure tourism should remain a focus. Tourists' beliefs about attractive scenery, wilderness, and variety of activities demonstrate that these attributes have already captured their attention. In particular, Nepal's leading destination belief is the attractive scenery available to tourists in the country. Second, the industry would find it useful to promote travel to the country by building on the strong positive beliefs about its people. The Nepalese are generally well liked, are seen to possess positive social traits, and tourists enjoy being with them. The strong positive position on people aspects may differentiate this from other destinations. Third, the industry should take interest in its international image (that is, negative media coverage due to political unrest and the strong awareness of Mount Everest) and develop its promotions to mitigate or take advantage where warranted. Fourth, Nepal should consider a "recommendation-based" promotional program to encourage more arrivals. Current tourists indicated their willingness to recommend the destination to others. Indeed, this particular factor achieved the highest mean score of all scales in the study. This would suggest there is considerable untapped promotional potential in the beliefs held by tourists.

There are also more general practical implications of the study. Primarily, this research also emphasizes the vulnerability of destinations to certain risks (political unrest, infrastructure). The importance of country and people beliefs to the image underlines the potential risk of political instability negatively affecting destination evaluations. The built environment remains an important contributor to the image even when the perceptions are dominated by nature or outdoor adventure. This means that adventure tourism destinations ignore the built environment at their peril.

This study provides an initial contribution to developing a richer understanding of TDI through inclusion of country-image constructs.

Since it involves only one country and one kind of destination context, replication of the study is in order. Moreover, other destination belief constructs may be relevant in other cases (such as simulated environment beliefs). The relevance of natural beliefs in the Nepal context is consistent with the importance of adventure tourism to the country. Future research testing the model in additional destinations and their types is recommended. Researchers should also examine the use of segmentation to highlight possible differences in model weighting for different groups of tourists. For instance, some may be interested in a simulated environment of an adventure destination while others would prefer a raw experience with the natural environment.

It is evident that future research on destination images should include country-image constructs. This study presents evidence that the country context is important to the image of the destination and touristic outcomes (that is, recommendations, like to visit again, and intention to visit again). Competencies about the country appear to directly impact the assessment or beliefs about the destination's ability to deliver on its promotional promises, especially in the built environment aspects of the touristic experience. Descriptive country beliefs are also salient. How the country and its people are perceived will impact the evaluations formed about the destination and influence its tourism industry. Further, the extent to which tourists' desire their home countries to build on relationships with the destination country influences their touristic responses. This is important because desired linkages may signal a preference for personal visit and potential for export market development. Depending upon the purposes of the investigation, future studies should consider using some or all of these constructs.

From a PCI perspective, research should not ignore the impact of the tourist experience on the evaluation of products or purchase outcomes. Tourism is a way for people to expose themselves to other countries and contribute to the images they form of them. Therefore, one may take a modeling approach to explore the role of country- and people- beliefs alongside destination-beliefs on the intentions to purchase the country's products. Perhaps the familiarity construct used in PCI literature can accommodate the potential for tourism exposure with a country to act as a moderating influence on the relationships among country- and people-beliefs, product evaluations, and purchase outcomes. Further, TDI research can suggest important dimensions of the country (that is, nested framework) that are not traditionally measured in PCI work to date. **A**

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