

## **1999/2000 Quality Management Student Project Competition**

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**Project Title:** Tourists' Perception of Hong Kong's Image and Attractiveness as a Tourist Destination in Asia

The tourism industry has become more and more important among Asian countries. The reasons for its prosperity include the increase of leisure time, wealth and income, and technological progress, which increase the intention of people to travel. The tourism industry plays an important role in Hong Kong's economy. So, understanding the perceived image and attractiveness of a destination from tourists' perspective is essential for formulating marketing and long-term tourism development strategies. It is generally recognized that one of the most important components of marketing strategy is product positioning. Basically, positioning involves creating the appropriate image of the product in the minds of the consumers in the targeted markets. In this aspect, tourism destinations, such as Hong Kong, are certainly not an exception. Creating and managing an appropriate image and attractiveness of a destination are critical to effective positioning and marketing strategy.

The main focus of this study is on Hong Kong's image and attractiveness as a tourist destination in Asia from tourist point of view. It attempts to compare Hong Kong's image as a tourist destination vis-à-vis selected Asian countries in terms of some salient destination choice criteria. International tourists with leisure travel experience are the main target sample in this study. According to the World Tourism Organization Report (1998), the top five tourist arrival destinations in Asia are China, Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. It would, therefore, be worthwhile to compare Hong Kong and her main competitors in Asia in terms of relative attractiveness as a tourist destination.

A two-stage survey was employed in this study. In the first stage, 28 specific attributes selected for this study were derived from previous studies, which focused on destination image and attractiveness attributes. Individuals indicated their levels of agreement with the attributes using a 7-point Likert scale varying from "strongly disagree – (1)" to "strongly agree – (7)". Respondents were asked to circle the number that best represents the extent to which they agree or disagree with the given statements. By using factor analysis, 28 destination attributes were grouped into a set of 6 common underlying dimensions in the main survey.

In the second stage, the survey questionnaire covered three main areas. The first part studied how tourists perceive on different attributes based on two destination ratings provided for each destination (i.e. the yes / no ratings of each destination on each attribute). By using the correspondence analysis technique to form the perceptual map in Asia, this helped in understanding which countries have what images and were being considered as closer to Hong Kong. The second part of destination attractiveness section, some travel behavior questions were included: e.g. "How would you rate the overall attractiveness of Hong Kong as a tourist destination", "Among the selected Asian countries, which one would you choose for your next holiday" etc. This helped in understanding how attractive Hong Kong is by comparing

with those selected Asian destinations. The third part of the questionnaire obtained information concerning the demographic characteristics of respondents including: age, gender, marital status, occupation and income etc. Then, one-way ANOVA was demonstrated to detect whether significant image and attractiveness differences existed among socio-demographic groups.

The results from this study showed how tourists perceived Hong Kong's image and attractiveness as a tourist destination in Asia. A perceptual map with 5 Asian destinations was fitted with 6 destination dimensions. Specifically, the map has shown to be meaningful in providing marketing applications. Hong Kong was perceived as a good service-providing destination in Asia. However, the position of Hong Kong was threatened by Singapore with similar destination dimensions perceived by tourists. Regarding the attractiveness of Hong Kong. In general, it was still be regarded as attractive from tourists' point of view. However, it is worth in pointing out that the younger generation regarded Hong Kong as only a somewhat attractive destination. It is a phenomenon that the younger the tourist, the lesser the attractiveness of Hong Kong they perceived. This result may contribute to the tourism industry for further research.

Overall, image and attractiveness data can be used to develop or enhance tourism promotions. More specifically, this type of data is necessary for effective product positioning and market segmentation of Hong Kong. Positioning and segmentation are stages of the same process and refer to detecting or developing product attributes which are expected to establish a competitive advantage and, therefore, may be transformed into valuable arguments and appeals in advertising and personal selling. The understanding of image and attractiveness variations related to socio-demographic variables can be helpful in targeting specific groups for delivering appropriate promotional messages, improving and correcting particular traveller groups' relative image, and tailoring promotion strategy to specific groups. Future research is recommended to investigate the more specific aspects of each destination attribute to further enhance the understanding of their perceptions, and to determine how image and attractiveness data can help to develop new attractions, activities and entertainment etc., eventually increase the number of tourists coming to Hong Kong in the future.