

The Role of Destination Marketing in Enhancing Local Perceptions of Djelfa Province - Algeria from the Perspective of Its Residents

Dahmane Ahmed ¹

¹ Faculty of Economic, Commercial and Management Sciences, University of Ghardaïa, Algeria
Email: Dahmane.ahmed@univ-ghardaia.dz

Abstract---This study aimed to explore the role of destination marketing in enhancing local perceptions of Djelfa Province in Algeria from the viewpoint of its residents. A descriptive and analytical methodology was used, with a random sample of 150 individuals from which 127 valid questionnaires were recovered for analysis. The study focused on understanding concepts related to the elements of the tourism marketing mix, investigating the impact of this mix on the perceptions and tourism image of the province, and identifying the most influential elements of the mix on the image. Results indicated that the distribution element had the highest mean approval (3.56), reflecting its significant role in shaping the tourism image, while the physical environment received the lowest acceptance score, indicating a need for improvements. The tourism image of the province from the residents' perspective was moderate, with a mean score of 3.24. Analyses showed a statistically significant correlation between the tourism marketing mix and the tourism image, explaining 13.4% of the variance, with the tourism product having a positive significant effect on the image, whereas factors such as pricing, distribution, promotion, service provider performance, the physical environment, and service delivery process had no significant effects.

Keywords---Tourism marketing, Tourism marketing mix, Tourism image, Djelfa Province.

Introduction

Tourist resources and attractions constitute a fundamental pillar of the tourism supply in any destination. Equally important is the availability of diverse tourism services in these areas, which is

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another essential condition for attracting tourists. However, the presence of these two aspects as basic determinants of tourism demand does not necessarily guarantee actual demand for tourism in the region or country. Numerous internal and external environmental factors significantly influence tourist behavior. Understanding these variables requires the formulation of effective marketing programs and policies that influence tourist behavior and attract them to tourist destinations, alongside recognizing the pivotal role of marketing in the process of researching, discovering, and attracting potential tourists in tourism markets.

For this reason, leading tourism institutions and destinations worldwide have adopted advanced marketing strategies aimed at activating tourist demand. Tourism marketing is considered an administrative approach and an integrated philosophy based on modern marketing concepts and methods, adding strong value to the tourism industry, which positively reflects on tourism demand levels through surrounding conditions and influential factors.

Adopting and implementing this philosophy through various activities and operations is necessary to achieve the set objectives of tourism institutions, primarily aimed at generating profits through servicing tourists and meeting their needs. The core goal of tourism marketing is to project a true, influential, and attractive image of the tourist destination to the targeted tourism markets, thereby helping create or reshape tourists' positive and negative perceptions. Many cases require adopting successful marketing strategies that eliminate or mitigate the negative aspects surrounding a destination by using effective communication tools that strengthen and highlight positive aspects.

Problem Statement

Djelfa Province is considered one of the important provinces in Algeria due to its strategic location connecting many other provinces. It possesses significant tourist sites such as archaeological locations, mineral baths, rich forests, and distinctive mountains. However, the tourism reality in the province does not meet the desired level. Accordingly, this study seeks to address the following problem:

Does tourism marketing affect the perceptions of Djelfa's local residents regarding the city through the elements of the marketing mix?

To answer this, the study formulated the following hypotheses:

- Primary Hypothesis 1: The tourism marketing mix of Djelfa Province affects the tourism image of the city.
- Primary Hypothesis 2: There are differences in perceptions regarding the tourism image of Djelfa city attributable to demographic characteristics (gender, age, marital status, profession).

Study Objectives

This study aims to:

- Identify concepts related to the elements of the tourism marketing mix.
- Clarify concepts related to the tourism image of the province and its components.
- Explain the impact of the marketing mix on perceptions and the tourism image of the province.
- Determine the most influential elements of the marketing mix on the tourism image of Djelfa Province.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive approach based on case diagnosis and hypothesis testing. Since the study required information to validate hypotheses, data were drawn from specialized and recent references and journals related to the research topic. The research included theoretical articulation and an analytical approach to study the aspects and content of the concepts, alongside statistical analysis tools used to display and analyze field study results.

Theoretical Framework: Tourism Marketing and Tourism Image

1.1 Tourism Marketing Concept

Tourism marketing is a fundamental element upon which countries rely to increase their share of international tourist flows and stimulate fast-growing domestic tourism. It is not an independent discipline but part of traditional marketing, although the sector's complex nature has necessitated new practices to cope with its peculiarities.

Tourism marketing aims to secure and satisfy tourists' needs through various distribution channels and tourism institutions that interact with tourists under external environmental pressures (ethical, technological, economic, and social constraints). This interaction facilitates the flow of exchanges into the target market, impacting supply and consumption efforts (Abdelfattah, 2008).

Tourism marketing is also defined as an administrative, technical, and organized activity carried out harmoniously by all tourism service providers and recipients, targeting to satisfy tourists' tastes in diverse forms (Obaidat, 2008). Despite different views on its concept, all definitions correlate with the tourism process, focusing on the tourist as a central figure for directing and programming tourism strategies to meet his/her desires and needs.

1.2 Elements of the Tourism Marketing Mix

1.2.1 Tourist Product

Represents a comprehensive set of tourist attraction elements consisting of a blend of natural (geographic, environmental, climatic, religious, cultural, economical) and human components, services, and tourism facilities such as public amenities, archaeological and heritage sites. This mix serves as a strong attractor for external tourism demand; the tourist product stands as the heart of tourism activity (Obaidat, 2008).

The term "product" also incorporates "service," making it difficult to distinctly separate goods from services. Tourism products are a combination of tangible and intangible services, including transport; tourism is essentially a mix of tangible and intangible elements (Al-Saadi, 2009).

1.2.2 Pricing of Tourism Products

Pricing policy is a critical mechanism affecting demand and supply forces in tourism and a decisive factor in pricing. Pricing flexibility requires preliminary studies and continuous revisions of competitive pricing strategies alongside full awareness of changing market circumstances. Effective pricing policies correlate with broad market segment coverage and external factors like prevailing economic and social conditions and seasonal tourism flows (Moqabla & Alsarabi, 2008).

1.2.3 Distribution

Distribution involves activities by stakeholders ensuring the flow of goods and services from producer to final consumer, achieving benefits in the right place and time. It bridges tourism demand and supply (Al-Ta'i, 2001). Distribution strategies must balance tourism attraction areas from the travel moment until the return to the place of origin to ensure travel satisfaction.

Two main distribution methods: direct (without intermediaries) and indirect (via agents such as travel agencies, tour operators, and guides) (Farah & Boudla, 2013).

1.2.4 Tourism Promotion

Promotional efforts employ various direct and indirect communication and media channels in targeted campaigns to foster strong relationships between tourism organizations and destinations and their markets. Promotion highlights the realistic image of the tourist area and the diverse attractions and facilities such as accommodations and supporting services to enhance the tourism process and increase demand (Mosaad, 2008).

Tourist advertising is a set of non-personal efforts aiming at influencing tourists emotionally and behaviorally towards specific tourism programs (Moqabla, 1998). Public relations include the organized efforts to develop and maintain mutual understanding between organizations and their publics, including advertising, sales promotion, and personal selling (Moqabla & Alsarabi, 2008).

1.2.5 Tourism Service Providers

These are the human resources providing various tourism services through institutions, such as booking, accommodation, and guiding. They form the core of the marketing mix, and their failure can undermine other components. Institutions invest in training staff to achieve high satisfaction, often employing internal marketing strategies to enhance this critical element's efficiency (Al-Ta'i, 2001).

1.2.6 Tourism Service Delivery Process

Refers to the methods of presenting tourism services, a primary concern in marketing strategy development. It enhances service performance and builds tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Factors include employee behavior, organizational structure, complaint management policies, reception quality, procedural quality, and provider reputation. Successful marketing hinges on these procedures and relationship marketing to secure customer loyalty.

1.2.7 Physical Environment

Tourists visit attractions to experience and enjoy tangible physical alternatives like furniture, equipment, décor, buildings, and facades, impacting their mood and attitude. Tourists seek physical evidence to reinforce specific images in their minds (Al-Khudairi, 1989). This physical element, part of the tourism marketing mix, helps shape the institution's image and positive impressions of service quality.

1.3 Tourism Image

Tourism image has been studied for over three decades, with multiple approaches due to its significant impact on marketing and tourist behavior. Disciplines such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, and geography recognize its role in forming a defined image of a destination in the tourist's mind, influencing their expectations and choice. The tourism image is a competitive advantage and a powerful tool to attract tourists and develop, distribute tourism products.

Philip Kotler defines it as the set of beliefs and impressions held by individuals about a place, simplifying many of their perceptions and knowledge about it (Joel, 2000). The International Marketing Encyclopedia describes it as "the tourist's self-perception of objective elements and characteristics of the destination such as natural features, tourism infrastructure, accessibility, and general political and social conditions" (Dalia, 2008).

The focus is on the image formed by the tourist, distinct from the image the tourism authorities aim to build. The World Tourism Organization regards a city's tourism image as "part of the overall image of the country" (Dalia, 2008).

Different opinions exist about the types of tourism image components, but a common classification by Mackay notes three main components (Esma, 2008):

- Cognitive Component: Ideas, information, and attitudes the tourist acquires about destination attributes, often from previous visits or external sources.
- Affective Component: The positive or negative emotions felt by the tourist toward the destination, influential during the evaluation phase of destination choice.
- Conative Component: The readiness or intention to visit the destination, reflecting willingness and desire to undertake a visit at a specific time.

1.4 Tourism Attractions of Djelfa Province

Djelfa is located centrally in Algeria, about 300 km south of the capital, within the Saharan Atlas region. It is surrounded by several provinces: Médéa (north), M'Sila (east), Tiaret (west), Biskra and Ouargla (southeast), Ghardaia (south), Laghouat (southwest), and Tissemsilt (northwest).

Natural Attractions:

- Mountains: Includes diverse ranges such as Mount Zakour, Mount Salty Stone (world's third largest salt mountain), and Mount Boukaihil.
- Forests: Including Sen El Ba forest and Qutia forest, with pine and juniper trees.
- Sand Dunes: Notably the saffron sand dunes.
- Scenic landscapes: Featuring plateaus, plains, depressions, oases, and reserves in desert areas.

Archaeological and Historical Attractions:

- Mount Zakour with its "Monastery" cave containing ancient murals.
- Rock engravings in Henq al-Hilal, Zakour, and Sidi Boubker Cave.
- Roman ruins highlighting ancient civilizations.
- Other historical sites like Ben Cherif Mosque.

3. Field Study

3.1 Methodological Procedures

3.1.1 Population and Sample

The population of the study consists of local residents of Djelfa Province, estimated at approximately 1,508,535 inhabitants. Due to the large size of the target population and constraints of cost and time, a convenient sampling method was applied on a random sample of 150 individuals. A total of 127 valid questionnaires were retrieved for analysis.

3.1.2 Data Collection Tool

The questionnaire is one of the most commonly used statistical tools for collecting information necessary to achieve the study's objectives. Therefore, a survey form consisting of two sections was designed: the first covers demographic data of the sample (gender, age, marital status, occupation), while the second section includes questions to measure various variables using a Likert scale.

A matrix of respondents' answers to the questionnaire statements was used as shown in the following table:

Table 1: Likert Scale Ratings

Response	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Score	1	2	3	4	5

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on previous studies

According to Table 1, if the answer is "Strongly Agree," it corresponds to score 5, and similarly for other responses. The questionnaire data was processed and analyzed using SPSS version 24, with statistical tools applied including mean, standard deviation, frequency, percentages, multiple linear regression, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

3.1.3 Validity and Reliability of the Tool

The questionnaire was presented to a group of specialized professors for review, modification, and addition of some items, after which it was finalized and distributed to the sample members. To verify the reliability of the tool, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated, yielding a value of 0.83, which exceeds the acceptable threshold of 0.60 for scientific research purposes, indicating a high level of reliability.

3.2 Description and Analysis of Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Descriptive statistics were used to extract frequencies and percentages related to the first section of the questionnaire concerning the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 2: Description of Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Demographic Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	66	52
Male	61	48
Age Group		
Under 15 years	15	11.8
16-30 years	80	63
31-45 years	25	19.7
46-60 years	4	3.1
Over 60 years	3	2.4
Marital Status		
Married	36	28.3
Single	88	69.3
Other	3	2.4
Occupation		
Employee	59	46.5
Student	37	29.1
Self-Employed	19	15
Unemployed	12	9.4
Total	127	100

Source: Prepared based on SPSS results

It can be observed from the above table that the highest percentage for gender is female (52%), while the male percentage is 48%. The highest age group percentage was for 16-30 years old (63%), followed by 31-45 years (19.7%), then 46-60 years (3.1%), with the lowest for under 15 years (11.8%), and above 60 years (2.4%). Regarding marital status, the majority were single (69.3%), followed by married (28.3%), and the least other statuses (2.4%). In terms of occupation, employees constituted the highest percentage (46.5%), followed by students (29.1%), self-employed (15%), and unemployed (9.4%).

3.3 Statistical Analysis Results and Hypothesis Testing

The regression model was used, which includes the independent variable (tourism marketing mix) and the dependent variable (the image of the province). The results were as follows:

3.3.1 Means and Standard Deviations for the Independent Variables

The means were evaluated using an agreement scale divided into three levels:

- From 1 to less than 2.5: Low agreement
- From 2.5 to less than 3.5: Moderate agreement
- From 3.5 to 5: High agreement

Table 3: Means and Standard Deviations of Tourism Marketing Mix Dimensions for Djelfa Province

No.	Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation	Agreement Level	Rank
1	Product	2.95	0.66	Moderate	2
2	Pricing	2.63	0.80	Moderate	3
3	Distribution	3.56	0.81	High	1
4	Operations	2.62	0.72	Moderate	7
5	Service Providers	2.59	0.80	Moderate	5
6	Promotion	2.48	0.80	Low	4
7	Physical Environment	2.46	0.73	Low	6

Source: Prepared from SPSS results

The table shows that distribution attained the highest level of agreement (3.56), while the physical environment had the lowest (2.46), signaling the need for provincial authorities to invest in improving tourist facilities, services, and urban aesthetics to enhance the destination's image in the minds of residents and visitors.

Dependent Variable

The table below shows the mean and standard deviation for the dependent variable (the image of Djelfa Province):

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation for the Dependent Variable

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation	Agreement Level
General Tourism Image of Djelfa Province	3.24	0.36	Moderate

Source: Prepared from SPSS results

It is clear that the tourism image of Djelfa Province from the residents' perspective is moderate, suggesting a need for improvements by local authorities.

3.3.2 Hypothesis Testing

Table 5: Summary of Regression Model

Correlation Coefficient (R)	Coefficient of Determination (R ²)	Adjusted R ²	Standard Error
0.366	0.134	0.083	0.354

Source: Prepared from SPSS results

The table indicates a moderate positive correlation between the tourism marketing mix and the tourism image, with 13.4% of the variance in the tourism image explained by the marketing mix, while the remainder is due to other unstudied variables.

Table 6: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F-value	Significance Level
14.91	8	2.314	0.014	Statistically Significant

Source: Prepared from SPSS results

Results show the model is statistically significant, indicating rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternative that the marketing mix significantly affects the tourism image.

Table 7: Significance of Regression Coefficients (t-test)

Variable	t-value	Beta	Std. Error	Significance (SIG)
Constant	13.625	/	0.19	0.000
Product	1.378	0.141	0.057	0.001
Price	-1.538	-0.159	0.047	0.127

Variable	t-value	Beta	Std. Error	Significance (SIG)
Distribution	0.978	0.192	0.043	0.330
Promotion	1.523	0.178	0.054	0.130
Service Providers	0.373	0.044	0.055	0.710
Physical Environment	-0.016	-0.002	0.050	0.988
Operations	1.611	0.158	0.050	0.110

Source: Prepared from SPSS results

Detailed Interpretation of Hypothesis Testing:

- Sub-hypothesis 1:
- H_0H_0 : There is no statistically significant effect of the tourist product on the image of Djelfa Province at the 5% significance level.
- H_1H_1 : There is a statistically significant effect of the tourist product on the image of Djelfa Province at the 5% significance level.

The regression coefficient for the independent variable (tourist product) is 0.078, with a standard error of 0.057 and a t-value of 1.378. This effect is statistically significant since the computed p-value is 0.001, which is less than the significance threshold, leading to rejection of the null hypothesis and support for the alternative hypothesis that the tourist product significantly influences the image of the province.

- Sub-hypothesis 2:
 - H_0H_0 : There is no statistically significant effect of product pricing on the image of the province at the 5% significance level.
 - H_1H_1 : There is a statistically significant effect of product pricing on the image of the province at the 5% significance level.

The regression coefficient for pricing is -0.173, with a standard error of 0.047 and a t-value of -1.538; this is not statistically significant because the p-value is 0.127, bigger than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted, indicating no significant impact of pricing on the image.

- Sub-hypothesis 3:
 - H_0H_0 : There is no statistically significant effect of product distribution on the image of Djelfa Province at the 5% significance level.
 - H_1H_1 : There is a statistically significant effect of product distribution on the image of Djelfa Province at the 5% significance level.

The coefficient for distribution is 0.042 with standard error 0.043 and t-value 0.978, non-significant with p-value 0.330, which leads to acceptance of the null hypothesis.

- Sub-hypothesis 4:
 - H_0H_0 : There is no statistically significant effect of the product promotion on the image of the province at the 5% significance level.
 - H_1H_1 : There is a statistically significant effect of product promotion on the image of Djelfa Province at the 5% significance level.

The coefficient of promotion is 0.082, standard error 0.054, t-value 1.523, and with p-value 0.130, this is not statistically significant, leading to accepting the null hypothesis.

- Sub-hypothesis 5:

- $H0H0$: There is no statistically significant effect of the performance of tourism sector employees on the image at the 5% significance level.
- $H1H1$: There is a statistically significant effect of the employees' performance on the image at the 5% significance level.

Coefficient of 0.020, standard error 0.055, t-value 0.373 with p-value 0.710, not significant; null hypothesis accepted.

- Sub-hypothesis 6:

- $H0H0$: There is no statistically significant effect of the physical environment of the tourism services on the image at 5% significance.
- $H1H1$: There is a statistically significant effect of the physical environment on the image at 5% significance.

Coefficient -0.001, standard error 0.050, t-value -0.016, p-value 0.988; not significant, null hypothesis accepted.

- Sub-hypothesis 7:

- $H0H0$: There is no statistically significant effect of the service delivery process on the image at 5% significance.
- $H1H1$: There is a statistically significant effect of service delivery on the image at 5% significance.

Coefficient 0.081, standard error 0.050, t-value 1.611, p-value 0.110; not significant, null hypothesis accepted.

3.3.3 Test of Main Hypothesis 3:

- $H0H0$: There are no statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level in the study sample's perceptions of the tourism image of Djelfa related to demographic characteristics (gender, age, marital status, occupation).
- $H1H1$: There are statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level related to demographic characteristics.

Table 8: Results of Main Hypothesis 3 Testing

Variable	p-value (C)	Significance Level	Conclusion
Gender	0.3170	1.128	No significant difference
Age Group	1.408	0.096	No significant difference
Marital Status	0.168	1.286	No significant difference
Occupation	0.116	1.367	No significant difference

Source: Prepared based on SPSS results.

The table indicates acceptance of the null hypothesis, confirming no statistically significant differences in tourism image perceptions due to demographic variables.

Conclusion

The study clearly indicates the pivotal role played by tourism marketing in enhancing the image and perceptions of a tourist destination such as Djelfa Province. The distinction of tourist areas is not only based on natural and historical assets but requires adopting organized and integrated marketing strategies that comprehensively consider all elements of the marketing mix. The results demonstrate that the distribution component has a significant impact on improving perceptions, whereas the physical environment shows clear deficiencies, necessitating urgent practical measures to improve tourism facilities, services, and related infrastructure. This will directly contribute to increasing local visitor satisfaction and loyalty.

Furthermore, the weak impact of pricing, promotion, and the performance of tourism sector employees on the tourism image points to shortcomings in these areas that must be addressed to ensure the destination's competitiveness. A moderate tourism image suggests opportunities for enhancing currently inactive marketing efforts.

Recommendations

1. Enhance the development of the physical and tourism environment: Invest in the modernization of tourist facilities, improve accommodation and entertainment services, and enhance the aesthetic appeal of the destination to boost its attractiveness.
2. Improve marketing and promotional strategies: Develop innovative and diverse promotional campaigns focusing on highlighting the unique features of Djelfa Province through both traditional and digital media, such as social media.
3. Train and qualify tourism sector employees: Focus on raising the efficiency of workers to provide high-quality services contributing to a positive tourism experience.
4. Review pricing policies: Establish flexible and fair pricing strategies that stimulate domestic tourism and attract broader visitor segments.
5. Focus efforts on the marketing mix: Maintain attention on all elements of the mix, especially distribution and product, as they are the most influential factors on tourism perception.
6. Involve local residents in marketing planning: Engage Djelfa's residents in marketing plans to ensure alignment with their expectations and desires, thereby enhancing positive perceptions among them.

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