

# EXPLORING THE PERSONALITY TRAITS OF PORTUGAL AS A TOURIST DESTINATION: PERSPECTIVE OF THE CZECH MARKET

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## ABSTRACT

The personality of a destination is vital to build a coherent destination brand and strengthen the place identity. Furthermore, brand personality appears in literature as a strategic axis that can be explored by tourist destinations in order to differentiate themselves from competitors. Since a brand encompasses not only functional but also symbolic elements, its image, as perceived by consumers, can be assessed with respect to both its functional and psychological components. Hence, this exploratory study investigates the brand personality of Portugal as a tourist destination, from the perspective of the Czech market, through a destination image approach. The online survey instrument included open-ended items to depict functional and psychological destination features and additional questions to characterize the profile of a sample of Czech university students. The main findings of this research highlight positive personality traits that are related to the brand of Portugal, which suggest its potential as a vacation destination for the Czech market under study.

Keywords: Destination Brand Personality, Destination Branding, Destination Image, Destination Marketing

JEL Classification: M310

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the 1970s, the new reality that characterizes western societies led to the arising of an increasingly more competitive economy not only in economic terms but also in terms of competitive pressure. No matter its dimension and besides being faced with a constant assessment and ranking process, places are under an intense competitive dispute as of the 1980s. The growing concerns with issues related to the quality of life, from the residents' perspective, and with the quality of the tourism experience, from the tourists' perspective, in addition to the need of gaining a differentiated and competitive position, led to marketing development with place management philosophy (Ashworth and Voogd, 1995).

Accordingly, marketing and place branding are among the main approaches included in the territory management and the study of the image is often recognized as essential to the definition of adequate marketing strategies and, specifically, strategies of creation and management of the respective brand. The process of branding a destination is also central to communicating a destination's unique identity, which differentiate places from competitors (Govers and Go, 2009). Moreover, the process of branding a destination should create links

between the destination and their audiences, and it should responsibly incorporate the fast environmental changes within society in the process of building the destination identity (Govers and Go, 2009; Olins, 2006).

In this context, the personality features of a destination are considered as vital in the process of building a coherent destination brand and strengthen place identities. Hence, a brand incorporates not only functional but also symbolic elements, and these components can be analyzed as perceived by consumers. Particularly, the personality dimension of a destination brand has been proven to influence consumer behavior, making its role in place marketing increasingly valued.

Considering that brand personality presupposes that the brand itself is associated with human characteristics (Aaker, 1997), this exploratory study investigates the brand personality of Portugal as a tourist destination, from the perspective of the Czech market, by analyzing the psychological dimension of Portugal as perceived by the market under study, in addition to the functional component. Although Czech Republic is not one of the main source markets of Portugal, in the National Strategic Plan for Tourism (Turismo de Portugal, 2007), Czech Republic is identified as an attractive potential source to Portugal in order to diversify its markets. Moreover, since 2010, there has been an increasing interest of Czech tourists in traveling to Portugal (Eurostat, 2014). Therefore, it seems that Czech Republic has an interesting potential as a tourist source market for Portugal (Tomigová, 2014), and thus it becomes relevant to understand how Portugal is being perceived by Czech Republic individuals.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Destinations and Brands**

Although branding has been studied since the 1950s (Pike, 2010, mentions articles published by Banks, in 1950, and by Gardner and Levy, in 1955), research on the brand conceptualization to tourism destinations can be traced back to the 1990s. The definition of brand presented by Hankinson and Cowking (1993: 10) translates its functional (or rational) and psychological (or emotional) duality: “a brand concerns a product or a service made distinctive through the positioning with regard to competition and the personality, which includes a unique combination of functional attributes and symbolic values”. Thus, a brand represents a unique combination of product characteristics and the respective functional and symbolic added-value elements. It is a set of “values, intellect and culture” that, although invisible, are the key elements of the brand (Morgan, Pritchard and Piggott, 2002: 348). For Schmitt (1999) the brand triggers a set of associations in the sensorial, affective and cognitive field that result in memorable experiences.

The brand ensures the existence of an emotional relation between the destinations (as particularly efficient products to evoke emotions and awaken senses) and the tourists “who tend to seek less escape and more discovery” (Morgan et al., 2002: 338). Furthermore, brands differentiate the products, represent a promise of value, evoke emotions, induce behaviors and have their own personalities (Kotler and Gertner, 2002). They contribute to improve the perceived value (Anholt, 2002) and the residents’ quality of life (Green, 2005).

Indeed, brand identity reflects the contribution of all brand elements to the awareness and image of the product (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1998), which is also the case for destinations (Qu, Kim, and Im, 2011). Furthermore, researchers claim that the concept of visitor experience should be incorporated into the process of branding (Blain, Levy, and Ritchie, 2005) since it “conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination”, and it also serves to “consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable

memories of the destination experience” (Ritchie and Ritchie, 1998:103). However, the brand not only generates value to the consumer but also to all the stakeholders involved (Govers and Go, 2009).

## **2.2 Destination Brands and their Personalities**

The construct of brand personality, which appears in the 1960s, is seen in consensus by most as an exploratory element for symbolic consumption and the fundamental premise of this construct is that consumers attribute human characteristics to brands (Aaker, 1997). However, only in the late 1990s with the work of Jennifer Aaker (1997), the measurement of personality has been addressed and brand personality is defined as a set of human characteristics associated with a brand. Aaker was the first researcher to develop an empirical scale related to the personality of the brand (Brand Personality Scale) (Klabi, 2012; Mathur, Jain, and Maheswaran, 2012). Aaker (1997) based her investigation on human psychology following several studies carried out by researchers who contributed to the identification of the five dimensions of human personality (Azoulay and Kapferer, 2003) and adapted it to the business world in order to identify the dimensions of the brand personality. These are *sincerity*, *excitement*, *competence*, *sophistication* and *ruggedness* (Aaker, 1997). The author states that a well-established brand personality can lead to differentiation, contributing to the development of a positive and lasting relationship with target audiences.

The brand personality of tourism destinations became an investigation topic since the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Accordingly with Aaker (1997), Ekinsi and Hosany (2006) this concept refers to the personality traits that tourists associate to the destination. Hosany Ekinsi, and Uysal (2006) captured destination personality with Aaker’s (1997) five-dimensional brand personality scale. The authors found destination image and destination personality to be related concepts, concluding that Aaker’s (1997) brand personality scale is applicable to places.

The specific characteristics of places that present themselves preferably as tourism destinations have their own challenges, which impact the brand development. Their ambiguous nature, the involvement of politicians in place management, the lack of resources (Morgan et al., 2002), the complexity of tangible and intangible attributes and the diversity of stakeholders (Buhalis, 2000) are some of the main characteristics. Sahin and Baloglu (2011: 73) adds to this “the geographic distance between destination and target markets” as it “takes a longer and a harder effort to develop and manage a positive and attractive brand personality for destinations”. To be aware of the personality traits perceived by the actual and potential tourists may contribute to develop strong destination brands as well as to reinforce the promotion strategy of the destination.

## **2.3 Destination Image and Brand Personality**

The increasing tourism revenues worldwide and the strong competition among tourism destinations have forced places to build favorable destination images to attract more visitors (Gartner, 1993; Goodall, 1990; Sahin and Baloglu, 2011). In the marketing literature this topic was first studied by Martineau (1958) who investigated the store image and personality. The author concluded that the success of retail stores can be envisaged as a force which can be explained by factors that are beyond prices or location. “This force is the store personality or image - the way in which the store is defined in the shopper’s mind, partly by its functional qualities and partly by an aura of psychological attributes” (Martineau, 1958: 47). To the author, image and personality were the same. However, further investigation led to the conclusion that image (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991, 1993) and personality (Aaker, 1997) are different constructs.

To Ekinsi and Hosany (2006), brand personality is one of the most relevant and metaphorical fields that builds the brands of destinations, helping them to strengthen their identities. Thus, brand personality must be assumed as a strategic pillar on which tourism destinations differentiate themselves from competitors (Murphy, Moscardo and Benckendorff, 2007). Accordingly with Sahin and Baloglu (2011: 70), “by examining the brand image and personality of a destination, a desired and fit-to-resources image and brand can be formulated”. In their study, Ekinsi and Hosany (2006) found evidence that destination personality has a moderating effect between image and behavioral intentions.

Considering that brand image is the “perceptions of customers or consumers about a brand or a product labeled with that brand” (Sahin and Baloglu, 2011: 70), it is, hence, a powerful component of successful brands (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 1998) contributing to build competitive advantage. Thus, the assessment of brand personality, from the consumers’ perspective, enables brands to “build greater, more favorable unique and strong brand associations and thus increase the brand equity” (Freling and Forbes, 2005, in Sahin and Baloglu, 2011). To these authors, “brand personality can be considered as the explanation of brand image with the appropriate human personality traits” (Sahin and Baloglu, 2011: 71).

Destination image studies started in the 1970s (Hunt, 1975; Gunn, 1972; Mayo, 1973) and have been a popular tourism research area since then (Hosany et al., 2006; Stepchenkova and Morrison, 2008). However, the concept remains difficult to define, and several proposals can be found in the literature (Gallarza, Saura and Garcia, 2002; Grosspietsch, 2006; Castro et al, 2007; Stepchenkova and Morrison, 2008; Balogu and Sahin, 2011; Nghiem - Phu, 2014). In general, the idea that the image of a tourist destination corresponds to a comprehensive and multidimensional impression prevails (Crompton, 1979; Phelps, 1986; Gartner and Hunt, 1987; Mackay and Fesenmaier, 1997; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999 a) b); Tapachai and Waryszak, 2000; Kim and Richardson, 2003; Kotler and Gertner, 2004; Stern and Krakover, 1993; Luque-Martínez et al., 2007), which supports the thesis that it has an holistic component (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991).

As a brand encompasses functional and symbolic elements, its image as perceived by consumers can be assessed analyzing, on the one hand, its functional components and, on the other hand, its abstract or psychological components. Accordingly with Echtner and Ritchie (1991, 1993), the functional impressions mean the mental map of the physical destination’s features, and the psychological impressions characterize the destination atmosphere. The image of a tourism destination is described in terms of “total impressions, auras and feelings” (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993: 40) tourists sense about it. This means a holistic approach that is made of a melt of attributes or characteristics (that can be directly observable or measured) as well as more abstract and intangible characteristics (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993). The uniqueness of the destination image can be captured through the identification of “unique features and events (functional characteristics) or auras (psychological characteristics)” (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993: 43). Accordingly with the authors, the image of the destination is therefore related to the imagery, a field of psychology (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991). The psychological dimension matches the atmosphere or mood of the place, encompassing the attributes related to the feelings and emotions that the experience creates in tourists.

In the literature, there is a notable predominance of studies using quantitative methodologies and structured techniques (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; Baloglu and Mangalolu, 2001; Mackay and Couldwell, 2004; O’Leary and Deegan, 2005). The main advantage of structured methodologies centered on the assessment of attributes is the fact that tools are easy to administer, and the data are submitted to statistical treatment, yielding information that can be compared in different places (Grosspietsch, 2006). However, they are unsuccessful to capture the holistic nature of image (Jenkins, 1999; Echtner and Ritchie 1991, 1993; Baloglu and Mangalolu, 2001). The main advantage of structured

methodologies, centered on the destinations' attributes, is the easy data collection and statistical analysis.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

Echtner and Ritchie (1993) suggest three questions to determine the holistic and unique components of destination imagery. Thus, the authors use non structured methodologies, as they enable respondents to “use free form descriptions to measure image” (Boivin, 1986, quoted by Echtner and Ritchie, 1993: 44). With this view, “unstructured methodologies are more conducive to measuring the holistic components of product image and also to capturing unique features and auras”, as well as the psychological component of image (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993: 44). The open-ended questions proposed by these researchers are as follows:

1. What images or characteristics come to mind when you think of Portugal as a vacation destination? This question endeavors to let the respondents think freely about the destination and to describe their impressions about the place. It aims to assess the functional characteristics of the destination.
2. How would you describe the atmosphere or mood that you would expect to experience while visiting Portugal? This question depicts the atmosphere or mood of the destination in order to characterize its psychological profile.
3. Please list any distinctive or unique tourist attractions that you can think of in Portugal. This question intends to capture distinctive or unique attractions of the destination.

The questionnaire used to collect data for this exploratory study was divided into three sections. The first part intended to collect the demographic characteristics of respondents, while the second section was designed to explore if respondents had previously visited Portugal and their willingness to visit this country in the future. The third section of the survey included the three open-ended questions suggested by Echtner and Ritchie (1993) with the following objectives: 1) to analyze the most salient cognitive characteristics of Portugal as a tourism destination; 2) to identify the most salient personality traits of Portugal as a tourism destination; and 3) to identify the most distinctive attractions of Portugal as a tourist destination.

For the purpose of this exploratory study, a web-based questionnaire was conducted during the spring of 2014, using the *Google Docs* technology, and the main tool to disseminate the survey was Facebook, followed by the use of the email address. The target population was Czech university students and the snowball method was used to collect the data. Answers were generated in excel file and imported to IBM SPSS Statistics 22, in order to perform descriptive statistics. The web application Wordle was used to generate word clouds regarding each open-ended question.

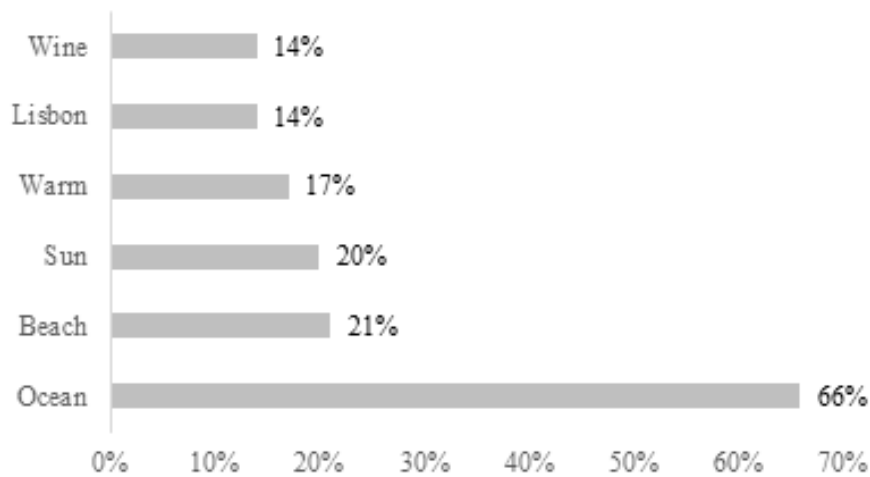
The study site, Portugal, is situated in southwestern Europe and also includes the Madeira and Azores archipelagos in the Atlantic Ocean. The country has 832 km of Atlantic coast and a 1,215 km border with Spain. According to the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics II, Portugal can be divided in seven regions: North, Center, Lisbon, Alentejo, Algarve, Azores and Madeira. The climate in Portugal varies considerably from one region to another, but is specially known for its sunshine, mild temperatures and Mediterranean climate. Tourism has a vital role in Portugal's economy, contributing to about 5% of its Gross Domestic Product ([www.visitportugal.com](http://www.visitportugal.com), <http://www.turismodeportugal.pt>). Tourism is a sector in which the country has a comparative advantage due to its rich natural, historical and cultural assets.

#### 4. RESULTS

Of the 111 respondents to the questionnaire, 55% are female and 25% are male, aged between 20 and 29 years old, with an average of 23.6 years old. The majority of the participants in the study were students that were not employed (68.5%), followed by employed students (30.5%). Those who had visited Portugal before represented 13.5% of the sample, while 86.5% of the respondents had never visited Portugal. From those who had been in Portugal before, 86.7% reveal that they are willing to visit Portugal again. With respect to the group of participants in the study who had never been in Portugal, 63.5% said that they are willing to visit this destination.

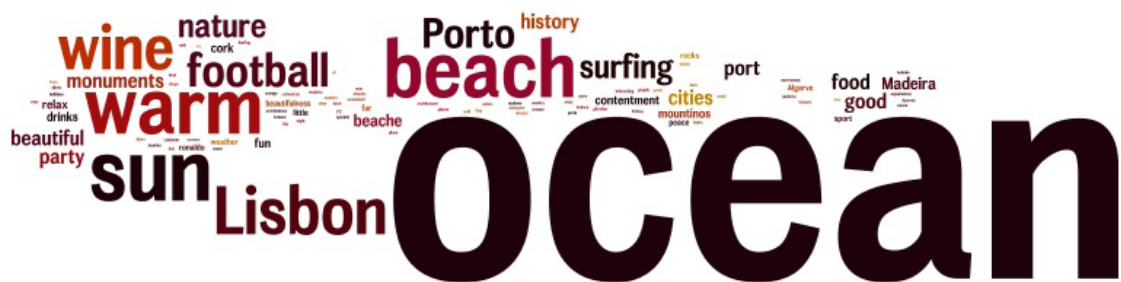
With respect to the question “*What images or characteristics come to mind when you think of Portugal as a vacation destination?*”, the respondents refer the ocean (66%), followed by beach (21%), sun (20%), warm (17%), Lisbon (14%), and wine (13%) (Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1. Word frequency related to functional attributes of Portugal (% of respondents)



Source: Own elaboration

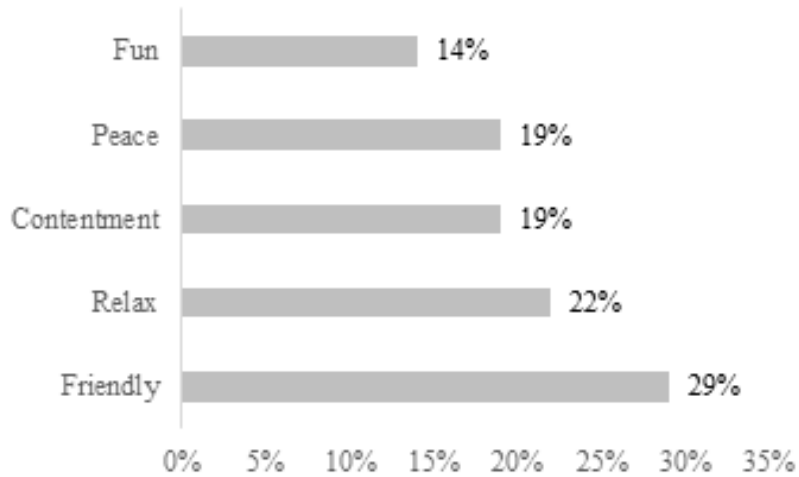
Figure 2. Functional attributes of Portugal as a vacation destination



Source: Wordle output

With regard to the open-ended question “*How would you describe the atmosphere or mood that you would expect to experience while visiting Portugal?*”, respondents associate Portugal with a “friendly” personality trait (29%). Portugal is also described as a place with a relaxed (22%), contentment (19%), peace (19%), and fun (14%) aura (Figures 3 and 4).

Figure 3. Word frequency related to personality traits of Portugal (% of respondents)



Source: Own elaboration

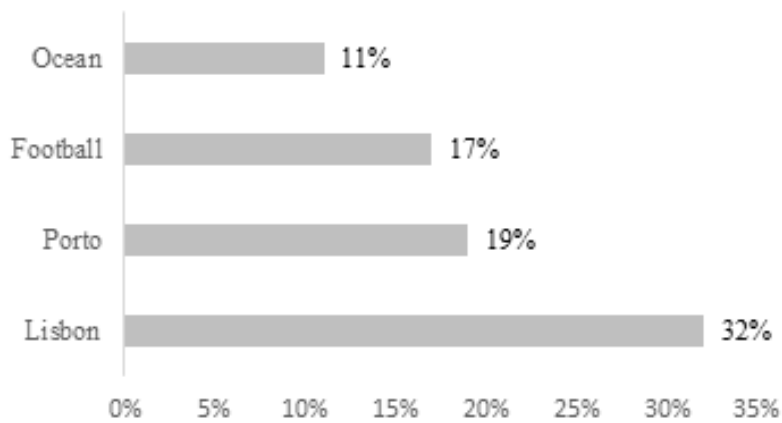
Figure 4. Affective personality traits of Portugal as a vacation destination



Source: Wordle output

When asked about “any distinctive or unique tourist attractions” related to Portugal, the respondents mentioned Lisbon (32%), followed by Porto (19%), football (17%), and ocean (11%) (Figures 5 and 6).

Figure 5. Word frequency related to unique attributes of Portugal (% of respondents)



Source: Own elaboration

Figure 6. Unique characteristics associated with Portugal as a vacation destination



Source: Wordle output

## 7. CONCLUSION

This exploratory research intended to study the brand personality of Portugal as a tourist destination, from the perspective of the Czech market, by analyzing the psychological dimension of Portugal as perceived by the market under study, in addition to its functional component. Hence, considering that brands have particular personalities, i.e., that there are human characteristics associated with brands (Aaker, 1997), Portugal is perceived by Czech university students as a friendly, relaxed, peaceful and fun destination, involved in an aura of contentment.

Despite not being one of the main markets choosing Portugal to spend holidays, the Czech market is one of the strategic markets proposed in the National Strategic Plan for Tourism as important for the diversification strategy (Turismo de Portugal, 2007). In addition to the functional component related to the coastal nature of the destination and pleasant weather, the young respondents refer to football, and the most important metropolises of Portugal, Lisbon and Oporto, as unique features of the destination. These findings suggest that, although the respondents focus on highly competitive sport events, such as football, and busy cities, as distinctive attractions of Portugal, they feel that these attractions are surrounded by a friendly, positive and relaxed aura, which can be associated with a feeling of safety. This idea is in line with other studies carried out from the perspective of Czech markets, which acknowledges that Portugal has the potential to be visited by a greater number of tourists from Czech Republic, depending on adequate communication and brand strategies (Tomigová, 2014).

Furthermore, it is worth noting that, in the sample, the majority of the respondents that already visited Portugal intend to return, which suggests that they were satisfied with their *in loco* experience. In fact, destinations with positive, strong and more favorable images have a greater chance to be selected by tourists. Furthermore, it can result in an increased preference and higher emotional ties to the place brand. Finally, the authors note that these study findings should not be generalized to the whole of the Czech tourism market which will potentially visit Portugal, since this convenience sample used snowball method to reach



respondents. Hence, further empirical studies that replicate the proposed methodology are required to validate and deepen these findings.

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