



# Image of the destination among stakeholders and tourists: Hermosillo City, Sonora, Mexico

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*Abstract.* This study explores the image of destination perceived by strategic agents of tourism in the city of Hermosillo, as well as actual visitors to the city. To this end, the following question is posed: what image do tourists perceive of the attributes of Hermosillo and of their experiences during their stay in the city? The referential and contextual framework explores in depth the destination image, stakeholders, and attributes of the locality. A mixed methodological approach is employed, supported by semi-structured interviews with providers of tourist services and a questionnaire applied to tourists and excursionists who visited Hermosillo. The study concludes by verifying the existence of a correlation between the variables of tourists' experiences during their visit and the image of the information received about the destination, by way of the chi-squared test.

*Keywords:* Tourist promotion; place marketing; tourism; tourists; stakeholders; Mexico.

*Acronyms and initials used*

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| df     | Degree of freedom  |
| HMO    | Hermosillo brand   |
| OCV    | Office of Conferences and Visitors (Oficina de Congresos y Visitantes)                                   |
| Sig.   | Significance   |
| SIIMT  | Comprehensive Tourist Market Information System (Sistema Integral de Información de Mercados Turísticos) |
| SPSS   | Statistical Package for the Social Sciences  |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization   |

## Introduction

Tourism involves the movement of people from their place of usual residence to enjoy the natural, historical and cultural resources of the places they visit, and the operational service structure required to this end. It also promotes foreign exchange, employment, investment, and the development of human capital, among other benefits. Each year, large numbers of people travel to experience the attributes and resources on offer at tourist destinations. According to the World Tourism Association, “tourism is the world’s third largest export category” (2018). On a global level, 1,326 million tourism arrivals were recorded in 2017. That same year, 210.9 million tourists visited the Americas, 39.6 million of whom went to Mexico, making it the sixth most-visited tourist destination in the world.

Mexico boasts an array of natural and cultural resources, some of them classified by the UNESCO as World Heritage Sites. Moreover, it has a series of facilities, equipment, and amenities necessary to provide tourist activities. Molina (2000) calls this the “tourist system,” whereby a set of procedures are related to and integrated with their environment, and are composed in turn of a subset of interrelated subsystems with a common purpose, the elements of which are the superstructure, demand, attractions, equipment and facilities, infrastructure, and host community.

In this context, it is not enough just to have resources available for tourist development in a given country or region; what is essential is the collaboration of all the actors engaged in the sector to develop the potential of the destination and the image it projects. However, tourist destinations tend to be competitive and pursue differentiation (Mazaro & Varzin, 2008), in terms of offering services or products that tourists perceive as unique. Thus, actors in some destinations develop and implement strategies to encourage travel, and use communication to promote and publicize the benefits of visiting these destinations. To this end, destination actors must be willing and able to ensure that tourists have a satisfactory experience that lives up to their preexisting image of that destination, and to the information they received before visiting (Parra & Beltrán, 2016).

All the actors or stakeholders involved in tourism in a particular destination ideally pursue collaboration strategies and actions that allow them to create tourist products, so as to develop the industry in that destination. Collaboration allows complex demands to be met in an effective and efficient way (Iglesias & Carreras, 2013). However, while there is collaboration between some tourism actors in the city of Hermosillo, most continue to work in an individualized manner, failing to value the potential of such col-

laboration in strengthening the city as a tourist destination and generating benefits for the community.

The aim of this study is to explore the image perceived by strategic agents engaged in tourism in the city of Hermosillo, and the tourists or excursionists who visit. The research question is: what image do visitors to the city of Hermosillo perceive in relation to its attributes and their own experiences during their stay?

This article is divided into sections on the following topics: the referential framework, including the destination image, the stakeholders, and the attributes of the city of Hermosillo, Sonora; the contextual framework; the methodology, which describes the procedures utilized for the semi-structured interviews with different actors and for the questionnaires applied to visitors; a discussion of the findings; and a final section with the conclusions.

## **1. Referential framework**

An understanding of the concepts of tourist destination, destination image, and stakeholders allows us to identify the elements involved in the visitor's construction of ideas about a place, and their decision to explore it.

### **Destination image**

One of the most influential factors in the tourist's purchase decision is the image they receive of a product or service, understood by Kotler and Armstrong (2004) as the set of beliefs that the consumer has about a brand. In this regard, Gordon argues that "brands are coded in memory on a cognitive (thinking, analytical, considered) and emotional (somatic) basis" (2002, p. 285). In turn, according to Parra and Beltrán (2016), investing in the image of a destination and adding value to its existing products and resources positions that destination in the minds of tourists.

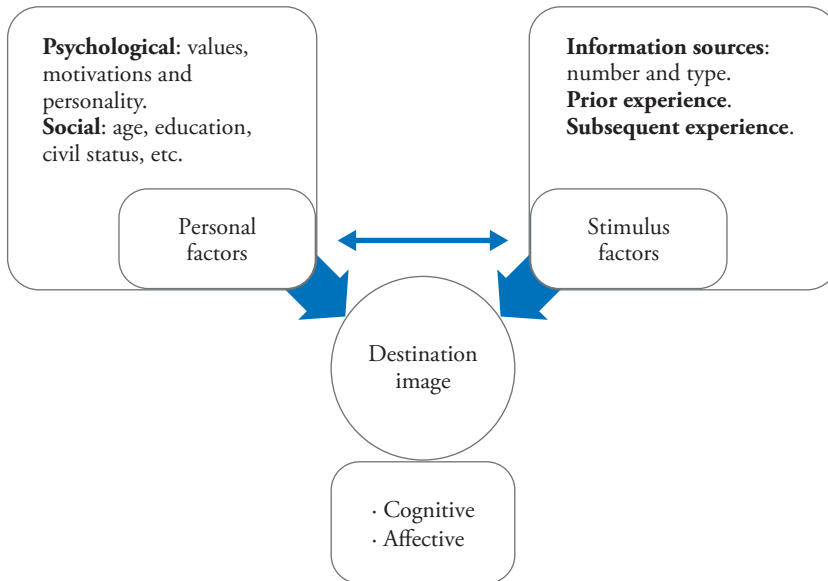
Moreover, McCracken suggests with regard to consumers' brand experiences that "when we craft brand experiences, we are doing so to communicate meanings" (2005, p. 179). Thus, brands are meanings, which are related in turn to the brand image, brand personality, and brand position.

For Batey (2013), the consumer conceives of things in symbolic and practical terms and seeks functional benefits; however, the choices consumers make, as well as their attitudes towards brands, are motivated by unconscious meanings, whereby cognitive response prevails over practical attitudes (such as beliefs about value for money, perceptions of brand benefits, and physical justifications). On the other hand, symbolic non-cognitive expressions encompass feelings, sensations, and motivations in the consumer's unconscious.

According to Ashworth (2009), the brand of a city encompasses three attributes: image, singularity, and authenticity. But above all, he argues that most cities implement a brand to improve their image. In relation to image, Qu, Hyunjung, and Hyunjung (2011) propose that a brand is based on visual objects that circulate in the form of signs, and identify the brand as a form of communication that has six functions: expressive or emotive, referential, conative, metalinguistic, and aesthetic. Meanwhile, Costa (2003) posits that image refers to the mental representation, within people's perceptions, of attributes and values (identity) that act as a stereotype and establish group behavior and opinions.

Along similar lines, Coshall (2000) defines image as the individual's perception about the characteristics of the place as a destination, and suggests that images represent a simplification of a large number of associations or fragments of information related to the place. Thus, stimulus factors, such as tourists' experiences and the information that they receive, as well as personal factors, such as psychological and social characteristics, allow a destination's image to be formed with cognitive, affective, and behavioral components (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999) (Figure 1). For Beerli and Martin (2004), this information, acquired through personal experience or upon visiting a destination, establishes the primary image and can defer the secondary image. Thus, personal and stimulus factors should be taken into account when performing an analysis.

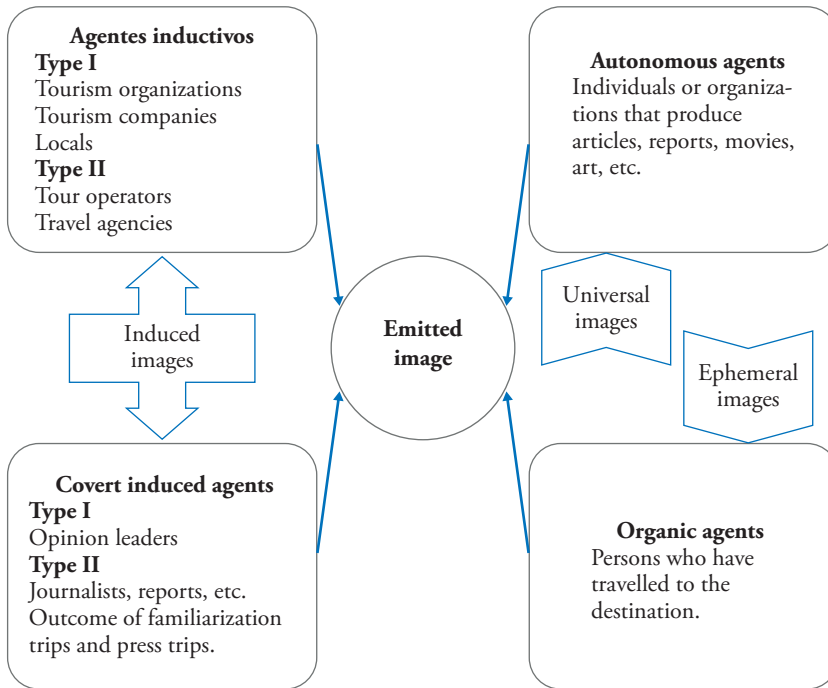
Figure 1  
Factors in the formation of a destination image



Source: Baloglu and McCleary (1999); compiled by authors.

Martínez and Pina conceive of brand image as “a set of assets and liabilities, linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm or to that firm’s customers” (2003, p. 433). Thus, an image implies a process ranging from perceptions of significant information and memorization to ideas and stereotypes that govern consumers’ behavior. In this context, in line with the image formation process model, Cai (2002), and Camprubí, Guía and Comas (2009) draw on Gartner’s classification to propose four types of agents who act individually or collaboratively to create the image projected for tourism (Figure 2).

Figure 2  
Tourist image formation agents



Source: Camprubí, *et al.* (2009); compiled by authors. *famtrips* = familiarization trips; *presstrips* = press trips.

The first box in Figure 2 shows induced agents (tourism organizations, local tourism companies, tour operators, travel agencies); the second refers to covert induced agents (opinion leaders, journalists, reports); the third denotes autonomous agents (persons, individuals, or organizations that produce articles, movies, music, art, etc.); while the fourth introduces organic agents (individuals who have visited the destination). Induced agents such as opinion leaders, tourism organizations, and local branches promote the creation of induced images; in turn, organic and autonomous agents construct universal or ephemeral images through individuals who produce articles, reports, movies, music, and so forth, and those who have traveled to the destination, respectively.

Huei-Ju, Po-Ju, and Fevzi (2013) observe that the destination image contains attribute-based and holistic-based components, each of which has tangible “functional” and abstract “psychological” characteristics; moreover, the image varies between common functional and psychological characteristics and unique holistic characteristics. As to the components,

the cognitive refers to knowledge about the destination, which includes tangible and intangible tourism resources; the affective is related to tourists' feelings when they identify the emotions that the tourist destination triggers; and the conative involves influencing tourists' behavior by inviting them to perform a certain action or to respond in a certain way (Zhang, Fu, Cai, & Lu, 2014; Beltrán & Parra, 2016).

For tourists or excursionists to reach a cognitive, affective, or conative appreciation, they need to obtain information about their intended destination from various sources. According to Castaño (2005), the destination image is formed from the following sources of information: a) promotional material, such as travel brochures, booklets, and posters, and so on; b) the opinions of others, such as friends, family members, workmates, travel agents, etc.; and c) the media, such as the internet, television, and specialized magazines, among others.

Thus, Coshall (2000, quoted by Kurgun, 2010) defines the destination image as the individual's perception of the characteristics of the place as destination. Coshall also contends that images represent a simplification of a large number of associations or fragments of information related to the place. Therefore, the image or perception of a tourist destination is important for tourists or excursionists, and so the actors engaged in tourism must make efforts to project the image as effectively as possible.

### **Tourist destination**

Authors such as Murray (1991), Meenaghan (1995), Grace and O'Cass (2005), and Calvento and Colombo (2009) define the concept of "tourist destination" by focusing on the core of image and perceptions about place. To this, Veasna, Wanniyh, and Chuhsin (2013) add the creation of symbolism, image, and tourist beliefs and attitudes. A common element in several studies is the destination image as an important characteristic. Pérez-Nebra and Torres (2010) cite destination image as a determining factor in the purchase decision of the tourism consumer. Meanwhile, Teng and Aqilah (2014) note that the image of a destination is characterized by its tourism infrastructure, as well as its natural, cultural, and social characteristics.

Of course, tourist destinations possess distinctive characteristics, just like individuals, brands, and stores. The personality of the destination, for Ching-Fu and Sambath (2013), conditions decisive behavior by tourists and excursionists. In particular, Barrado defines the tourist destination, based on a systems approach, as follows:

a subsystem made up of spatial (territorial resources, infrastructure, etc.), administrative (legislation, policies), and productive



(production resources and factors, agents, investment, etc.) elements; and its group of interrelations and the effects they produce, which are fundamentally sectoral (certain goods and services produced *in situ*) and geographical (new landscape realities; changes to prior territorial relations, perception of the territory, images, etc.) (Barrado, 2004, p. 56).

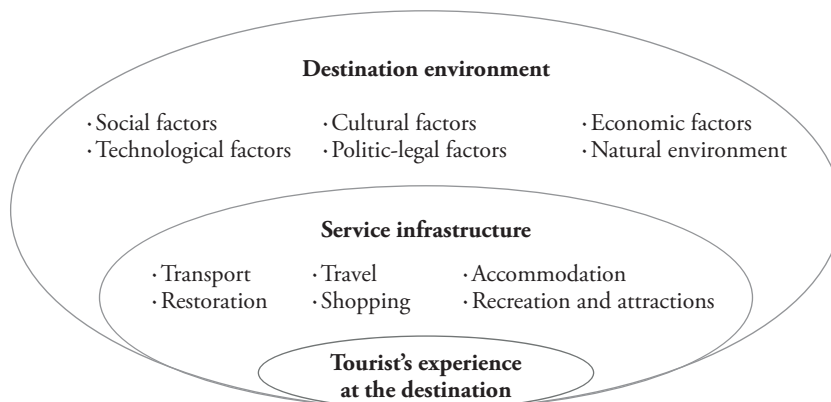
In this sense, the systems approach is essential for analyzing tourist activity in a comprehensive manner that takes into account, as Molina (2000) mentions, the attractions, infrastructure, host community, demand, and superstructure, with the aim of facilitating an improvement in the quality of life of the actors.

Stepchenkova and Zhan (2013) propose that to be competitive, destinations can avail themselves of tourism resources and infrastructure, as well as a country's overall economic conditions, political stability, and governance of tourism. For Fernández (2011), the characteristics of a destination are ethnic diversity, landscape, industrial investments, development of activities, and the historical and cultural past. In turn, the World Tourism Organization (2005-2007) conceives of a destination as the main place in a tourism trip, fundamental to the decision to travel. For their part, Coshall (2000, quoted by Kurgun, 2010) argues that the influx of tourists depends on the characteristics of a destination, such as climate, landscape, services, and cultural attributes.

From a different perspective, Bartoncello explains that "the tourist destination place can be thought of as a relational place whose existence is derived from the articulation of its particular features or attributes with the interests and values defined by others" (2008, p. 7); that is, the tourist attraction is regarded as a factor related to tourists and, in turn, with the actors who have the ability to assign a function to the territory.

As to the tourist destination as a brand, Ritchie and Ritchie (1998, quoted in Blain, Levy, & Brent, 2005) define it as a name, symbol, logo, word mark, or another graphic that identifies or distinguishes the destination. This serves to transmit the promise of an unforgettable travel experience, exclusively associated with that destination. With regard to the product, Murphy, Pritchard, and Smith (2000) define it as the service infrastructure, its attributes, and the ability to influence visitors' perceptions of their experience (Figure 3). Together, all of this forms the overall experience of the tourist or excursionist in relation to the destination visited.

Figure 3  
Conceptual model of the tourist destination product



Source: Murphy, *et al.* (2000); compiled by authors.

As defined by Valls, the tourist destination is “any territorial unit that has a planning vocation and can avail itself of some form of administrative capacity to develop it; it may be a country, a region or state, a city or a place” (2004, p. 17).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, destinations possess distinctive personality characteristics, just like people, just like brands, and tend to describe qualities in a tourist context. The destination personality is a potential predictor of tourists’ purchase behavior (Ching-Fu & Sambath, 2013). Another notable proposal in the literature is the “planning and destination management model” of Lorenzini, Calzati and Giudici (2011), which defines the associated strategy based on four elements: product scope, deployment of resources, competitive advantages, and synergy.

From a marketing standpoint, Bigné, Font, & Andreu (2000) propose that the tourist destination is the area made up of the systemic relationship between resources, infrastructure, and services, which designates it as a unit or an entity in its own right and enables its recognition; that is, it refers to the existence of resources that allow for the integration of services or products so that tourists can perceive their stay as an experience.

### Tourism and stakeholders

It is important to analyze the destination image in terms of perception and, above all, the will of tourism stakeholders to generate benefits for the destination. Stakeholder theory is founded on various other theories:

1 Translation from the Spanish by *Apuntes*.

organizational theory, in which there is an understanding of the firm in the plural sense, an operational practice involving the organization, the individual and the environment; general systems theory, which deals with human communication from a holistic and integrative perspective, whereby relations between the firm, family, and so on are most important; and corporate social responsibility theory, which incorporates an ethical component into business practice.

Along similar lines, some studies on stakeholder theory indicate “that its overall management value stems from the fact that the normative, descriptive, and instrumental aspects of the theory are (mutually supportive)” (Truly & Leisen, 1999, p. 314). On the basis of this theory, the present study seeks to identify the tourism stakeholders in the city of Hermosillo and the relations between them, while also incorporating other persons and organizations that develop goods and services linked to the industry.

Within the stakeholder management approach, Freeman defines these actors as “any group or individual that can affect or is affected by the achievement of a corporation’s purpose” (2004, p. 229). Building upon this, Clarkson (1995) ascribes to stakeholders rights or interests in an organization and in the activities that result from transactions, which can be exercised legally, morally, individually, or collectively. In addition, Clarkson (1995) classifies tourism stakeholders as either primary or secondary. Primary stakeholders are those without whom the organization cannot survive, and who may be shareholders, investors, employees, customers, suppliers, governments, or communities. These stakeholders obey and observe laws, regulations, taxes, levies, and other obligations. In turn, secondary stakeholders are those who may oppose the policies and programs that the organization has implemented to accomplish its objectives, but who let the organization operate and survive.

One example of consolidated collaboration is the Bidasoa-Txingudi Transfrontier Consortium, formed through an agreement between the towns of Hondarribia (on the Basque coast), Hendaya (a French border commune), and Irún (in the Basque province of Gipuzkoa), as part of a treaty between France and Spain. The consortium’s areas of focus are primarily the promotion of tourism, culture, and sport; health and social welfare; socioeconomic development; mobility; and the environment.

Thus, for Rodríguez (2005), collaboration is the voluntary and attitudinal process through which individuals or firms unite to pursue a common goal, and which presents itself strategically and spontaneously. Krawchuk (2013) states that collaboration is a deliberate relational and cordial act.

## 2. Conceptual framework

The city of Hermosillo is the capital of the state of Sonora, Mexico (Figure 4). It is located in the Municipality of Hermosillo, at parallel 29° 05' north latitude and 110° 57' longitude west of the Greenwich Meridian, 282 meters above sea level.

Figure 4  
Location of the city of Hermosillo



Source: Google Maps (2019); compiled by authors.

Hermosillo's tourist infrastructure includes 52 lodging establishments (37 hotels and 15 motels) with a total of 4,181 rooms, according to the Office of Conferences and Visitors (Oficina de Congresos y Visitantes, OCV, 2012); 68 restaurants specializing in various cuisines; and 25 car rental companies located both at the airport and throughout the city (Yescas, 2012). The Association of Travel Agencies in Hermosillo currently recognizes 18 agencies that provide services for domestic and international tourists.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, Hermosillo has a convenient geostrategic position in relation to the U.S. and Asian markets, with air, sea, and land transport infrastructure: General Ignacio Pesqueira International Airport, with flights to the United States; the port of Guaymas one hour away; and Carretera 15, the highway connecting the city with Arizona on the U.S. border, respectively. As Sánchez and Propin (2010) point out, this infrastructure supports tourism

2 Personal correspondence with M. Arteaga, Association of Travel Agencies (August 28, 2014).

(whether natural or cultural), and is a basic factor in prompting tourists to decide on one destination over another.

### 3. Methodology

This study is descriptive with a mixed approach. According to Hernández, Fernández, and Baptista, this type of approach allows the researcher to “seek to specify important properties, characteristics, and features of any phenomenon analyzed” (2010, p. 80). As part of the quantitative approach, a structured instrument with 22 general items was used, featuring a five-level Likert scale divided into five sections: the first contains sociodemographic data; the second includes the economic determinants of tourists or excursionists; the third refers to the city’s identity attributes; the fourth concerns the city’s image, examining both positive and negative perceptions; and, finally, the fifth section is related to experience and seeks to identify emotions and obtain descriptions of tourist’s experiences in the city.

To ensure validity, the expert judgement technique was employed, as part of the study conducted. The data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program, employing Cronbach’s alpha procedure.

The instrument has an acceptable degree of reliability, with an index of 0.87 obtained. As Hernández *et al.* (2010) observe, this is the degree to which repeated application to the same subjects yields the same results. The sample was calculated based on the formula proposed by Daniel (2006) for when the population is already known:

$$n = (N z^2 p q) / ((N - 1) e^2 + z^2 p q)$$

Where:  $n$  = sample size;  $z$  = relative deviation of a standard normal distribution (in this case, it is equal to 1.96, which corresponds to a confidence level of 95%);  $p$  = probability of an expected event occurring (in this case, 0.87, so,  $q = [1 - p] = 0,13$ );  $e^2$  = degree of accuracy desired (in this case, 95%, that is:  $1 - 0.95 =$  error of 0.05%);  $N = 38,742$  international and domestic tourists (population);  $n = 173$  domestic and international tourists.

The sample of 173 (tourists or excursionists) is based on the domestic and international tourist arrival statistics in the Comprehensive Tourist Market Information System (Sistema Integral de Información de Mercados Turísticos, SIIMT) maintained by the Tourism Promotion Board of Mexico (Consejo de Promoción Turística de México), which has recorded a total of 38,742 tourists.

In turn, the qualitative approach analyzes the image perceived and collaboration between tourism service providers (travel agents, restaurateurs,

hoteliers, guides, and hosts) and associations and government authorities in the city of Hermosillo. The technique centers on three focus groups, with the aim of analyzing the measures taken by service providers to promote destination image nationally and internationally, and collaboration between associations and the government. Utilizing verified transcripts of the interviews recorded and information from the focus groups, the analysis was conducted by way of the program ATLAS.ti version 7 so as to confirm the semantic networks.

#### **4. Results and discussion**

The quantitative fieldwork focused on the 22-item questionnaire. The sociodemographic data taken from the surveys completed by tourists or excursionists shows, first, that 52% are male and 48% female; and, second, that 44.5% are single, 43.9% married, 6.9% divorced, and 2.9% are in a civil union. The level of education of the respondents breaks down as follows: 36.4% have an undergraduate degree; 29.5%, pre-university; 20.2%, secondary; 4.6%, primary; 4%, without any formal degree; 2.9%, postgraduate. As to age, 33.7% are between 25 and 44; 33.5%, between 15 and 24; 27.7%, between 45 and 65; and 5.2% are aged 65 or over. With regard to usual place of residence, 91.9% of tourists are from Mexico (Baja California, Chiapas, Chihuahua, Ciudad de México, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Jalisco, Nayarit, Oaxaca, Puebla, Querétaro, Quintana Roo, San Luis Potosí, Sinaloa, Sonora, Tabasco, Veracruz, Yucatán, and Zacatecas) while 8.1% come from abroad (Australia, Canada, Chile, United States, Honduras, and Russia).

To ascertain economic determinants, the tourists' occupations and reasons for traveling to the city of Hermosillo were analyzed. In the case of occupation, the largest group were professionals or white-collar workers (24.3%); followed by students (20.2%); retirees (9.2%); self-employed (8.1%); public sector or civil service (6.9%); teaching (4.6%); security (1.7%); other occupations (19.7%, including mechanics, salespersons, drivers, stylists, among others); and unemployed (5.2%). Among the reasons for traveling, the primary one was to visit family (30.6%), followed by business or professional travel (30.1%); leisure and recreation (17.3%); health (8.1%); religion or pilgrimage (0.6%); and other reasons (13.3%).

With respect to opinions about graphic identity, 26% of tourists stated that they "totally agreed" that graphic identity forms part of the destination's image; 22.5% said they "agreed"; 26% neither agreed nor disagreed; 11% "disagreed"; 13.3% "totally disagreed"; and 1.2% did not answer.

However, in the specific case of the city of Hermosillo (whose graphic image is abbreviated as HMO), 78% of the tourists or excursionists were unfamiliar with the graphic image, while 20.8% stated that they were familiar with it, and 1.2% did not answer. As to the effect of occupation on familiarity with the brand, of those who answered in the affirmative, 27.8% were professionals or clerks; 25% were students; 16.7%, other occupations; 11.1%, unemployed; 8.3%, professionals or self-employed; 5.6%, retirees; and 2.8% were teachers, civil servants, or public sector employees. Among the respondents who were unfamiliar with the city's graphic image, 22.2% were professionals or white-collar workers, 20.7% were engaged in other occupations, 19.3% were students; 10.4%, retirees; 8.1%, professionals, self-employed, civil servants, or public sector employees; and 3.7% were unemployed.

The questionnaire contained a list of attributes of the city of Hermosillo, to which possible responses ranged from total agreement to total disagreement. To explore the relationship between the variables of visitor appreciation during their stay in the city and visitor opinion about the basic and complementary attributes of the locality, a chi-squared test was performed so as to contrast the null hypothesis that the variables are independent. Then, the data were processed by the SPSS program. The results are provided in tables 1 and 2 with their corresponding chi-squared tests (tables 1.1 and 2.1). Moreover, to test for the existence of correlation between both variables, the Pearson correlation was used, and, finally, the results were confirmed using the Spearman statistical test.

Table 1  
Variables of tourists' appreciation of basic attributes (in frequencies and percentages)

| Basic attributes<br>(grouped) | Tourist appreciation (grouped) |          |          |               | Total |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------|----------|---------------|-------|
|                               | Very negative                  | Negative | Positive | Very positive |       |
| Very negative                 | 1                              | 0        | 0        | 0             | 1     |
|                               | 33.3%                          | 0.0%     | 0.0%     | 0.0%          | 0.6%  |
| Negative                      | 1                              | 4        | 7        | 0             | 12    |
|                               | 33.3%                          | 15.4%    | 8.3%     | 0.0%          | 6.9%  |
| Positive                      | 1                              | 14       | 38       | 17            | 70    |
|                               | 33.3%                          | 53.8%    | 45.2%    | 28.3%         | 40.5% |
| Very positive                 | 0                              | 8        | 39       | 43            | 90    |
|                               | 0.0%                           | 30.8%    | 46.4%    | 71.7%         | 52.0% |
| Total                         | 3                              | 26       | 84       | 60            | 173   |
|                               | 100%                           | 100%     | 100%     | 100%          | 100%  |

Source: fieldwork (2016).

The statistical significance of the variable of tourists' appreciation of the city's basic attributes is presented below, whereby  $p > 0.000$ .

Table 1.1  
Chi-squared tests

| Chi-squared tests            | Value                 | df <sup>(1)</sup> | Asymptotic significance (bilateral) |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Pearson's chi-squared        | 79.371 <sup>(2)</sup> | 9                 | 0.000                               |
| Likelihood ratio             | 34.439                | 9                 | 0.000                               |
| Linear-by-linear association | 27.098                | 1                 | 0.000                               |
| Valid cases                  | 173                   |                   |                                     |

Notes:

<sup>(1)</sup> Degrees of freedom

<sup>(2)</sup> Nine boxes (56.2%) have an expected frequency below 5. The minimum expected frequency is 0.02.

As to the appreciation variable, 66.7% of tourists have a very positive opinion of the city's complementary attributes, which define its image (Table 2).

Table 2  
Variables of tourists' appreciation of complementary attributes (in frequencies and percentages)

| Complementary attributes (grouped) | Tourist appreciation (grouped) |          |          |               | Total |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------|----------|---------------|-------|
|                                    | Very negative                  | Negative | Positive | Very positive |       |
| Very negative                      | 2                              | 2        | 0        | 0             | 4     |
|                                    | 66.7%                          | 7.7%     | 0.0%     | 0.0%          | 2.3%  |
| Negative                           | 1                              | 14       | 9        | 0             | 24    |
|                                    | 33.3%                          | 53.8%    | 10.7%    | 0.0%          | 13.9% |
| Positive                           | 0                              | 9        | 56       | 20            | 85    |
|                                    | 0.0%                           | 34.6%    | 66.7%    | 33.3%         | 49.1% |
| Very positive                      | 0                              | 1        | 19       | 40            | 60    |
|                                    | 0.0%                           | 3.8%     | 22.6%    | 66.7%         | 34.7% |
| Total                              | 3                              | 26       | 84       | 60            | 173   |
|                                    | 100%                           | 100%     | 100%     | 100%          | 100%  |

Source: fieldwork (2016).

The statistical significance of the variable of tourist appreciation of the city's complementary attributes is presented below, whereby  $p > 0.000$ .



Table 2.2  
Chi-squared tests

| Chi-squared tests            | Value                  | df | Asymptotic significance (bilateral) |
|------------------------------|------------------------|----|-------------------------------------|
| Pearson's chi-squared        | 140.299 <sup>(1)</sup> | 9  | 0.000                               |
| Likelihood ratio             | 97.325                 | 9  | 0.000                               |
| Linear-by-linear association | 75.218                 | 1  | 0.000                               |
| Valid cases                  | 173                    |    |                                     |

Note:

<sup>(1)</sup> Eight boxes (50.0%) have an expected frequency below 5. The minimum expected frequency is 0.07.

The Pearson correlation is used to identify correlation between the basic attributes and complementary attributes variables, as shown in Table 3. Finally, this correlation is confirmed using the Spearman statistical test provided in Table 4.

Table 3  
Correlations of tourists' appreciation of the city's attributes

| Correlations                       | Tourist appreciation (grouped) | Basic attributes (grouped) | Complementary attributes (grouped) |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Tourist appreciation (grouped)     | Pearson                        | 1                          | 0.397 <sup>(1)</sup>               |
|                                    | Sig. (bilateral)               |                            | 0.000                              |
| Basic attributes (grouped)         | Pearson                        | 0.397 <sup>(1)</sup>       | 1                                  |
|                                    | Sig. (bilateral)               | 0.000                      | 0.000                              |
| Complementary attributes (grouped) | Pearson                        | 0.661 <sup>(1)</sup>       | 0.321 <sup>(1)</sup>               |
|                                    | Sig. (bilateral)               | 0.000                      | 0.000                              |

Note:

<sup>(1)</sup> The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (bilateral).

Source: fieldwork (2016).

Table 4  
Spearman's rho: tourists' appreciation of the city's attributes

|                                    | Spearman's rho          | Tourist appreciation (grouped) | Basic attributes (grouped) | Complementary attributes (grouped) |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Tourist appreciation (grouped)     | Correlation coefficient | 1.000                          | 0.353**                    | 0.621**                            |
|                                    | Sig. (bilateral)        | -                              | 0.000                      | 0.000                              |
| Basic attributes (grouped)         | Correlation coefficient | 0.353**                        | 1.000                      | 0.305**                            |
|                                    | Sig. (bilateral)        | 0.000                          | -                          | 0,000                              |
| Complementary attributes (grouped) | Correlation coefficient | 0.621**                        | 0.305**                    | 1.000                              |
|                                    | Sig. (bilateral)        | 0.000                          | 0.000                      | -                                  |

Note:

<sup>(1)</sup> The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (bilateral).

Source: fieldwork (2016).

Upon identification of tourists' appreciation of the image of Hermosillo, it was found that 83.2% have a positive image of the city (Table 5). This coincides with the observations of Geng-Qing and Hailin (2008): if the image obtained from a travel experience is positive, this will facilitate a favorable assessment of a destination. Likewise, the finding is in keeping with McCracken (2005), who indicates that working with brand experiences helps to communicate image and personality, and to position the brand – in this case, the city of Hermosillo as a tourist destination.

Table 5  
Tourists' appreciation of the image of the city of Hermosillo (in frequencies and percentages)

| Place with positive image | Frequency | Percentage | Accumulated percentage |
|---------------------------|-----------|------------|------------------------|
| Totally agree             | 5         | 2.9        | 2.9                    |
| Disagree                  | 5         | 2.9        | 5.8                    |
| Neutral                   | 19        | 11.0       | 16.8                   |
| Disagree                  | 45        | 26.0       | 42.8                   |
| Totally agree             | 99        | 57.2       | 100                    |
| Total                     | 173       | 100        |                        |

Source: fieldwork (2016).

The correlation between the variables of visitors' experience during their visit and the image of the information received about the destination, as well as the corresponding chi-squared test, were performed together (tables

6 and 6.1). A significant correlation was found between both variables ( $p < 0.000$ ); that is, if there is any change to the variable of tourists' experience in the destination, then the variable of tourists' perceived image of the city will also change.

Table 6  
Variable: tourists' experience during their visit and image of the information received (in frequencies and percentages)

| Image of the information received (grouped)) | Experience during visit (grouped)) |            |             |               | Total       |
|--|------------------------------------|------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|
|  | Very negative                      | Negative   | Positive    | Very positive |             |
| Very negative                                | 0<br>0.0%                          | 1<br>9.1%  | 2<br>3.7%   | 1<br>0.9%     | 4<br>2.3%   |
| Negative                                     | 0<br>0.0%                          | 6<br>54.5% | 5<br>9.3%   | 3<br>2.8%     | 14<br>8.1%  |
| Positive                                     | 0<br>0.0%                          | 2<br>18.2% | 34<br>63.0% | 39<br>36.4%   | 75<br>43.4% |
| Very positive                                | 1<br>100.0%                        | 2<br>18.2% | 13<br>24.4% | 64<br>59.8%   | 80<br>46.2% |
| Total  | 1<br>100%                          | 11<br>100% | 54<br>100%  | 107<br>100%   | 173<br>100% |

Source: fieldwork (2016).

Table 6.1  
Chi-squared tests

|                              | Value                 | df | Asymptotic significance (bilateral) |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|----|-------------------------------------|
| Pearson's chi-squared        | 57.247 <sup>(1)</sup> | 9  | 0.000                               |
| Likelihood ratio             | 42.39                 | 9  | 0.000                               |
| Linear-by-linear association | 26.549                | 1  | 0.000                               |
| Valid cases                  | 173                   |    |                                     |

Note:

<sup>(1)</sup> Ten fields (50.0%) have an expected frequency below 5. The minimum expected frequency is 0.02.

In turn, to identify the existence of correlation between the variables, Pearson's correlation was used (Table 7), which revealed a correlation of 0.393 between the two variables. This is in keeping with Sahin and Baloglu (2014), who note that visitors' experiences are utilized for the construction of a unique brand image and identity, in order to position the image in tourists' minds and mark it apart from that of other cities. So, to position

the destination and make it more competitive, it is necessary to create and manage an appealing and particular perception of it.

Table 7  
Correlations between experience during visit and image

| Correlations                                |                     | Experience during visit (grouped) | Image of the information received (grouped) |
|---|---------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Experience during visit (grouped)           | Pearson correlation | 1                                 | 0.393**                                     |
|   | Sig. (bilateral)    |                                   | 0.000                                       |
| Image of the information received (grouped) | Pearson correlation | 0.393**                           | 1   |
|   | Sig. (bilateral)    | 0.000                             |   |

Note:

<sup>(1)</sup> The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (bilateral).

Source: fieldwork (2016).

The qualitative fieldwork was carried out by way of three focus groups, categorized by the following types of tourism service providers: restaurants within the city; travel agencies, guides, and hotels within the city; and sectoral associations and government authorities. The participants' opinions were sought through the following question: what image do you have of Hermosillo as a tourist destination? Some of their responses were as follows:

4R The custom of eating seafood in the morning is an area of opportunity, but also Hermosillo is a city with a beach or Hermosillo, a seaside city. I'd go a little further, we have a great tourist product which is, it's not unknown, everyone sees us this way, a fusion of desert with the sea. This is also unusual and compared to other destinations in the country, and also with an extra ingredient, that our beaches, practically the entire Hemosillo coastline are, either belong or belonged to the Com-caac [Seris] ethnic group.

1H. They come to Hermosillo on business or to do politics or hold sports and cultural conferences, on health and all that. So it's a cosmopolitan city that doesn't have a reputation as a beach town. And of course Hermosillo is not known as a tourist beach destination.

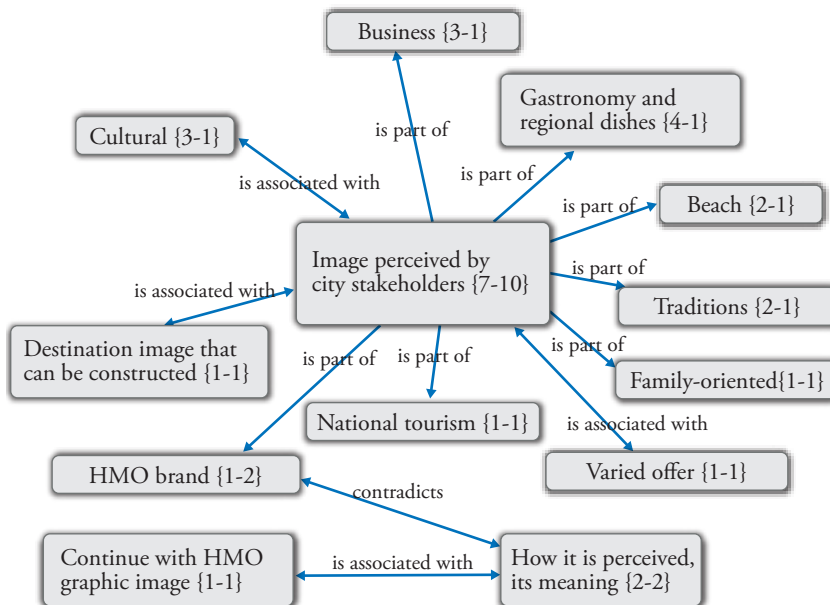
2G. I think Hermosillo has a great advantage, which many of us see and many others don't, that it's a destination that can still be developed differently than the way other destinations have been developed, isn't that right? For example, you go to

the famous Riviera Maya or even what is now talked about a lot, the Riviera Nayarit, and these are destinations that are an expression, sometimes even a false one, of what sometimes the destination itself is, of what Mexicanness is, et cetera.

2H. In reality we have domestic tourism, Hermosillo is wonderful, good gastronomy, Cerro de la Campana, nearby beaches [in] Bahía de Kino, and the Seri ethnic group. But they say it's too hot. Of course, you're not going to take them [visitors] to a conference at one in the afternoon, you'll do it at a different time.

The comments from the three focus groups form a semantic network of the perceived image (Figure 5); that is, the image perceived by tourism stakeholders in Hermosillo, which can be broken down as follows: business; gastronomy and regional dishes; beach destination; traditions; family; varied offer; national tourism; the HMO brand; destination with opportunities to build its image; and cultural. In the case of the HMO brand, concerns were expressed about how its significance is perceived, as well as how to continue developing this graphic image.

Figure 5  
Semantic network of the image perceived by stakeholders of Hermosillo as a tourist destination



Source: fieldwork (2016); ATLAS.ti.

According to Kurgun (2010), the destination image is the individual's perception of the characteristics of the place as a destination, and the large number of associations or fragments of information related to that place. Therefore, finding the essence of the image, and beginning with what stakeholders perceive, is important in directing efforts towards better projecting that image. In her exploration of Argentine entrepreneurs involved in the Federal Program, Schenkel finds an example of cooperation and collaboration that involves

[...] few of [...] the SME hotels or emerging destinations at which the initiative was initially targeted. Despite prioritizing the consolidation of emerging destinations, the program mainly includes well-established tourist destinations [...] Schenkel (2018, p. 87).

Another comment from the focus groups refers to the contribution of the city brand to the image perceived:

2A. The HMO brand, we have fought for twelve years for it to stay the way it is. For us as travel agents, initials are common, the ones from flights, HMO, MEX, et cetera. They're common initials for us. However, we again need promotion and publicity that HMO is Hermosillo; but the colors are related to the sunset, which we have here. The image is twelve years old now. Yes, we've tried to sustain it, we do like it. However, probably, if there are doubts about what it refers to, we have to position it again or specify that it is the city of Hermosillo, it is Sonora.

And as to the opportunities for gastronomy to support and strengthen the destination image, participants stated the following:

1R. We have the sea very close by, as it's also a beach destination. We have culture, with gastronomy and regional dishes.

3R We have culture, we are very regionalistic. We take great care of the traditions that we are told about from a very early age. I think it's an opportunity for seafood restaurants to exploit the image in terms of gastronomy; for people anywhere in the country think of carne asada. I think we shouldn't lose that; but take advantage of other "seafood" opportunities and exploit them as we should.

For their part, the restaurateurs state that the city of Hermosillo is seen as part of the trend of business tourism. As the same time, they mention other areas of opportunity:

2R As a global destination, that has something for the family, that isn't just for business, we have everything to offer in all areas: family tourism, beach tourism, accessible, cultural. So I would like to see this reflected in a varied offer.

4R I think the image should have a lot to do with the businessman, but accompanied by his family. Instead of leaving the hotel on Friday and going to Mexico City or wherever else that these visitors might be from, and coming back to work on Monday, often for three weeks.

This is not only about the image projected as a tourist destination, but also about collaboration between stakeholders; that is, between interested parties and actors in tourism in the city of Hermosillo in pursuit of a common goal. For Rodríguez (2005), as noted earlier, collaboration is the voluntary and attitudinal process through which individuals or firms decide to unite to pursue a common goal, and which presents itself strategically and spontaneously. Moreover, and again as noted earlier, Krawchuk (2013) states that collaboration is a deliberate relational and cordial act. Thus, and in line with Jamal and Getz (1995), the collaborative efforts of stakeholders in planning and managing local tourism are key to the processes as a whole, for a common end.

## **5. Conclusions**

The city of Hermosillo boasts natural and cultural attractions, equipment and amenities, infrastructure, tourism service providers, and specialized community and tourism groups which, as a whole, as a system, construct the tourist destination as a product. Based on the product, tourists and excursionists utilize both the cognitive and the affective image to select a destination, and unique experiences allow for its positioning.

In this regard, tourism stakeholders perceive the image of the city by way of various impressions, most of them focused on business tourism, followed by consideration of a destination associated with the beach, traditions, and culture. That is, it can be inferred that the graphic image of the HMO brand is positioned among some stakeholders who have tried to sustain it for twelve years, since, by their reasoning, its creation was the sum product of an effort by various local stakeholders. However, they all express concern that tourists are unaware of the place associated with the brand, and that the design may need to be targeted or built upon.

In sum, efforts to project the city using a fresh and distinctive image can be observed. However, there is a lack of inclusion, of willingness to work in close alignment on a common project, without private or political

interests and with the support of both municipal and state authorities, so that tourism can provide benefits to society. For this to happen, will is not enough – the activity must also be understood.

Domestic and international tourists have a positive image of the city, as they enjoyed their experience during their stay. The domestic segment is identified as the main market for Hermosillo, given it is the capital of the state of Sonora and an influential center for business activity. This is reflected in the fact that the main reason for going to the city (for slightly over half of those surveyed) was business or family visits, while lesser numbers visited for health, leisure and recreation, and other reasons.

In the chi-square test of independence, the relationship between the variables of visitors' appreciation during their stay and their opinion about the city's basic and complementary attributes has high statistical significance. This indicates a clear relationship between these variables. At the same time, the Pearson correlation shows that there is a significant correlation between these three variables; however, there is a lower correlation (0.321) between the variable of basic attributes and that of complementary attributes, and the same is true for the correlation between the basic attributes and tourist appreciation variables (0.397). On the other hand, the correlation between the tourist appreciation and complementary attributes is 0.661.

In conclusion, according to the chi-squared test, there is a correlation between the variables of visitors' experience and the image of information received about the destination, with a high significant relationship between them ( $p < 0.000$ ). That is, if the variable of experience in the destination is altered, the perceived image of the city also changes. In turn, the Pearson coefficient shows that among the two variables, there is a correlation of 0.393. Thus, as Sahin and Baloglu (2014) propose, to take advantage of visitors' experiences, a unique brand image and identity should be constructed in order to position the image in tourists' minds and mark it apart from that of other cities.



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