The Perceived Destination Image of Hangzhou City of China as Received in the Travel Blogs of Western Tourists

Xiao Mali
E-mail: xiaomalistudy@hotmail.com

BaoYafang
E-mail: boyafan@126.com

Sun Zhia
School of Tourism and Health,Zhejiang Agriculture&Forestry University,,Hangzhou,311300,China
E-mail: curelandscaper@tom.com

Abstract: This study explored travel blogs as a manifestation of travel experience, along with the destination image of Hangzhou city of China from the perspective of western tourists. Frequency analysis, semantic network analysis as well as content analysis were taken in this study which aims to reveal the perception of western travelers to Hangzhou. The data for this study was from the blogs of western tourists who had been to Hangzhou. Empirical results revealed that the overall perceived destination image of Hangzhou was positive, with particular strengths in tourist attractions and major weaknesses in meals and transportation.

Key Words: travel blogs; Hangzhou; destination image; Western tousists.

1 Introduction

Destination image which provides an important basis for consumers' purchase destination influences tourist decision making and, consequently, their behavior and destination choices.[1] Destination image formation and psychological characteristics help to shape the image, develop marketing strategy and promote the core competitiveness of a particular destination.[2] In this study, Hangzhou was chosen as the tourist destination for this qualitative blog data collection. In 2011, as the fifth largest inbound tourism city in China, Hangzhou received more than 3 million inbound tourists—11.1% increase over the previous year (CNTA, 2012).For selling points of Hangzhou in its outbound tourism market, researchers had reached a consensus—selling points should vary in different markets. Thus, in order to promote the outbound tourism market of Hangzhou in western countries, it is necessary to conduct a study about the destination image of Hangzhou from the perspective of western tourists. Up to now, there are some scholars do have conducted latent researches on the destination image of Hangzhou from

the aspect of the tourists' perception. However, from the view of travel blogs, few studies have been done. The effects of travel blogs on destination image have been largely overlooked. Blogs present a new and easy means of experience-sharing, where both positive and negative electronic word-of-mouth are exchanged.

This sharing of information has undoubtedly had a direct impact on destination.[3] In this study, frequency analysis, semantic network analysis as well as content analysis are taken which aims to reveal the perception of western travelers to Hangzhou. The data for this study is from the blogs of western tourists who have been to Hangzhou. The purpose of this study was to, from a marketing perspective, assess western tourists' opinions posted on leading Internet travel blogs to better understand the experience being communicated about the strengths and weaknesses of Hangzhou.

2 Literature review

2.1 The perceived destination image and its impact on tourism

Researchers stated that the perceived destination image plays an important role in consumers' purchase decisions, consequently, their behavior and destination choice.[4] Foreign scholars have reaped bumper academic achievement. Gartner put forward eight types of destination image agents, including overt induced I image, overt induced II image, covert induced I image, covert induced II image, autonomous image, unsolicited organic image, solicited organic image and organic image.[5] Echter and Ritchie undertook an empirical analysis, settling the essential elements which engender when the perception striking tourists.[6] Gallarza et al. reviewed the methodologies of empirical studies of destination image.[7]

2.2 Tourist information search behavior and travel blogs

Tourism is an information–intensive industry and the tourist organization markets their products and builds customer relationships through various channels. Internet has become one of means for tourists to seek travel-related information, which is more effective and flexible compared with the traditional types of media such as advertisements, personal experience, advice from friends and relatives. The development of Internet is inevitable for its extensive source of prepurchase information. It has been found that an increasing number of consumers were relying on online opinions when making decisions[8]. which is especially true for tourism products because of their features of exclusivity and untransferability.

In the Internet era, consumers become "the media" themselves.[9] The web provides consumers with various channels, from which they are able to access the others' opinions of tourist destinations. Bloggers judge online blogs to be more trustworthy than other types of media.[10] Travel blogs, as narratives, provide textual artefacts of consumer identity and sense-making and narrative analysis of these texts offers a commonsense approach to developing a deeper and more meaningful understanding of tourists' experiences and behavior.[11] Recently, researchers suggested that travel blogs provided a new way of understanding consumers' perceptions of a destination, its products, and service. After analyzing travel blogs on Charleston, South Carolina, Pan et al. (2007) identified strengths and weakness of the destination. Choi et al. (2007) compared the image of Macau represented in different online information sources. Similarly, Wenger (2008) analyzed blog entries relating to Austria and found that blog authors are quite different from Austria's market in demographics and touristic characteristics.[12]

3 Methodology

In this study, diverse means were adopted to investigate further relationship between bloggers and the tourist destination as well as grasp insight into the meaning of blogs. The text contained in blog was analyzed by frequency and semantic network analysis, after that, the text of each gathered blog entry was analyzed by content analysis.

3.1 Data collection

An essential reason for choosing Google as the search engine is that Google's PageRank algorithm ranks documents based on popularity, which was put forward by Brin and Page in 1998. What's more, Google is generally identified as the most popular and reliable search engine through the world. As a result, two top travel blog sites travelblog.org and travelpod.com were selected in terms of the rank of Google. These sites have a hierarchical directory of blogs (continents, countries, provinces and cities). All travel blogs on China, Hangzhou were downloaded from the two sites. Besides, all travel blogs analyzed in this study were created from December 2005 to April 2012. Totally, 127 blogs were collected up to April 18, 2012. The remaining valid 102 blogs were placed in a master file for qualitative data analysis. Each blog retained its title and identification information.

3.2 Date analysis

After detailing the 102 blogs, frequency analysis, semantic network analysis and content analysis were employed in this study. In order to acquire what the greatest concern of western tourists, the frequency analysis was chosen to analyze the full text of 102 blogs. After analyzing, the high- frequency keywords were built into a semantic network. The adjacency of two keywords represents their relative distance of semantic meaning, meanwhile the relative frequencies of words or phrases and the relative distance of them reflect the correlation of their meaning. Content analysis was the third method used in this study. While classifying data, a coding and classification system was adopted to analyze the content efficiently and clearly. As can be seen in Table 1, the categories were labeled meals, hotels, transportation, shopping and attractions. Each category included subcategories. Different evaluation criteria were settled according to different items. The number of the accumulated positives, negatives, neutral comments and the percentage of negatives were the basis of the content analysis.

Table 1 - Category, Subcategory and Evaluation Criteria

Category	Subcategory	Evaluation Criteria
Meals	By the type of cuisine (e.g., Asian, Western)	Price, products, service, environment, other
Accommodation	By the type of accommodation (e.g., hotels, hostel)	Price, room, service, environment, other
Transportation	By the type of transport (e.g., buses, taxies)	Fare, convenience, environment and user friendliness, other
Shopping	By the type of goods (e.g., tea, silk products)	Price, service, other
Attractions	By the name of attractions	Positives, negatives

4 Results

As a manifestation of communicated travel experience, travel blogs express the attitude of visitors towards Hangzhou. The results of frequency, semantic network analysis and content analysis for travel blogs presented the strengths and weaknesses of Hangzhou as a notable tourist destination in detail.

4.1 Profiles

The demographic information of bloggers was acquired from the hosting sites where bloggers were permitted to post their personal portraits, disclose their gender and hometown in the traveler profiles. Despite a small minority of bloggers were from Canada, Switzerland, France, Spain and Germany, most of them lived in USA and UK. For those users who disclosed their gender, male users were more than females in this segment, with 30 females (44%), 38 males (56%) and 12 blogs owned by couples or families (13%). For the blog profiles, except for some bloggers posting several pieces for one trip to describe their experience, the most users preferred producing one posting for the description of one trip. The majority of blogs were composed after the trip, and the rest were posted the same day the trip was taken. In the blogs, the number of words ranged from 2 to 3121, and every blogs contained photos.

4.2 Frequency analysis

Table 2 revealed the most frequently used keywords or phrases in travel blogs. It demonstrated the priorities travelers focused on, and it expressed many aspects of travel experience in their travel blogs, including meals, accommodation, transportation, shopping and attractions.

Table 2 - Most Frequent Keywords in Blogs for Hangzhou City of China

Keywords	Frequency	Keywords	Frequency	Keywords	Frequency
Hangzhou	307	boat	45	bamboo	14
West Lake	136	silk	26	menu	14
hostel	97	Longjing tea fields	26	Lingyin temple	11
bus	70	island	26	Tea house	8
bicycle/bike	67	history	24	Leifeng pagada	7
taxi/cab	67	night market	19	willow	7
hotel	59	Buddha	17	jasmine	7
restaurant	51	Causeway	15	Sony dynasty	5
museum	45	Longjing tea	14		

4.3 Semantic network analysis

Based on frequency analysis, semantic analysis presented a clear and valuable framework for the construction and analysis of communication content of Hangzhou. In the Figure1, a large frequent occurrence of keywords was illustrated by a larger and darker colored circle and vice versa. As can be seen, Hangzhou is the most dominant cluster with accommodation, transport tools and some other tourist attractions. The second cluster is West Lake as the major tourist attraction of Hangzhou. Three keywords related to Longjing tea field belong to the third cluster. In addition, there is also a small cluster associated with Buddha and Linyin temple.
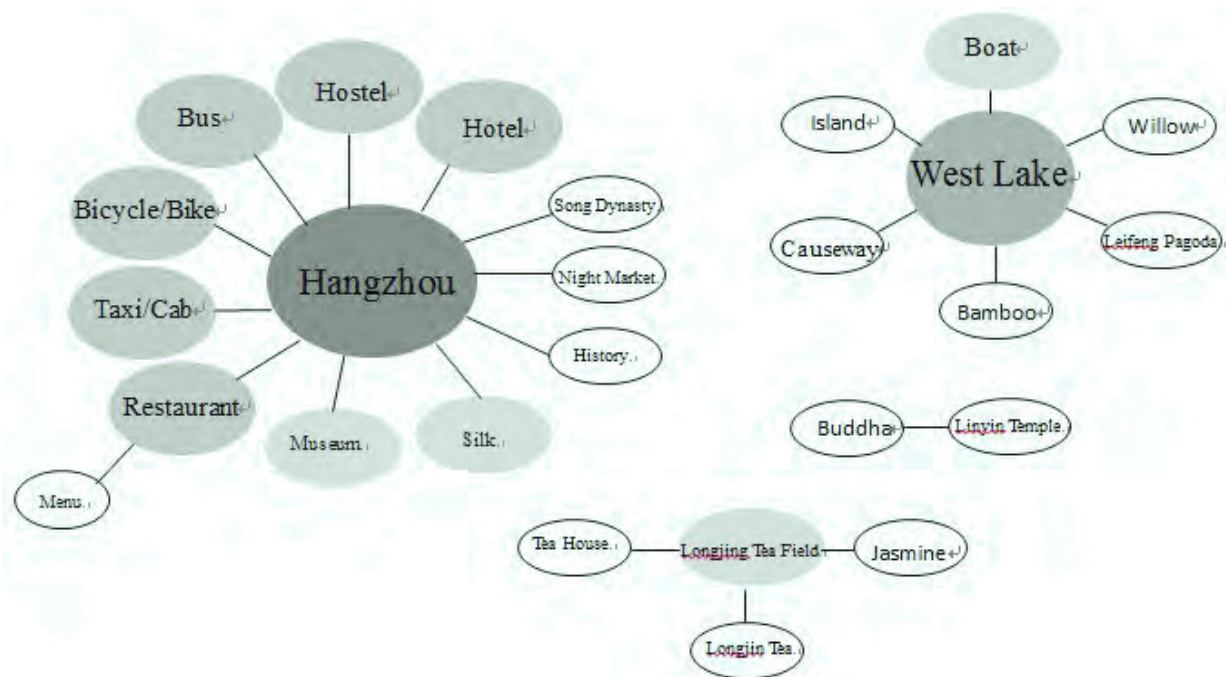
Figure 1 - Semantic Network of Travel Experience to Hangzhou City of China

4.5 Content analysis

After the text of each collected blog was analyzed, a coding and classification system was adopted and the texts were categorized by meals, accommodation, transportation, shopping and attractions. Every category included subcategories.

1) Meals

As Table3 shows, compared with the 51 total sentences of comment, there are only 5 comments for bars and pubs indicating that western tourists attached more attention to Chinese food but less to bars and pubs. Additionally Japanese and Korean food won more praises from bloggers. Specifically, Chinese cuisine was most often commented among bloggers, but its prices generated a relatively large number of negative comments.

Table 3 - Coding Categories and Number of Positive and Negative Comments for Meals

Coding categories	Positives	Negatives	Total Sentences	% of Negative Sentence
Asian food				
Chinese food				
Price	1	4	5	80
Products	27	12	39	31
Environment	0	0	0	0
Other	0	6	6	100
Subtotal	28	22	50	44

Japanese/Korean food				
Price	0	0	0	0
Products	4	0	7	0
Environment	0	0	0	0
Other	4	0	7	0
Subtotal	8	0	14	0
Bars and pubs				
Price	0	3	3	100
Products	1	0	1	0
Environment	1	0	1	0
Other	0	0	0	0
Subtotal	2	3	5	80
Western food				
Price	0	0	0	0
Products	2	0	2	0
Environment	1	1	2	50
Other	0	1	1	100
Subtotal	3	2	5	40
Total	42	28	70	40

2) Accommodation

Both bloggers who chose hostels and these who preferred hotels poured less attention to price and room. The detailed results are listed in Table4. Regarding hostels, bloggers were discontent with the service and hotels received the most negative comments on environment.

Table 4 - Coding Categories and Number of Positive and Negative Comments For Accommodation

Coding categories	Positives	Negatives	Total Sentences	% of Negative Sentence
Hotel				
Price	0	0	0	0
Room	0	0	0	0
Environment	1	1	2	50
Service	2	1	3	33
Other	2	0	2	0
Subtotal	5	2	7	29

Hostel				
Price	1	0	1	0
Room	1	0	1	0
Environment	3	1	4	25
Service	0	4	4	100
Other	1	2	3	67
Subtotal	6	7	13	54
Total	11	9	20	45

3) Transportation

As Table5 shows, among 26comments on transportation, 65% comments were negative. All comments on buses and taxis were negative. In contrast, bicycles and boats received a relatively high proportion of positive comments.

Table 5 - Coding Categories and Number of Positive and Negative Comments for Transportation

Coding categories	Positives	Negatives	Total Sentences	% of Negative Sentence
Buses				
Convenience	0	1	1	100
Fares	0	0	0	0
Environment and user friendliness	0	1	1	100
Other	0	1	1	100
Subtotal	0	3	3	100
Taxis/Cabs				
Convenience	0	1	1	100
Fares	0	0	0	0
Environment and user friendliness	0	1	1	100
Other	0	4	4	100
Subtotal	0	6	6	100
Bicycles/Bikes				
Convenience	1	0	1	0
Fares	3	0	3	0

Environment and user friendliness	1	0	1	0
Other	0	4	4	100
Subtotal	5	4	9	44
Boats				
Convenience	0	0	0	0
Fares	0	1	1	100
Environment and user friendliness	1	0	1	0
Other	0	0	0	0
Subtotal	1	1	2	50
Trains				
Convenience	1	0	1	0
Fares	1	0	1	0
Environment and user friendliness	1	0	1	0
Other	0	3	3	100
Subtotal	3	3	6	50
Total	9	17	26	65

4) Shopping

As shown in Table 6, shopping in Hangzhou received a total of 27 comments, one-third of which were negative. The categories that had the highest percentage of positive comments were tea and silk products, especially for silk products, all comments of which were positive. However the range of clothing and accessories, appliances and digital products fall shorts of expectation.

Table 6 - Coding Categories and Number of Positive and Negative Comments for Shopping

Coding categories	Positives	Negatives	Total Sentences	% of Negative Sentence
Tea				
Price	1	0	0	0
Products	4	0	4	0
Other	3	1	4	25
Subtotal	8	1	9	11

|				
Silk products				
Price	0	0	0	0
Products	1	0	1	0
Other	1	0	1	0
Subtotal	2	0	2	0
Clothing and acessories				
Price	0	3	3	100
Products	0	0	0	0
Other	1	0	1	0
Subtotal	1	3	4	75
Jewelry				
Price	1	0	1	0
Products	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0
Subtotal	1	0	1	0
Groceries				
Price	1	0	1	0
Products	0	1	1	100
Other	4	1	5	25
Subtotal	5	2	7	29
Appliances and digital products				
Groceries	0	3	3	100
Price	0	0	0	0
Products	1	0	1	100
Other	1	3	4	75
Subtotal	18	9	27	33

5) Attractions

The results revealed the diversity of travel experience in Hangzhou. As shown in Table7, attractions in Hangzhou received a total of 146comments, only 6% of which were negative. Compared with other 4 categories, attractions received the highest percentage of positive comments.

Table 7 - Coding Categories and Number of Positive and Negative Comments for Shopping

Coding categories	Positives	Negatives	Total Sentences	% of Negative Sentence
West Lake	37	2	39	5
Leifeng Pagada	5	0	5	0
Botanical Gardens	1	0	1	0
Yue-Wang Temple	1	0	1	0
Dreaming of the Tiger Spring	2	0	2	0
YunQi bamboo path	3	0	3	0
Linyin Temple	5	0	5	0
Klippe	1	2	3	27
Longjing Tea Fields	14	1	15	7
Wushan Square	1	0	1	0
Museum	57	2	59	3
Song Dynasty	5	0	5	0
Wushan Birds and Flower Market	1	0	3	67
Hideout of Linbiao	1	0	1	0
Chongyi Church	3	0	3	0
Overall Impression	28	5	33	15
Total	165	14	179	78

4.6 Strengths and Weaknesses as Reflected from Travel Blogs on China, Hangzhou

A total of 341comments were extracted from 102 western travels' blogs, with 253 positive and 88 negative comments. Strengths and weakness identified in the coding process, as shown in the Figure2. Three out of four comments were positive (74.2%), that is to say, most travellers expressed their favor to Hangzhou. Looking at the major categories, the results showed that attractions were the major strengths of Hangzhou while most complaints came from meals and transportation.
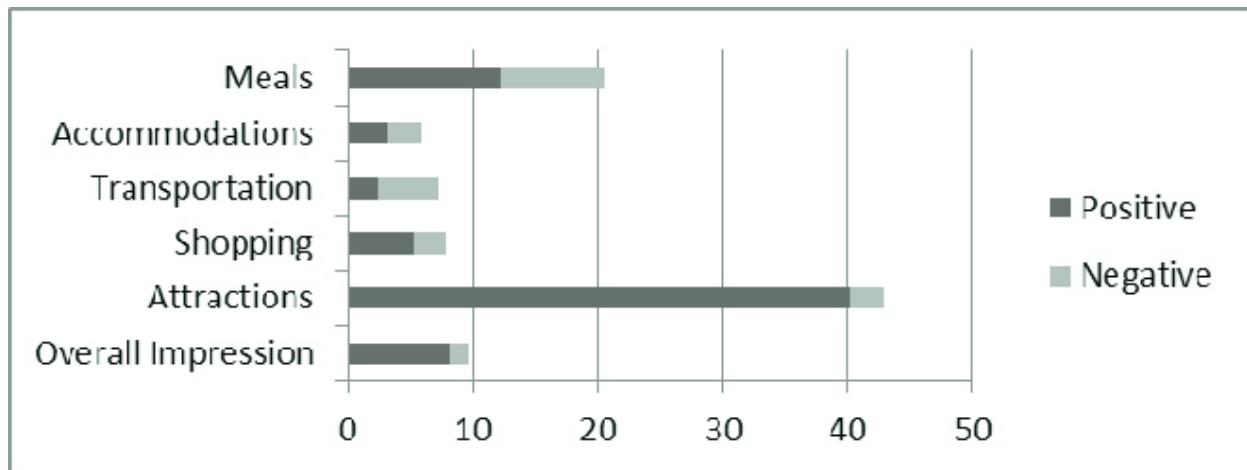
Figure 2 - Percent of Positive and Negative Sentences in Travel Blogs on Hangzhou

5 Conclusions

This study analyzed the destination image of Hangzhou as revealed in the travel blogs of western tourists. Analysis of blogs on travels in Hangzhou revealed strengths and weaknesses of this city. The results revealed that the major strengths of the destination of Hangzhou lie in its attractions. Besides the West Lake which is the most charming attraction, the temples and museums also received a wide range of praise. The major weaknesses of Hangzhou were meals and transportation. There were unfavorable perceptions about the price of food and beverage and service of restaurants, which ask local restaurants to control the price as well as improve the service. As for the transportation, bloggers' complaints were mainly about traffic congestion which caused by the growing number of vehicles and the traffic violations of drivers, passengers as well as pedestrian. Additionally, foreigners also confused about the language barrier which was a big factor affecting their trips. Thus, to solve the traffic problems, Hangzhou government should intensify the publicity and education to improve the levels of citizen qualities. Furthermore, in order to improve the service on accommodation, hotels and hostels need to recruit good workers as well as organize staff training. Lastly, marketers have to orient Hangzhou tourism to the needs of public, highlight the strengths of Hangzhou as a tourist attraction and send the correct message conceptually to western travelers.

It is important to note several limitations of the study. First, the findings were not generalizable over foreign visitors to Hangzhou. The sample was not stratified based on demographic variables such as nationality, age and gender. Second, only manifest content was analyzed in this study. In the course of this research, myriads of photos were found along with the main text. Hence, future research analyzing the study with visual pictures to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the image of destination would provide more comprehensive implications.

References

[1] K.S. Chon. The role of destination image in tourism: A review and discussion [J]. The Tourist Review,1990,2 :2–9

[2] R.C. Mill, and A.M. Morrison. The tourism system: An introductory text [M]. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall,1992

[3] R Law, and Shannon Cheung, The Perceived Destination Image of Hong Kong as Revealed in the Travel Blogs of Mainland Chinese Tourists [J]. International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration,2010,11(4):303-327

[4] K.S. Chon, The role of destination image in tourism: A review and discussion [J]. The Tourist Review,1990,2:2–9

[5] W.C. Gartner, Image formation process[J]. Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, 1993 ,2(2/3): 191-215

[6] C.M.Echtner, and J.R. Ritchie, The measurement of destination image: An empirical assessment[J]. Journal of Travel Research, 1993,31(4): 3-13

[7] M.G. Gallarza, I.G. Saura, and H.C..Garcia, Destination image: Towards a conceptual framework[J]. Annals of Tourism Research, 2002,29(1): 56–78

[8] L.Guernsey, Suddenly, everybody's an expert on everything[M]. New York Times. 2000

[9] G. Thevenot, Blogging as a social media[J]. Tourismand Hospitality Research,2007,7:287–289

[10] T.J. Johnson, and B.K. Kaye, Wag the blog: Howreliance on traditional media and the Internet influence credibility perceptions of weblogs among blog users [J].Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 2004,81:622–642

[11] S. McCabe, and C. Foster, The role and function of narrative in tourist interaction [J].Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change, 2006,4(3):194-215

[12] Xu Li, and Youcheng Wang, China in eyes of Western Travelers as Repesented in Travel Blogs. Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing,2011, 28(7): 689–719