American College Students' Perceptions of Saudi Arabia as a Travel Destination

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AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS’
PERCEPTIONS OF SAUDI ARABIA AS
A TRAVEL DESTINATION

By
Majed Hader

A Thesis submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Hospitality and Tourism Management

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December 14, 2017
Committee Approval

The M.S. Degree Thesis of Majed Hader has been examined and approved by the thesis committee as satisfactory for the thesis requirement for the Master of Science degree.

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Abstract

Destination image is a critical factor for customers making a travel decision. The recent fluctuation in oil prices has forced the Government of Saudi Arabia to focus on tourism to revive its economy. The terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, affected the image of Saudi Arabia in the minds of people in other countries. The purpose of this study is to investigate American college students’ perceptions of Saudi Arabia as a travel destination and to provide information to help Saudi Arabia’s tourism authority to develop marketing strategies that will attract potential tourists.

Keywords: destination image, destination perceptions, Saudi Arabia, travel and tourism
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Dedication

I dedicate this work to the most important and adorable people in my life; my mother, sister, wife, and daughter.
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1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Saudi Arabia is a Middle Eastern country bordered by Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. The country is famous for the holy Muslim cities of Mecca and Medina, and religious tourism attracts 17.5 million tourists to Saudi Arabia annually (Smith, 2016). That number is expected to reach 30 million in 2025 (Smith, 2016).

Tourism is the third largest industry in Saudi Arabia after energy and manufacturing, and has recently emerged as the second most important in terms of foreign exchange earnings and job creation (Sadi & Henderson, 2005). According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2015), the direct contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP in Saudi Arabia was SAR 68.4 bn (2.4% of total GDP) in 2014, and is forecast to rise by 6.2% in 2015, and to rise by 4.3% pa, from 2015-2025, to SAR 110.8 bn(2.8% of total GDP) in 2025. In 2014, Saudi Arabia’s travel and tourism industry directly supported 603,000 jobs (6.2% of total employment) and contributed 2.4% of the country’s GDP (WTTC, 2015). Additionally, the launch of the Saudization program, which aims to reduce the number of foreign workers and replace them with Saudis, is expected to create 1.7 million tourism jobs in 2020 as revealed by the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH) (SCTH, 2015).

Based on the importance of tourism and its contribution to the economy and employment, Saudi government paid more attention to tourism and established the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH) in 2000 to prepare master plans and promote the sector. The first goal was to attract 8.1 million arrivals in 2010 and 10.9 million by 2020, 3 million will come from outside of the Arab areas and the countries of the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council
whose members are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) (Sadi & Henderson, 2005). In addition, seminars and forums on tourism and its future prospects have also been organized by many Saudi universities and institutions, which reflect the new approach in the country.

Saudi Arabia has the second-largest reserves of petroleum in the world and relies heavily on oil for its economy. The recent fluctuation in oil prices, which is the main economic source for Saudi Arabia, forced the Saudi government to look for alternatives to revive its economy. In 2015, Saudi government, represented by the Board of Economic Affairs and Development, announced the National Transformation Program – a five-year plan of the country, in order to diversify the economy and stimulate investment and support non-oil exports. As a result, promoting tourism can play a major role in the shift of the country’s economy. Moreover, the government established the General Entertainment Authority in May 2016 to work side by side with SCTH.

In June 2016, Saudi government launched the “National Transformation Program” NTP as a road map to achieve “Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030” that was announced in April 2017. This vision considers tourism and the entertainment industry one of its pillars. According to the NTP, SCTH has four strategic objectives:

- “Establish and develop tourism destinations as well as integrated entertainment cities and islands for all family members, and encourage the private sector to invest in and operate them.
- Protect and develop awareness of national heritage sites, and encourage private investment and operation.
- Increase and organize events and festivals that appeal to the various segments of society.
- Increase and develop hospitality facilities and tourism services.” (NTP, n.d.)
In addition to these strategic objectives, there are 16 indicators and 16 targets.

The Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 based on three themes;

- Vibrant Society with Strong Roots
- Thriving Economy,
- Ambitious Nation

Tourism has its share in all these themes. In vibrant society, the government has focused its efforts to serve Umrah visitors through the third expansion to the Two Holy Mosques, modernizing and increasing the capacities of airports, developing the Metro project, establishing more museums, preparing new tourism and historical sites and cultural venues, and improving the pilgrimage experience within the Kingdom to increase the number of visitors for religious tourism from 8 million to 30 million. In addition, within this theme, government tends to promote culture and entertainment by supporting the efforts of public and private sectors to organize cultural events, enhancing the role of government funds, attracting local and international investors. Moreover, government tends to develop the children’s character by promoting cultural, social, volunteering and athletic activities through empowering educational, cultural and entertainment institutions (Vision 2030, 2017).

Regarding the thriving economy theme, government will improve the business environment and allocate prime areas within cities for educational institutions, retail and entertainment centers; dedicate large areas along the country’s coasts to tourism projects; and create an environment attractive to both local and foreign investors. (Vision 2030, 2017).

In April 2017, the Public Investment Fund (PIF) announced the launch of the largest project of cultural, sports and entertainment city of its kind in the world which will include a major safari area and a city of Six Flags (Saudi Press Agency, 2017). According to the PIF, Saudi government
launched a megaproject, “The Red Sea Project” in July 2017. The project will cover 34,000 square kilometers of Saudi coasts and islands. The project will be built on 50 islands, mountain sites and beaches to become a leading destination for leisure tourism, activities and adventures in the Kingdom. With these opportunities, the Red Sea project targets Saudi Arabia's residents and tourists from around the world, including families and individuals, and expect to host a million visitors a year by 2035. To achieve this ambitious goal, a special legal and regulatory framework will be developed, in accordance with international best practices, to ease procedures for entering tourists from most of the world's nations without visas. A strict environmental system will ensure the protection of the Kingdom's natural resources (PIF, n.d.).

According to Aljazeera.net, Saudi Arabia intends to ease visa restrictions to promote tourism (2013). In 2017, SCTH launched a tourism visa program to be approved by both the foreign and interior ministries in the coming days (Alarabia.net, July, 19, 2017).

Recently, the Saudi Arabia image was affected by the September 11 attacks in 2001. Although the political relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia is still strong, the image of Saudi Arabia in the American society’s eyes is still damaged. The Saudi government launched the biggest scholarship program in its history to send Saudi students to the western world. The United States has the biggest portion of this program – 100,000 Saudi students with their families as recorded by the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission in the U.S. in 2013. One goal of this program is to maintain rapprochement between the people of the two countries and to enhance the image of Saudi Arabia among American citizens. Tourism is an effective tool in this case as mentioned in conferences as International Tourism-Passport to Peace which held in May 1987 in Shannon, Ireland, and The First Global Conference, Tourism -A Vital Force for Peace which held in Vancouver, Canada in October 1988. The goal of the Saudi Scholarship Program to the United
States is enhanced by attracting American students, who are in direct contact with Saudi students, and this will result in benefits from economic, cultural, and social perspectives.

1.2. Background of the Topic

The definition of image and its components varies among researchers, and there is still no consensus. This study adopts Crompton’s definition and defines destination image as “the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination” (1979, p. 18). Boo and Busser (2005) argued that image structure is reflected by the way in which individual attributes are synthesized to become the image of an entity. Echtner and Ritchie provide a more thorough understanding of destination image by envisioning a three-dimensional diagram, including the attributes holistic, functional-psychological, and common-unique continuum (2003). Research suggests that cognitive images (perceptual/cognitive evaluations), affective images (affective response), and overall images are blended in consumers’ minds to form a complete image of a destination (Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010). Image regarding any particular destination is a recollection of memoirs of the place, and largely impacts the tourists’ travel decision-making process and behavioral patterns, as well as their desired level of satisfaction (Jesus, 2013; O’Leary & Deegan, 2005).

1.3. Purpose of the Study

The United States has been a critical target market for many countries because it is ranked second in terms of its outbound market for international tourism, and number one in terms of money spent by Americans while traveling internationally (IPK International, 2015). American college students are an ideal target for tourism administrators in Saudi Arabia, not only for the
purpose of rebuilding the country’s image, but also because the students represent market power in the near future after they graduate. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), in fall 2013, the total undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions was 17.5 million students and expected to increase to 19.6 million students in 2024. In the same record, 2.9 million students were enrolled in post baccalaureate degree programs (NCES, 2015). The purpose of this study is to examine American college students’ perceptions of Saudi Arabia as a travel destination and provide suggestions to promote tourism in Saudi Arabia.

1.4. Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the American college students’ perceptions of Saudi Arabia as a travel destination?
2. What are the main resources of their information?
3. What are their intentions to visit Saudi Arabia in the future?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study will focus on investigating the American college students’ perceptions of Saudi Arabia as a travel destination. As a potential target market, the American college students may contribute greatly in the development of tourism in Saudi Arabia. Thus, it is essential to find out the positive and negative perceptions they have toward Saudi Arabia as a travel destination and the sources they rely on to form these perceptions. Knowing the sources will help to improve and change any negative perceptions they have, and help the Saudi tourism administrators to develop their marketing strategies.
1.6 Overview of the Thesis

This thesis contains five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction of the thesis, background of the topic, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, and this overview. The second chapter is a review of the previous studies and researches regarding destination image; its definitions, importance, components, formation, process of destination selection, measurement of destination image, media influence on destination image formation, and images of Saudi Arabia as a travel destination. The third chapter is mainly about methodology. It includes the study setting, sample, instruments, data collection process, and data analysis. The fourth chapter describes the results and discussion of findings. The last chapter presents the conclusion, limitations of the research and recommendations for future researches.
2. CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Destination Image Definition

According to Jenkins (1999), it is problematic to determine an exact meaning of tourist destination image (TDI). The definition of image and its components varies among researchers and there is still no consensus. In fact, there are almost as many definitions of image as there are scholars devoted to the topic (Sonlleitner, 2011). Due to this ambiguity in defining destination image, it is difficult to determine the components that make up the destination image and the methods to measure them. Since there is no exact definition of destination image and no exact method to measure it, there is no development yet of solid conceptual/theoretical framework for destination image (Gallarza, Saura & García, 2002; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Pike, 2002; Iarmolenko, 2010; Jenkins, 1999).

“The fundamental importance of the image has induced scholars from various disciplines to attempt to define it.” (Avraham & Ketter, 2008, p.20). Crompton (1979) defines destination image as “the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination” (p. 18). It can be said that Crompton’s definition is one of the most cited definitions of destination image. “The image concept has generally been considered as an attitudinal construct consisting of an individual's mental representation of knowledge (beliefs), feelings, and global impression about an object or destination” (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999, p. 870). “Destination image may be referred to as the visual or mental impression of a place, a product, or an experience held by the general public” (Milman & Pizam, 1995, p .2).

Iarmolenko (2010) emphasizes in his study that comprehensive definition of destination image is still to be developed by citing the following table in his study:
Table 2-1. Destination Image Definitions. Adopted from (Iarmolinko, 2010, p. 13-14)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Govers, Go &amp; Kumar (2007)</td>
<td>Image is formed by few impressions chosen from a flood of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murphy, Moscardo &amp; Benckendorff (2007)</td>
<td>Image is comprised of perceptions about a place reflected by tourist’s associations with it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan &amp; Cave (2005) Boo &amp; Busser (2005)</td>
<td>Destination image is a set of cognitive, affective attitudes, and overall impression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mazanec &amp; Strasser (2007)</td>
<td>Sum of cognitive, conative, and affective perceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Echtner &amp; Ritchie (1993)</td>
<td>Destination image is comprised of attribute-based and holistic components</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reilly (1990)</td>
<td>Image reflects the overall impression of destination in people’s minds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunt (1975)</td>
<td>Perceptions potential visitors hold of place or area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDougall &amp; Fry (1975)</td>
<td>Image is the ‘personality’ of the product, complex of meanings and relationships people hold about it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son &amp; Pearce (2005)</td>
<td>“An individual’s subjective beliefs, feelings, and multi-sensory representations toward a tourist destination” (p. 24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gartner (1989)</td>
<td>“Image is an underlying concept which when formed correctly will force a destination into a traveler’s evoked set” (p. 16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reynolds (1965)</td>
<td>A mental construct based upon a few impressions chosen from a flood of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milman &amp; Pizam (1995)</td>
<td>“Visual or mental impression of a place, a product, or an experience held by the general public” (p. 21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Tourism Organization (in Milman &amp; Pizam, 1995)</td>
<td>“An aura, an angle, a subjective perception accompanying the various projections of the same message transmitter” (p. 21) Destination image can exist only if there is at least some small amount of knowledge about it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Upon examination of the table, it becomes evident that most researchers define destination image quite vaguely, through a set of impressions or perceptions, or sum of attitudes tourists have towards a destination. They never refer to whether they define destination image in terms of
attributes or overall impression. So, a universal comprehensive definition of destination image is still to be developed” (Iarmolinko, 2010, p.13-14). Image is a term that has already been used differently in a large number of contexts and disciplines, thus creating different meanings. In psychology, image tends to refer to a visual representation, whereas in behavioral geography the concept of image is more holistic and it includes all of the associated impressions, knowledge, emotions, values, and beliefs. Definitions from marketing, however, point to the attributes that underlie image and relate image to consumer behavior (Jenkins, 1999). It has been found that destination image and tourist destination image have the same meaning. Thus, they will be used interchangeably during current research.

2.2 The importance of Destination Image

“The importance of the tourist destination’s image is universally acknowledged” (Gallarza, Saura, & Garcia, 2002). Images became more important than reality as tourism services are intangible (Sonnetner, 2011, Beerli & Martin, 2004). This led to a substantial body of research on this topic not only in the tourism field but in other different fields as well, such as: psychology, marketing, geography and environmental planning (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). The destination image is one of the most important elements of a tourist destination, and becomes a critical factor for the success or failure of tourism management (Lopes, 2011, Tapachai & Waryszak, 2000; Gartner, 1996). Marketers spend a great deal of time, effort, and expense in presenting images of a destination as creating and managing an appropriate destination images are important to effective positioning (Gartner, 1996, Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Avraham and Ketter, 2008). Image is believed to represent the destination and subsequently has the power to influence destination choice as tourism products are mainly intangible and the potential traveler has no or only limited
knowledge about them (Tasci & Gartner, 2007, P. 419). “Therefore, it can be said that researchers, no matter how they approach the subject, are in consensus about the importance of image for a destination’s viability and success in tourism” (Tasci & Gartner: 2007, p. 413).

According to Tasci and Gartner (2007, p. 413) researchers relate the importance of destination image to different aspects. Some researchers relate the importance of proper image development to the success of a destination in tourism. Others attribute destination image importance to its effects on supply-side aspects (marketing, such as positioning and promotion). Still others relate the importance of destination image to its influence on demand-side aspects (tourist behavior, especially decision-making).

LaPage and Cormier (1977) highlighted the importance of the role of image in the vacation decision and this is cited in Tapachai and Waryszak (2000, p.37). According to LaPage and Cormier (1977), information that tourists have before they visit a tourist region is enhanced by their own mental image of that region. In many cases, it is probably the image more than the real information that makes a tourist’s decision on where to travel.

Jenkins (1999) emphasizes on the importance of tourist destination image because of its great and direct influence on both the decision-making behavior of tourists and the tourists’ level of satisfaction regarding their experience. “Since potential holiday-makers generally have limited knowledge about the attributes of a destination they have not previously visited, the destination or place image is seen as a critical element influencing holiday choice” (Goodall, 1991, p.177).

A study done by Katharina Sonnleitner (2011) investigated destination image and its effects on marketing and branding a tourist destination. The concepts of destination image and destination marketing and branding are strongly interrelated. Destination image studies are considered to be the foundation of successful destination marketing strategies. Marketers’ strong
interest in the concept of destination image is mainly due to the fact that a positive image of a
destination can be positively related to consumer's’ choice for that destination, resulting in
profitable sales (Sonnleitner, 2011). The findings of the study suggest that most tourist destinations
spend a considerable amount of time and money creating and boosting a positive image.

According to Goodall “mental images of the products and destinations provide the basis of
the evaluation with those images individuals possess of the real world representing the pull
component in choice. Because holidays are a service which cannot be sampled before
consumption, holiday-makers must base their choice on these mental images of the alternative
holidays” (Goodall, 1991, p. 176).

Based on the review of written literature, Tasci and Gartner (2007) emphasize in their paper
on the great influence of destination image on tourist behavior during travel stages; pre-visit,
during visit, and post-visit. According to Maclnnis and Price (1987) imagery permeates the
consumption experience. Vicarious consumption may take place through imagery even before
making a purchase. Imagery can add value and increase satisfaction during the process of
consumption. After consumption, “imagery can have a reconstructive role in which a person
relieves the experience via memories and vacation souvenirs” (Jenkins, 1999, p.2).

● Pre-visit

“People hold perceptions of different destination areas which, when assessed and
evaluated, become a key component of site selection” (Gartner, 1996, p.456). “Destination image
is strongly believed to influence a tourist’s choice of destination. Some researchers relate
destination choice to a positive overall image” (Tasci & Gartner, 2007, p. 419). Not only the overall
destination image but also the image forming process affects the behavior of tourists. When being
exposed to various information from induced agents, the consumers definitely develop their
awareness of different dimensions and features of the destination. Once the consumers are aware of the destination, they usually want to learn more about it. It means that tourist information obviously plays an important role in determining the consumer’s perception of destination as well as stimulating their interest and desire to have a visitation (Tasci & Gartner, 2007).

- **During visit**

  Tasci and Gartner (2007) and Ly (2013) stated that there is a lack in the body of research regarding the influence of destination image on tourists during their real visitation to the destination. If the tourists’ real visitation matches their anticipated destination image, the tourists will be very satisfied and joyful. On the contrary, it will result in the dissatisfaction if the real experience is worse than their expectations. The most positive case happens when the actual experience is better than the pre-visit expectations. Interestingly, long-stay tourists are believed to have more truthful and reliable image than short-stay tourists (Jenkins, 1999; Tasci & Gartner, 2007, Echtner & Ritchie, 1991).

- **Post-visiting**

  “Although the effect of image on post-visit behavior has been recognized, this is one of the most overlooked aspects of destination image theory. Only a few researchers have examined this effect empirically” (Tasci & Gartner, 2007, p. 421). When tourists have a positive actual experience, they probably will visit the destination again. “Marketers can use imagery to increase remembered satisfaction and to encourage repeat purchases of holidays”. Also, there is a correlation between destination loyalty and the positive destination image (Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Jenkins, 1999). Although no empirical evidence was found regarding the influence of tourists’ past experience on the perceived image, this factor has received great attention among researchers insofar since it is a good indicator of their needs, motivations, and satisfaction, and may be of great
use in market segmentation (Beerli & Martin, 2004). Unlike material products, the tourism experience is a mixture of experiences with tangible products and intangible services. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that “the destination image is a total of the images of the individual elements or attributes that make up the tourism experience.” (Milman & Pizam, 1995, p. 22).

2.3. Destination Image Components

Destination image is considered as a multifaceted concept and, due to this, it encompasses a number of components. “Destination image is a complex concept that may be analyzed from different perspectives and composed of a variety of individual perceptions that relate to various product/service attributes” (Milman & Pizam, 1995, p. 22). Gunn (1972) was one of the first scholars to conceptualize image. He produced two types of images: organic and induced. The organic image is the image that is formed as a result of communication sources not disseminated by the destination through reports such as news, newspaper articles, geography and history courses, and the like. The induced image, on the other hand, is the image that is formed as a result of conscious promotional efforts by the destination and formed by advertising, promotion, and publicity (Iarmolenko, 2010).

Milman & Pizam (1995) suggested that the destination image consist of a mixture of three components:

- The product (i.e. quality and variety of attractions, price, uniqueness, categories of users, etc.),
- The behavior and attitudes of the employees who come in direct contact with the visitors,
- The environment (i.e., weather, scenery, landscape and physical layout of the destination, the quality and type of accommodations, restaurants, other facilities, and physical safety).
Goodrich (1978) and Relph (1976) presented two types of images as well. Goodrich’s two types of images were:

- **Primary** (resulting from visit to the destination)
- **Secondary** (as a result of information obtained from external to the individual resources).

Relph (1976) distinguished between individual and mass image where the individual image is shaped by memory, experiences, feelings, and imagination. The mass images are obtained through the mass media and other secondary sources.

Lopes (2011) stated that the development of the image of a tourist destination is a result of the combination of two main components or dimensions:

- **Perceptual and cognitive:** there is a priority of the importance and value given to each attribute of tourist destinations. The destination image is evaluated by the attributes of its resources and attractions (Stabler, 1995)
- **Affective:** feelings raised by a tourist destination (Rial, Garcia & Varela, 2008)

According to Gartner (1996), destination images are made up of three different but interrelated components: cognitive, affective, and conative. How these components interrelate eventually determines predisposition for visitation.

- **Cognitive**

  The cognitive component can be defined as “the sums of beliefs and attitudes of the object leading to some internally accepted picture of its attributes” (Gartner, 1996, p. 457). It consists of beliefs and knowledge about a destination, primarily focusing on tangible physical attributes (Pike & Ryan 2004). It is based on perceptual fact rather than reality and it is the process of forming cognitive images that is important in creating destination awareness.

- **Affective**
“The affective component of image is related to motives in the sense that it is how a person values the object under consideration. It is the “feelings” we hold about any object” (Garetner, 1996, p. 457). “Motives determine what we wish to obtain from the object, which then affects the object’s valuation. It is easier to evaluate images of activities than it is of places” (Garetner, 1996, p. 457). The affective component becomes critical when a decision to travel is actually being considered.

- Conative:

Based on Gartner (1996), the conative component of image is comparable to behavior because it is the action component. After processing external and internal stimuli about a destination, a decision is made whether or not to travel to the area. This act is the conative component. It has a direct relationship to the other image components as it depends on images developed during the conative stage which are assessed during the affective stage.

Boo and Busser (2005) argued that image structure is reflected by the manner individual attributes are synthesized to become the image of an entity. They suggested that cognitive images (perceptual/cognitive evaluations), affective images (affective response), and overall images are blended in consumers’ minds to form the complete image of a destination (Iarmolenko, 2010).

A different framework of destination image components is presented by Echtner and Ritchie (1993). In their study to measure a destination image, they proposed that a destination image is composed of the following components: attribute-based images, holistic impressions, and functional- psychological, unique-common characteristics.
As shown in Figure 2.1, Echtner and Ritchie (1993) emphasize that a destination image composed of perceptions of individual attributes (climate, friendliness of the people…etc.) as well as holistic impressions of the place (mental pictures or imagery). They also proposed functional-psychological continuum of destination image. Characteristics which are directly observable or measureable are ‘functional’ and those that are more difficult to observe or measure are ‘psychological’. Functional and psychological characteristics can be perceived on both sides of individual attributes or more holistic impressions.

- On the attribute side are the various perceptions of the individual characteristics of the destination, ranging from functional to psychological.
- On the holistic side, the functional impressions consist of the mental picture (imagery) of the physical characteristics of the destination, while the psychological impression could be described as the mood of the place.
However, Echtner and Ritchie’s conceptual framework includes an additional dimension ranging from common to unique as can be seen in the figure above. This dimension implies that “images of destinations can range from those perceptions based on “common” characteristics to those based on “unique” features or auras” (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993, p. 4). These characteristics can be of functional or psychological nature. “In a tourism context, truly unique functional characteristics are not hard to provide, they exist in any destination: exceptional monuments, sights, symbols or distinctive landscapes. Hence, Paris may evoke an image of the Eiffel Tower, Egypt the pyramids, and so forth” (Sonnleitner, 2011, p.23). So, according to Echtner and Ritchie’s model destination image should be defined and measured within these three dimensions:

- Attributes-holistic
- Functional-psychological
- Common-unique

Destination image components can be briefly summarized as Goodall (1991, p. 187) stated, “the holiday-maker’s image of a holiday is a combination of an awareness of that product, his/her attitudes towards the product, and his/her expectations of it”.

2.4. Destination Image Formation

“Similar to the heterogenic definition of destination images, a variety of models and views on the actual image formation can be found” (Hallmann, Zehrer, & Muller, 2013, p. 54). After three decades of research on destination image’s meaning and measure, there is still no consensus on the process and nature of its formation (Echtner & Ritchie, 2001; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003, Gallarza, Saura, & Garcia, 2002). Therefore, several models of destination image formation have been developed by researchers.
“Each person’s image of a particular place is unique, comprising their own memories, associations and imaginations of a particular place.” (Jenkins, 1999, p. 2). It can be said that the destination image is formed by both stimulus factors and the characteristics of the tourists (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). An individual’s image of a holiday is compiled from his/her attitudes towards the holiday’s perceived attributes (Goodall, 1991).

Individual’s image of destination is formed and influenced by different factors involving both external and internal information sources. The external factors provide information of destination to consumers while the personal factors shape their image perception. There are connections and relationships between these image formation factors that must be understood to be successfully employed (Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999).

2.4.1 Stimulus factors (information sources)

Stimulus factors or information sources refer to the amount and varied nature of information sources to which individuals are exposed, including destination information acquired as a result of having visited the place (Beerli & Martin, 2004, p. 661).

One of the initial works to develop a theoretical framework of destination image formation was produced by Gunn (1972). He produces a model illustrating destination image formation. In his model, he breaks the destination image formation into seven stages which are related to the individual stages of the travel experience:

1. Accumulation of mental images about vacation experiences
2. Modification of those images by further information
3. Decision to take a vacation trip
4. Travel to the destination
5. Participation at the destination

6. Return home

7. Modification of images based on the vacation experience.

Using this model, three states of destination image formation can be identified at Phases 1, 2 and 7. In Phases 1 and 2, destination images are formed based upon secondary sources of information (images perceived before visiting a destination), whereas in Phase 7, actual direct experience is used to modify the destination's image. Gunn labels the destination image formed in Phase 1 an organic image. At this stage, the image is based primarily upon information assimilated from non-touristic, non-commercial sources, such as the general media (news reports, magazines, and movies), education and the opinions of family/friends. It is only in Phase 2 that more commercial sources of information, such as travel brochures, travel agents and travel guidebooks, are used. As a result of accessing these additional sources of information, the organic image (Phase 1) may be altered. This modified image, which occurs in Phase 2, is labelled an induced image. The stage theory implied that images formed by visitors, non-visitors, and returned visitors will be different from each other.

Jenkins (1999) provides a very comprehensible summary of this approach as can be seen in Figure 2.2. In phases one and two, destination images are formed upon secondary sources of information but during the later phases actual experience modifies these images.
In the light of Gunn’s image typology, Gartner (1996) view the image formation process as a continuum consisting of eight distinctly different components. This categorization is based on
the information sources. The components often work concurrently and form a distinct image in the
mind of the traveler. The eight components are Overt Induced I, Overt Induced II, Covert Induced
I, Covert Induced II, Autonomous, Unsolicited Organic, Solicited Organic and Organic. Each of
these components are explained briefly in the following lines.

1. **Overt Induced I** information consists of traditional forms of advertising for example,
television, brochures, billboard, print media, and so on. Destination promoters try to create
a planned image in the mind of prospective tourists through using this kind of advertising.

2. **Overt Induced II** consists of information received or requested from tourism
intermediaries that are not directly associated with a particular destination. Destination
operators work with tour operators to represent images of different places but tour operators
are interested in their business and selected images are passed to their clients.

3. **Covert Induced I** develops destination images using traditional form of advertising but
the images are projected through a second-party spokesperson. It is a direct attempt to solve
the problems related to credibility that is found in Overt Induced I. The spokesperson is
usually chosen depending on their degree of popularity and credibility.

4. **Covert Induced II**. Information is delivered by someone with high credibility and usually
it takes the form of unbiased articles, reports, and stories about a certain place. Destination
promoters have direct influence on the content, but to the tourists there is no direct
connection between the projected image and destination promotion. Thus, credibility rises.

5. **Autonomous** image formation component is on the contrary. It consists of independently
produced reports, films, articles, documentaries, and so on about certain places. They are
independently produced and has no connection at all with marketing or destination
promotions. Autonomous component is divided into news and popular culture. Due to the
unbiased nature of news story, they are assumed to have major impact on tourism image development. Popular culture portrays images of people and places. The autonomous component may be the only component that can change the image of a place dramatically in a short period of time because of its high credibility and its high market penetration.

6. **Unsolicited Organic** consists of unrequested information taken from an individual who has visited a place or thinks he/she knows what exist there. The credibility is moderate as the person receiving the information does not request it.

7. On the contrary is the seventh component that is **Solicited Organic**. It consists of requested information received from a knowledgeable source usually individual’s friends or relatives. Therefore, the credibility is high. This stage is important when prospective tourists are in the information search mode and may move a destination from a destination from the awareness set into the inert, inept, or evoked set. This stage is also referred to as ‘word of mouth’ advertising.

8. The final component is termed **Organic**. It consists of information received from individuals who actually traveled to a destination and came back with a formed image in their minds. Then, they start to distribute the information in the unsolicited and solicited organic components. The following Table (2) is a summary of all the image formation agents compared against cost, market penetration, and credibility.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image Change Agent</th>
<th>Credibility</th>
<th>Market Destination</th>
<th>Penetration Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Overt Induced I**  
Traditional form of advertising (e.g. Brochures, T.V, Radio, Billboard) | Low | High | High |
| **Overt Induced II**  
Information received from tour operators, wholesalers | Medium | Medium | Indirect |
| **Covert Induced I**  
Second party endorsement of products via traditional forms of advertising | Low/Medium | High | High |
| **Covert Induced II**  
Second party endorsement through apparently unbiased reports (e.g. Newspaper, Travel section articles) | Medium | Medium | Medium |
| **Autonomous**  
News and popular culture; documentaries, reperts news stories, movies, television programs | High | Medium/High | Indirect |
| **Unsolicited Organic**  
Unsolicited information received from friends and relatives | Medium | Low | Indirect |
| **Solicited Organic**  
Solicited information received from friends and relatives | High | Low | Indirect |
| **Organic**  
Actual visitation | High | _ | Indirect |

According to Echtner and Ritchie (2003), the process of destination image formation highlights two important points. First, it suggests that individuals can have an image of a
destination even if they have never visited it or even been exposed to more commercial forms of information. In designing marketing strategies, it would be useful to measure these base images.

Second, since there are changes in destination image before and after visitation, it is desirable to separate the images of those individuals who have visited and those who have not. This can be accomplished when measuring image by either controlling for or monitoring those individuals that have visited the destination.

To enhance the current perspective on the tourism destination image formation process, Kim and Chen (2014) highlight the concept of ‘schema’, which is a mental structure of perceiving and classifying acquired information or knowledge. It creates a holistic model of a continuum mental process of destination image formation, first, by proposing two schema-related models spanning into three-way trip stages of before, during, and after the trip. Specifically, this study enlists five Prime Tourist Destination Schemas entailing (1) place, (2) mega event, (3) crisis, (4) self, and (5) emotion to describe the destination image formation process that is constantly modified owing to its dissimilation with new information, where these information sources could affect the formation of the destination image before the trip. An example to illustrate the five Prime Tourist Destination Schemas is provided by (Kim & Chen, 2015) using New York City:

- Place schema: Status of Liberty and Central Park.
- Mega-event schema: New York countdown in Time Square
- Crisis schema: Ground Zero Memorial
- Self-schema: Fifth Avenue and other high-class districts can be linked to self-schemas on lifestyle.
- Emotion schemas: when all previous schemas blend to elevate the potential visitors’ emotion schemas on New York City.
Once the tourist visits the destination, the schemas may be changed, resulting in three different types of conditions within the tourist’s schematic fabric: congruity (confirmation), moderate incongruity (disconfirmation), and extreme incongruity (disconfirmation). Accordingly, the resultant destination images after the trip may be labeled as an identical image, a moderately transformed image, or a largely transformed image based on experience input (Kim & Chen, 2014). During and after the trip destination image formation process is illustrated in the following figure (Kim & Chen, 2014).

Lopes (2011) identifies in his study the main elements that characterize the image of a tourist destination. He finds that brand image has become one of the most important elements of a tourist destination in recent years. It is directly reflected in their positioning and ultimately increases the possibility of commercial success or failure for each destination. According to Lopes (2011), the image of a destination can be influenced by different variables such as age, race, the fact that a person has visited a destination before, their level of education, motivation and cultural
values. In this sense, working with all of these variables is a unique opportunity to strengthen a positive image of a destination and thus to increase the possibility of a particular tourist destination being selected.

Phelps (1986) divided the image of a destination into two stages: the primary image and the secondary image. The primary image is developed after visiting a tourist destination while the secondary image is the image created before a person has traveled to a particular destination. It has been suggested that using messages recalling past experiences during the primary image is more strategic, while in the secondary image stage it is more useful to communicate information about the destination. “Phelps groups both Gunn’s induced and most of the organic image formation agents into one type, and separates actual visitation into a distinctly different form of image formation” (Gartner, 1996, p. 463).

2.4.2 Personal factors (internal)

An individual’s personal characteristics, or internal factors, have a great influence on image formation. This must be considered especially from a perspective of consumer behavior as it eventually concerns the destination choice process. Personal factors refer to psychological characteristics such as an individual’s values, motivations, personality, as well as those of a socio-demographic nature (Sonnleitner, 2011).
Figure 2.4 Image Formation Agents. Adopted from Baloglu and McCleary (1999, p.870)

Figure (2.4) illustrates Baloglu and McCleary (1999) model in which personal factors are divided into psychological factors (values, motivations, and personality) and social factors (age, education, marital status and others). These personal factors can include also gender, social class, the place of residence, income and others. All of these factors have a direct impact on the individual’s perceptions of the different attributes. Baloglu and McCleary (1999) carried a research studying the perceptions of Turkey, Greece, Italy and Egypt by Americans who planned to travel to these countries for the first time. They have found that age and education levels factors influenced both cognitive and affective images of the respondents. Thus, individuals with different personalities and backgrounds will perceive places differently. Therefore, personal factors have great influence on the affective component of image. For example, motivations are directly associated with feelings aroused at a certain place. Since the affective dimension of image can have an influence on the overall image, motivation has no exception (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Sonnleitner, 2011).

Another model is produced by Beerli and Martin (2004) in Figure (5) that explains the set of factors influencing the image formation. The model involves both of the different information
sources and the characteristics of the individuals as the main factors forming the image. Based on the model, both of them are interrelated to produce a compound image. The perceived image will be formed through different sources, including the image projected by the destination, the individual’s own needs, motivations, prior knowledge, preferences, and other personal characteristics. In this way, individuals build their own mental picture of the place, which in turn produces their own, personal perceived images (Beerli & Martin, 2004). Personal factors refer to the sociodemographic characteristics of the individuals (gender, age, level of education, etc.), as well as those of a psychological nature (motivations, values, personality, lifestyle, etc.). These personal factors affect individuals’ cognitive organization of perceptions, thus also influencing the perceptions of the environment and the resulting image. Moreover, most of the decision process models for destination choice show that personal characteristics, such as gender, age, education and, social class, are internal inputs that influence the perceptions of places. The combination of the two components (personal and stimulus factors) results in an overall image which is related to positive or negative evaluation of a destination (Beerli & Martin, 2004).

Figure 2.5. Model of the Formation of Destination Image (adopted from Beerli & Martin, 2004, p. 660)
2.5. The Process of Destination Selection

Most of the tourism scholars agreed on the importance of developing a proper destination image in the mind of consumers in order to succeed in such a competitive sector (Gartner, 1996; Jenkins, 1999; Goodall, 1991; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). Destination image has a great role in the various models of travel decision making developed to date (Goodall, 1991; Lyonski & woodside, 1989; Gartner, 1996; Gartner & Tasci, 2007; Crompton, 1992).

Despite the importance of destination image in the selection of a destination, studies have focused on studying the image attributes of a destination rather than addressing the characteristics of destination image that affect individuals’ decisions to visit particular places (Tapachai & Waryszak: 2000). Moreover, little is known about the cognitive process related to tourists’ decision to visit a particular place rather than another (Butler, 1990, P. 46).

Goodall (1991) provides a comprehensive explanation of destination selection process. Deciding to have a holiday at a particular destination can be viewed as a rational process in which all attributes (pull factors) of a destination are analyzed and compared with other competitive destinations. Also, holiday choice can be viewed as a set of hierarchical questions starting from whether to have a holiday and moving through all the other questions such as where to go, what type of accommodation to use and with which tour operator to book …etc.

Holiday-makers vary in the extent to which their choice of a destination is systematized. Therefore, a behavioral approach rather than a normative economic perspective is required to understand how people reach decisions regarding the holiday destination. This approach examines the holidaymakers’ information search and evaluation, recognizing their differing abilities to obtain and use information about holiday opportunities. (Williams, 2004).
Holidaymakers interaction with their everyday environment help to condition their motivations and preferences. Once they decide to have a holiday and seek for a particular type of holiday, their goals need to be precisely specified. Then, holidaymakers start to search for information to find the destination that satisfies their goals. Definitely, holidaymakers differ regarding the nature and extent of their pre-purchase search. They fall into two groups: impulse buyers and meticulous planners (Williams, 2004).

The information search may rely on primary sources internal (recalling of previous holiday experiences) or external. External sources involve active processes and a variety of sources both secondary (for example, TV) and tertiary (for example, consultations with travel agents). Goodall (1991) emphasizes the importance of personal knowledge and the influence of family and friends as more important than tourism industry sources of information especially for the less experienced holidaymakers (Williams, 2004).

According to Goodall (1991) the gathered information is filtered to create a naïve image which the holiday-maker compares to the evaluative image to decide whether or not the holiday goals will be met. If the holiday-maker selects the first destination, during the evaluative process, then he/she is acting as a satisfier. “Where the holiday-maker stores several destinations which meet his/her goals, his/her behavior is optimizing within the context of bounded rationality- the assumption being that the destination chosen is the one expected to satisfy best the holiday-maker’s goals” (Goodall, 1991, p. 181-182). If no destination meets his/her goals at this point, he/she need to modify the holiday goals or reorganize their information search. Once the booking is done, the holiday-maker starts to search for additional information related to the attractions at the destination, e.g. opening times of museums. The holiday is then taken and the actual experience
will result in satisfied holiday-makers or less satisfied ones if the destination did not meet their preferences and goals (Goodall, 1991).

Gartner (1996) stated that tourists go through different stages in order to choose their travel destination:

**Stage one**: based on the needs and objectives expected to be fulfilled from the travel, the cognitive component will decide which destinations to be considered, forming “the awareness set”. It refers to all the destination a consumer might consider for visitation in a specific period of time (Woodside & Ronkainen, 1980).

**Stage two**: cognitive components may modify the choice of destinations after knowing more information.

**Stage three**: all remaining destinations are closely evaluated, forming three sets of destination:

- Inert set: destinations that are neither valued positively nor negatively by the affective image component
- Inept set: destinations rejected from present and future consideration
- Evoked set: destination that meets the vacation objective.

The following figure (2.6) explains the process:
Another model that illustrates traveler destination choice is presented by (Lyonski & Woodside, 1989). It explains traveler awareness, preference, and choice of competing destinations. They build their work of several propositions and research findings from cognitive and behavioral psychology, marketing, and travel and tourism.

2.6 The Measurement of Destination Image

There has been scientific discussion on what methods are best for measuring complex, multifaceted destination images. No single universal method on collecting data regarding tourists’ perceptions of travel destinations has been developed. Destination image measurement and assessment is complicated (Iarmolenko, 2010; Sonnleitner, 2011). Due to this, the researcher has
a considerable responsibility to choose the most appropriate measurement method and instruments to capture the many components of the destination image.

According to Echtner & Ritchie (1993), almost all of previous studies have preferred the quantitative approach and the structured methodologies (scales) to measure destination images. Almost all the researches have used Likert scales or semantic differential scales to measure the destination of specified destination. Scales are based on standardized attributes and can be effective for measuring the common and attribute-based components of images, but are not useful for measuring and capturing the unique and holistic components. In other words, the previous investigations have failed to integrate psychological and functional characteristics as the list of attributes employed may not be sufficient to capture all destination image characteristics. According to Jenkins (1999), most studies fail to give a holistic picture of destination image because of the wrong methods used. For such purpose, Echtner and Ritchie (1993) emphasize on the importance of using unstructured methodologies (open-ended questions). To fully capture the components of destination image (attribute-holistic, functional-psychological, common-unique), a combination of structured and unstructured methodologies must be used.

Previous researchers used secondary sources of information (i.e. brochures, general literature review) to create the lists of destination image attributes. It is more useful for the researchers to create a list of attributes that is relevant and important to the consumers. Beerli and Martin (2004) proposed a classification of all factors that may influence the image assessment and could be used to design the scales for the measurement. The classification consists of nine dimensions. Each dimension consists of various attributes, and the selection of the attributes used in the measurement will depend on the attractions of each destination, on its positioning, and on
the objectives of the assessment of perceived image. Here is a brief example of the nine dimensions along with some of the attributes:

- **Natural Resources**: weather, beaches
- **General Infrastructure**: development of health services, transportation facilities
- **Tourist Infrastructure**: hotels and self-catering, restaurants
- **Tourist Leisure and Recreation**: water parks, zoos
- **Culture, History and Art**: customs and way of life, gastronomy
- **Political and Economic Factors**: safety, prices
- **Natural Environment**: cleanliness, traffic congestion
- **Social Environment**: quality of life, language barriers
- **Atmosphere of the place**: fashionable, relaxing

Echtner and Ritchie (2003) suggest employing qualitative research (unstructured methodologies) at the initial stage of the research would help greatly to reveal a complete set of destination image attributes. They emphasized on the importance and usefulness of using focus group approach to create the comprehensive list of attributes. However, qualitative methods (unstructured methodologies) can be seen as time and money consuming. Thus, few studies relied on the consumers to create the list of attributes used to measure the destination image. Echtner and Ritchie (1993) produced a set of destination attributes by grouping them based on interviews, literature review, focus groups sessions that can be used to develop scale items in other studies (Figure 2.7). They found that few researchers have succeeded in using the majority of these attributes into a measurement instrument. Furthermore, the emphasis in current research has been on the functional attributes of destination image. The only psychological attribute measured by the
majority of researchers is “friendliness”. For current research, the list of Echtner and Ritchie (1993) formed the basis of the list used to measure the destination image attributes.

Echtner and Ritchie (1993) have applied both structured and unstructured methods in their studies. See Figure 2.7. They have developed a complete set of attributes used to design a destination image measurement scale and the open-ended questions to measure the holistic and unique components of destination image. The measurement scales were aimed to measure the common attributes in both terms of psychological and functional characteristics and the open-ended questions to measure the unique and holistic impressions of the destination image.

Therefore, when designing a system of measurement for destination image the following points should be considered:

- Developing a series of open-ended questions that capture the holistic components of destination image with both functional and psychological dimensions. The unique features will be explored within these impressions as well.
- Producing a reliable and valid set of scales to measure the common and attribute-based components of destination image along with both functional and psychological dimensions.
After the work of Echtner and Ritchie (1991), Jenkins (1999) produced a table illustrating structured versus unstructured methods used in destination image measurement:

**FUNCTIONAL (physical, measurable)**

- Tourism sites/ activities
- National parks/ wilderness activities
- Historic sites/ museums
- Scenery/ natural attractions
- Nightlife and entertainment
- Shopping facilities
- Facilities for information and tours
- Sports facilities/activities
- Local infrastructure/transportation
- Cities
- Accommodation/ restaurants
- Architecture/ buildings
- Costs/ price levels
- Climate
- Crowdedness
- Cleanliness
- Degree of urbanization
- Economic development
- Political stability
- Accessibility
- Personal safety
- Ease of communication
- Customs/culture
- Different cuisine/ food and drink
- Hospitality/friendliness/ receptiveness
- Restful/relaxing
- Atmosphere (familiar versus exotic)
- Opportunity for adventure
- Opportunity to increase knowledge
- Family or adult oriented
- Quality of service
- Fame/reputation

**PSYCHOLOGICAL (abstract)**

Figure 2.7  Adopted from Echtner and Ritchie (1993, p. 6)
Table 2.3 Structured Versus Unstructured Methods Used In Destination Image Measurement (Jenkins, 1999, p. 6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Structured</th>
<th>Unstructured</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Various common attributes are specified and incorporated into a standardized instrument and the respondent rates each destination on each of the attributes, resulting in an ‘image profile’</td>
<td>The respondent is allowed to freely describe her or his impressions of the destination. Data are gathered from a number of respondents. Sorting and categorization techniques are then used to determine the ‘image dimension’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Techniques</td>
<td>Usually a set of semantic differential or Likert type scales</td>
<td>Focus groups, non-ended survey questions, content analysis, repertory grid.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Advantages | - Easy to administer  
- Simple to code  
- Results easy to analyze using sophisticated statistical techniques  
- Facilitates comparisons between destinations  
- Does not incorporate holistic aspects of image  
- Attribute focused- that is, it forces the respondent to think about the product image in terms of the attributes specified  
- The completeness of structured methods can be variable- it is possible to miss dimensions | - Conducive to measuring the holistic components of destination image  
- Reduces interviewer bias  
- Reduces likelihood of missing important image dimensions or components  
- Level of detail provided by respondents is highly variable  
- Statistical analyses of the results are limited  
- Comparative analyses are not facilitated. |

Jenkins (1999) referred to the use of another kind of structured methodologies to measure destination image that is constructed with visual techniques in combination with word-based...
scales. Using photos and maps will help individuals to recall data and easily evoke the individual’s experiences which cannot be described by verbal words.

A broad model for conducting destination image research that combine both methodologies (structured and unstructured) has been developed by Jenkins (1999). The model incorporates two phases of research. As illustrated in Figure 2.8, the first is qualitative phase in which the researcher use unstructured methods to develop constructs relevant to the group being studied (constructs are the respondents’ perceptions of destination image’s components). The second phase is quantitative phase in which set of scales are developed to quantitatively measure the psychological and functional attributes of destination image.

**Qualitative phase**

**Purpose:** to find the constructs used by the study population in their cognition of destination image.

**Methods:** construct elicitation techniques such as interviews, content analysis, triad elicitation and photo elicitation.

**Relevant constructs**

**Quantitative phase**

**Purpose:** to measure tourist destination image according to the relevant constructs.

**Methods:** two rating scales are required
- Evaluative preference of the destination
- Construct preference (or importance)

*Figure 2.8 A model for Conducting Destination Image Research (Jenkins, 1999, p.7)*

Developing constructs from the group being studied through qualitative research in phase one minimize the danger of forcing respondents to react to standardized framework that may not represent accurately their image of the place. According to the Jenkins’s model (1999), various
qualitative (unstructured) methods could be used in the first phase of destination image measurement studies.

- **Content analysis:**

  Content analysis can be conducted by reviewing two different forms: written literature (destination image researches, travel brochures, guidebooks) and interactive communication (interviews and focus groups). It can be of written information (such as guidebooks) or visual information (such as photographs used in travel brochures). This review would help to gather important information of the projected image which would be very useful for producing the important destination attributes and dimensions.

- **Free Elicitation:**

  This method is mainly performed in the form of word-association. The participants are allowed to describe freely the destination image rather than following the predetermined scales. This method also helps to measure whether the image of the destination is weak or lacking, in case the participants could not provide any replies. It is best to be used first when combined with other techniques as it offers a spontaneous window on the image held by tourists (Jenkins, 1999, p. 8).

- **Triad elicitation:**

  This technique involves that the researcher sets up different groups of three elements and requests the respondents to compare the three elements as well as identify the constructs that make two elements similar and different from the third. However, this method can be time consuming and is highly dependent on the full cooperation of the respondents.
• Photo-elicitation

The photo-elicitation technique refers to the open-ended interview that is guided by visual presentations. This method helps to investigate the tourists’ experiences and the constructs of particular destination image from the respondent’s point of views.

After defining the attributes in the first phase, the unstructured methods are employed in the second phase to measure the individual’s destination image. The unstructured methods consist of complete sets of measuring scales usually including the semantic differential scale and Likert scale. The participants are required to rate the destination attributes according to the scales. Participants are asked to assess evaluative preference and construct preference. The evaluative preference rating scale relates to the individual evaluation on the particular attitudes of destination while the construct preference rating scale relates to individual evaluation on the importance of the destination attitudes to them. The researchers can determine the particular destination image held by individual respondents and evaluate the important extent of these image aspects by combining both of these rating scales (Jenkins, 1999).

Avraham and Ketter (2008) also lists methods that can be used for evaluating a place’s image and divided them into five methods:

1. **Attitude surveys/questionnaires**

   Surveys can be conducted in different ways such as regular mail, electronic mail, telephone and face-to-face. The two major kinds of survey are the unstructured and the structured.

2. **Unstructured survey (open-ended)**

   Unstructured surveys ask open-ended questions that elicit free and unbiased answers, without forcing the respondent to choose a ready-made answer, for example, “What comes to mind when you hear the word ‘Paris’?”
3. Structured survey (close-ended)

In a structured survey, the respondent is asked to choose from a group of ready-made answers. A close-ended survey can include questions evaluating the level of awareness of a place, its characteristics, satisfaction with its functioning and expectations of it. These questions are aimed at understanding a person’s perception of a place and his/her intentions regarding it. A structures survey is divided into:

- **Trait grading:**
  In the trait grading technique, the respondent is asked to determine how much each trait characterizes the place relative to other traits.

- **Evaluating the place’s characteristics**
  Another method for assessing a place’s positive and negative characteristics is by asking the respondent to grade each trait on a Likert scale.

- **Place grading:**
  By this method, respondents are asked to grade the place in comparison with other places, as in trait grading.

4. **Focus groups:**

A group of 8–15 people is drawn from the participants and they are asked to discuss in depth a certain subject, with the guidance of a discussion leader.

5. **Interviews with experts**

These interviews can serve as a major source of data regarding the way the place is perceived, its disadvantages and how they can be removed.
When conducting a study regarding destination image including image measurement, it is important for scholars to differentiate between first-time and repeat tourists according to Beerli and Martin (2004, p. 660-661) due to the following reasons:

- Certain differences may exist between the images perceived by each group of individuals that have an effect on the results.
- The relationship between secondary information sources and perceived image can only be analyzed in the case of first-timers since repeat tourists could have difficulty recalling the sources of information used before visiting the place for the first time.
- There may be differences between the two groups in terms of their level of knowledge of the destination and in their motivations, depending on whether they had previously visited the place or not.
- It enabled a validation of the proposed model to be made using two independent samples.

2.7 Media influence on Destination Image Formation

Media plays a main role in the formation of destination image (Gartner, 1996; Mercille, 2005). Echtner and Ritchie (1991) described the sources of the flow of information in the case of destination image as three resources; promotional literature (travel brochures, posters), the opinions of others (family/friends, travel agents) and the general media (newspapers, magazines, television, books, movies). Reynolds (1965) described development of image as a construction of a mental picture based on few impressions chosen from a flood of information. This flood of information includes a) media (newspapers and television), b) tourism promotional materials, and c) opinions of family and friends (Iarmolenko, 2010). “Destination managers have different communication channels to develop and consequently transfer the image of a tourist destination.
such as marketing campaigns, direct promotional activities, Internet presence, printed informational material and public relations campaigns” (Schwaighofer, 2014, p. 41).

Gartner (1996) argued that image is formed either on an induced or organic level. As mentioned earlier, the induced image is a result of the efforts performed by marketing and promotion of a destination area or business while organic images are formed from sources that are not directly associated with any touristic or development organization (news report, movies, newspaper articles, magazines…etc). Based on Gartner (1996) autonomous is the fifth image component and it consists of independently produced reports, articles, films, documentaries, and so on a bout specific places.

Based on the characteristics of media produced by Butler (1990), the different forms of media can be divided into three types: Oral, Literary, and Visual. Butler (1990) emphasized the importance of knowing that in most cases the information received by people comes in a combination of forms of media rather than one form exclusively, for example, tourist brochures have both visual and literary components, movies and television have visual, oral, and occasionally literary components (e.g., signs, names etc.). Moreover, each type of media has a different significance at each stage in the decision-making process in shaping the decisions of visitors to seek an experience and visit a location. The combinations of types of media and methods of reception are numerous and varied and quite possibly unique for each individual.

- **Oral Medium**
The oral medium is probably the first form of media which most people are exposed to and reinforced with visual evidence. One of the common and effective forms of information spreading is word of mouth. Previous tourists tend to tell others what they have seen and what they liked and disliked, and give them advice regarding their future travel.
• **Literary Medium**
The literary or written medium is one on which much more research has been carried out. The literary medium by way of journals and novels play a great role in shaping the taste of travel. For example, the effect of Ernest Hemingway on image formation. The twenty-fifth anniversary of his death resulted in increased interest in Hemingway, and in places featured in his novels or associated with his writings. It is worth mentioning that the written word allows the material to be checked and validated, a procedure which is next to impossible in the case of the spoken word.

• **Visual Medium**
Paintings, sketches, postcards, posters, movies, TV shows and the illustration in the tourist brochure and related publicity information (Butler, 1999).

“It has been suggested that tourists’ imagination and consumption of destinations are no longer primarily influenced by destinations’ promotion material such as brochures and advertisement. Contemporary tourists are influenced by media products” (Mansson, 2009, p. 226). As cited in Scarles and Lester (2013), tourism media has mainly referred to the image of destinations constructed through media texts, in particular tourist brochures and postcards, with increasing attention towards other media types such as films and television.

Destination marketing organizations provide features such as images, videos, and blogs on their websites to help tourists. These advances allow people to benefit from being able to use multimedia features to enhance and add value to their tourism experiences (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). Moreover, this contributes not only to tourism experience literature, but also to the field of information systems and communication media within the context of tourism (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009).

Media products influence tourists’ behavior greatly. Media products may influence each stage of tourist behavior, from image formation to final decisions. They can be motivated by a
number of popular cultural media products at the same time. All media products are important for tourists in creating an awareness of represented places or attractions as well as being root for tourists’ image formation (Mansson, 2009). Media products play a significant role in the decision-making process in relation to which destination to visit next time. Also, they influence the actual visit as they guide tourists to how places and attractions are viewed. Furthermore, media products are still influential after the return home as a tool for sharing and remembrance (Mansson, 2009).

“Tourism media and the outputs they mobilize, become powerful products infused with political, cultural and social discourse and motivation” (Scarles & Lester, 2013, P.1).

The Internet helps to exchange information between the consumer and industry suppliers (e.g., hotels, attractions), intermediaries (e.g., travel agents), controllers (e.g., governments), as well as many non-profit organizations such as destination marketing organizations (Gretzel & Xiang, 2010).

Social networking sites would have a direct impact on creating the destination image (Stepaniuk, 2015). Social media plays an increasingly important role in information sources for travelers. ‘Social media’ can be generally understood as impressions created by consumers, typically informed by relevant experience, and archived or shared online for easy access by other consumers (Gretzel & Xiang, 2010). Studies show that tourists tend to document their travel by sharing their photos, videos, opinions, impressions, stories, and their different experiences through the different forms of social media. This has a great impact on the perception of destinations by other users of the social media (Stepaniuk, 2015; Gretzel & Xiang, 2010; Mansson, 2009).

Xiang and Gretzel (2010) conducted a study in which they confirm the growing importance of social media in the online tourism domain. The goal of their study was to investigate the extent to which social media appear in search engine results in the context of travel-related searches. The
study employed a research design that simulates a traveler’s use of a search engine for travel planning by using a set of pre-defined keywords in combination with nine U.S. tourist destination names. The pre-defined keywords include ‘accommodation’, ‘hotel’, ‘activities’, ‘attractions’, ‘park’, ‘events’, ‘tourism’, ‘restaurant’, ‘shopping’, and ‘nightlife’. These key words represent the top-level travel-related terms that will likely be used by travelers when they are looking for tourism-related information about a specific destination. The analysis of the search results showed that social media constitute a substantial part of the search results, indicating that search engines likely direct travelers to social media sites. Figure 2.9 shows the breakdown of the types of social media used by travelers based on the study of Xiang and Gretzel (2010).

![Social media forms](image)

**Figure 2.9  Breakdown of Social Media Used By Travelers (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010)**

In tourism sector, TV, films, advertising, guidebooks and documentaries are high impact popular media products influencing tourists’ consumer behavior (Gartner, 1996; Mansson, 2009). As cited in Mansson (2009, p.227), film tourism can be defined as involving tourists who visit a destination or attraction as a result of the destination being featured on television, video, DVD, or
the cinema screen. An example of the direct influence of films on tourism is the increase of travel to Australia shortly after the release of Crocodile Dundee. The film’s star, Paul Hogan, also became a tourism spokesperson for the country (Gartner, 1996).

According to Mansson (2009), research on film tourism can be divided into four different fields of interest. First is the influence of film on the decision to travel. Second is research that focuses on the visitors to film locations (film tourists). Third is sustainable destination issues with the impact of film tourism on visitation numbers and on residents. Finally, the fourth is destination marketing activities related to film.

Guidebooks are another genre of media that are much connected to tourists both as a tool for preparation and as a guide to the places that are visited. These books could be anything from educative or informative to read as pure entertainment. The influence of guidebooks can be seen as encouraging people to visit the same places and look at the same sight exactly as mentioned in the guidebooks. Mansson (2009) argued that guidebooks help tourists to be individual travelers and to experience things on their own instead of being part of an arranged package tour. In this context, the guidebook is just a tool for helping the tourist to select between displayed places and attractions. (Mansson, 2009)

A study conducted by Julien Mercille (2005) attempted to clarify empirically the impact of mass media—such as movies, guidebooks, and magazines on destination image. The analysis of his study is based on data collected from tourists in Lhasa, Tibet. He found that the image of Tibet projected by media productions corresponds to a significant extent to tourists both in what is shown and what is omitted about the place. For example, it is argued that important absences in media productions, such as Westernization, led to tourists being surprised by Tibet’s quite high level of development and Chinese presence upon arrival. On the other hand, media effects are not
deterministic or identical. The cultural and social background of each individual must be taken into account to understand the differences in interpretations of messages. According to Mercille (2005), in the case of Tibet, the basic conclusion of the study is that the effect of the media lies somewhere between a strong and negotiated influence. Mercille (2005) recommended that since representations may have a significant influence on image, marketers should act responsibly by projecting images of destinations that are not harmful to locals.

The fact remains that all the media do send messages about places. It can be argued that it is important to know more about how people perceive knowledge. This is necessary to understand why people go where they go and what they expect by going there (Butler, 1990).

2.8 Images of Saudi Arabia as a Travel Destination

Searching the image of Saudi Arabia as a travel destination is understudied and underreported. Limited articles have discussed tourism in Saudi Arabia as it is just recently that the country renewed efforts to market itself as a tourist destination. This can be due to two reasons:

- The government was concerned about the 'corrupting' influence of foreign tourists and was afraid that their behavior or dress might cause problems to conservative local society.
- Because of the Kingdom's vast oil revenues, the government was not motivated to promote tourism activities (Yusuf, 2014).

A study done by Yusuf (2014) investigated the strengths and weaknesses that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia faces to find a place in global tourism. She used three panels of experts who were given structured questionnaires on three stages. The experts were permitted to interact and discuss the problems and questions in the area of their expertise. Questions were prepared in a manner that
would approach the issues of tourism in Saudi Arabia in the past, how it is now, and projections for its future.

The first part of the questionnaire, investigates the history of tourism in Saudi Arabia and the result of the answers were as followed:

Table 2.4. First Questionnaire on history of tourism in Saudi Arabia. Adopted from Yusuf (2014, p.68)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>70%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86%</td>
<td>believe that that the oil industry distracted the Kingdom from seeing tourism as a potential way to increase the image of the country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43%</td>
<td>believe that that the oil industry was taking up Resources that are now creating money that can be used for tourism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53%</td>
<td>all agreed that oil was the major industry for the Kingdom, but that tourism hold large potential if the monarchy backs the endeavors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second part investigates tourism in Saudi Arabia at present and the result of the answers were as followed:
Table 2.5. Second set of questionnaire results. Adopted from Yusuf (2014, p.68)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Observation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>73% felt that tourism is expanding rapidly in the Kingdom</td>
<td>89% believe tourism holds potential to be a second huge income to the Kingdom due to the religious status of Medina and the Hajj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100% feel that the monarchy is interested in tourism and in putting resources into the industry</td>
<td>100% agree with putting more money into the tourism industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2% felt that cultural clashes would reduce tourism</td>
<td>54% feel that the growth of tourism is dependent on more hotels, as they are already built or in planning and feel that appealing to the West would increase tourism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The last part of the questionnaire investigates the panels expectations of the tourism in Saudi Arabia and the result of the answers were as followed:

Table 2.6. Final questionnaire for panelists. Adopted from Yusuf (2014, p.68)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expectation</th>
<th>Agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100% see infrastructure as a necessary improvement for tourists</td>
<td>These issues were agreed upon by all experts on the panel with no disagreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>almost complete consensus that internet and satellite structure needs improvement for tourism</td>
<td>89% feel the monarchy must step up production of goods offered to foreign tourists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass transit is another issue that the panel agrees needs improvement for tourism to flourish</td>
<td>82% agreed that those who come for pilgrimage must also find other tourism in the country attractive so they will stay once they are there, and spend more money on other attractions and good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Saudi Arabia image was affected by the September 11 attacks in 2001. Although the political relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia is still strong, the image of Saudi Arabia in the American society’s eyes is still damaged. The annual Gallup Poll Social Series update on World Affairs conducted in 2002 shows that American’s views of Saudi Arabia have shown
the greatest decline following Sept. 11. The survey asked Americans to rate their opinions of a list of 25 countries and Figure 2.10 illustrates the result of the survey.

Figure 2.10 Americans’ Favorability of Nations around the World as cited in Gallup (2002)

To change this image of Saudi Arabia among Americans, the Saudi government launched the biggest scholarship in its history to the Western world. The United States has the biggest portion of this program – 100,000 Saudi students with their families as recorded by the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission in the U.S. in 2013. One goal of this program is to maintain rapprochement between the people of the two countries and to enhance the image of Saudi Arabia among American citizens. Tourism is an effective tool in this case as mentioned in conferences as
International Tourism-Passport to Peace which held in May 1987 in Shannon, Ireland, and The First Global Conference, Tourism - A Vital Force for Peace which held in Vancouver, Canada in October 1988. Enhancing the goal of the Saudi Scholarship Program to the United States by attracting American students, who are in direct contact with Saudi students, will result in benefits in economic, cultural, and social perspectives.
3. CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sample

The target population of this study is U.S. students in 4-year universities. Due to time and financial constraints, convenience sampling was employed for this study. Data were collected from two universities. One is located in the northeast region and one is in the southern region of the United States.

3.2. Survey Instrument

Survey questionnaire, which is considered as one of the most productive data collection methods, was chosen to collect information that represents the general views of the target population. The researcher did a profound review of literatures, articles, and previous studies that discuss destination image measurement. Based on the review, two basic approaches were found to be the most used methods to measure destination image which are; structured and unstructured. Guided by this, the survey included open-ended questions, Likert scale questions, and semantic questions. Survey questions were mainly adopted from previous studies (i.e. Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Choi, Chan, & Wu, 1999) which had been proven to have acceptable reliability and validity. Additional questions regarding the tourism attributes in Saudi Arabia were created to reflect the tourism in the country.

The questionnaire was divided into 4 sections. The first section included 3 open-ended questions to capture participants’ holistic perceptions toward Saudi Arabia as a travel destination. An example of the questions was “When you think of Saudi Arabia as a travel destination, what images or characteristics come to your mind?”.
The second section asked participants questions regarding their perceptions of Saudi Arabia in terms of cognitive, affective, and conative attributes. Participants were asked to choose their level of agreement or disagreement (from 1 to 5 on Likert scale; 1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) with statements indicating tourism destination perceptions of Saudi Arabia. An example of the cognitive questions was; “There are a lot of opportunities to observe natural beauty in Saudi Arabia (e.g. mountains, grasslands).” An example of the affective questions was “People in Saudi Arabia are friendly and hospitable.” An example of the conative questions was “How would you rate your interest in visiting Saudi Arabia in the future?”

The third section included questions regarding information resources about Saudi Arabia. Participants were asked to indicate how frequently they used and depended on these resources in getting information and building knowledge about Saudi Arabia as a travel destination based on a Likert scale (1=never, 5=always).

The fourth section included the demographic information of the participants such as nationality, age, gender, religious preference, and household income. A pilot test were conducted on 10 American students to improve the readability and comprehension of the survey questions.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

Upon receiving the IRB approvals from both universities; the paper-and-pencil surveys were distributed in the two selected universities during the month of March 2017.

Regarding data collection from American students at the university located in the northeast region of the United States, the questionnaires were handed out to the respondents by the researcher in person to fill them out. Participants were recruited in various public places at the university campus. In order to increase the representativeness of the data, the researcher visited the different
colleges of the university, library, restaurants, and cafes on daily basis following different time schedules. The data collected from the university located in the southern part of the United States follow the same data collection protocol.

3.4. Methods of Data Analysis

All gathered questionnaires from both universities had been examined before the data analysis in order to exclude any invalid questionnaires such as surveys filled out by non-American students or surveys with tremendous missing data. Collected data were analyzed through SPSS. Content analysis was used to analyze the first 3 open-ended questions. Descriptive analysis was employed to analyze questions in Section II, III, and VI. Means, standard deviations, and frequency of the responses were reported.
4. CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section gives a general description of the respondents based on their demographic characteristics; gender, age, marital status, education, and religious preferences. Moreover, it gives a general description of the respondents’ international trips in the last two years. The second section presents the findings from the three open-ended questions adopted from Echtner and Ritchie’s (1993). These questions aim to capture images and characteristics evoked from the respondents when thinking of Saudi Arabia as a travel destination, perceived atmosphere of mood expected while visiting Saudi Arabia, and perceived distinctive or unique tourist destinations in Saudi Arabia. The third section reports the finding of an analysis of 26 attribute-based statements regarding images of Saudi Arabia as a travel destination. The last section presents the findings regarding the information distribution channels used by respondents.

4.1 Respondent Profiles

The total number of responses was 333. One hundred and ninety-nine (199) of them were from the university in the northeastern region and 134 were from the one located in the southern region of the United States. Of these responses, 29 of them were either incomplete or invalid, yielding 304 useful responses for data analysis. Among these 304 respondents, more than half were females (53.6%), whereas 46% were males. The average age of the participants was about 21.46 years old. The majority of participants (96.3%) were undergraduate students, while graduate students represent only about 3.7%. Only 1% of the respondents were married, while most of the participants were single students (92%), and 7% were divorced, a widow(er), or have a partner.
With regard to religious preference, the majority of the participants were Christians (67.7%), followed by Agnostics (14.7%), and other religious preferences (12.8%). Muslim participants represented only 0.7% of the total number of participants, and all of the American Muslim respondents have visited Saudi Arabia. Since traveling to the Saudi Arabia is not fully open to the Westerners, implying their visits were for religious purposes.

During the last two years, more than half of the participants (55%) have traveled internationally (outside the 50 states of the U.S.), whereas, (45%) have not. Table 4.1 presents the profiles of respondents.

Table 4.1: Respondent Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>46.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>53.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-19</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24-31</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>92.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (divorced, widow-widower, or have partner)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Preferences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian (including Protestant and Roman Catholic)</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>67.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agnosticism</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2. Images and Characteristics Regarding Saudi Arabia

Respondents were asked to answer three open-ended questions regarding Saudi Arabia from three aspects: images/characteristics, atmosphere/mood, and unique attractions/personalities when they think of Saudi Arabia as a travel destination. The three open-ended questions were purposely arranged as the first part of the survey to capture respondents’ first impression of Saudi Arabia.

All answers were analyzed word by word and further categorized in groups based on similarities of the meanings. For example, words like “wealth”, “rich”, “tycoon”, “money” were gathered in a group named “wealthy economy” since they conveyed the same meaning. In addition, for the purpose of data cleaning, inconsistent spelling of cities or attraction names were corrected to avoid confusion. For example, the name of the most mentioned city “Makkah” was written in two formats. Some students wrote it as “Mecca” and some wrote it as “Makkah”. The researcher chose “Makkah” as a default since it is the official spelling used by the Saudi government.

The first open-ended question “when you think of Saudi Arabia as a travel destination, what images or characteristics come to your mind?” was intended to discover the holistic images that evoked in the respondents’ minds about Saudi Arabia as a travel destination. The 10 most frequent images/characteristics came into respondents’ minds were “hot climate,” “wealthy economy,” “modern architecture,” “hazardous,” “religious significant,” “wildlife,” “oil,” “coastal lifestyle,” “urban,” and “culture.” All these characteristics are true about Saudi Arabia except “hazardous” which might be a result of the aggressive propaganda from some Western media about the country after the 9/11 attacks.

The analysis of the responses revealed that some respondents held negative images of Saudi Arabia, such as “the country is hazardous”, “repressive toward women”, “poor economy”,
“restrictive”, “dirty”, “bad odors”, “unfriendly to American tourists”, “bad place”, “corruption”, and “lack of food”. All these images can be results for the previously discussed reasons.

Some of the responses were completely unrelated to Saudi Arabia, such as “Pyramids”, “Oman”, “Taj Mahal”, “Dubai”, reflecting American college students’ lack of geographic knowledge (Camera, 2015). Some responses such as “perfect weather”, “no princess”, and “similar to Iraq” were not true in the country. Most of the country is covered by deserts and that is not a perfect weather except in few regions. The regime is a monarchy system, hence, there must be princes and princesses. The country is different from Iraq in terms of governance and dialect of Arabic. It is obvious that some respondents held misperceptions of Saudi Arabia and this may due to their lack of knowledge of the country or the influence of propaganda. Table 4.2 shows the summary of images/characteristics perceived by respondents.

Table 4.2: Images/Characteristics of Saudi Arabia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Images/Characteristics</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hot Climate: desert, sand, sandy, sand dunes, hot, heat, sunny, warm, climate, dry, humid, dusty, windy, and Oasis</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealthy Economy: wealth, wealthy people, wealthy country, rich, tycoon, money, palaces, luxury, fancy cars, expensive, glamor, and gold.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern Architecture, tall buildings, skyscrapers, and large highways. Hazardous: dangerous, unsafe, war, war zone, terror, terrorism, scary, conflict, blood, violence, tanks, barbaric.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious significant: religious, religious place, religious destination, hajj, Mecca, Medina, Kaaba, Muslim.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildlife: camel or camel back riding, elephants.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images/Characteristics</td>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coastal lifestyle: beaches, coastlines, beach resorts, Red sea, Arabian Sea, Persian Gulf, water, islands. Urban: big, beautiful, historic, busy, large, small cities.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture, cultured, different culture, rich culture/tradition</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repressive toward women: chauvinism: inequality, inequivalent with authority and subjects, misogyny, (women are not allowed to drive, covered from head to toes, women not treated fairly, women are less than men, treat poor women like trash)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful scenery: beautiful country, beautiful natural lands, plains, grassland, terrain, hills, mountains, gardens</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing: cultural outfits, covered women, men in white robes, conservative clothing, robes, head dresses, hijabs, turbans</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist: vacation spot, travel destination, tourist spots, great to visit, culture tourism</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vibrant: busy, a lot going on, vibrantly, vibrant colors, exciting, lively, dramatic</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>don't know/something new</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor economy: poor, poor country, poverty, people without homes, struggling. Large lifestyle gap, skinny children</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exotic: (cloths, flowers, food, places), wilderness, camel burgers, 24kt gold coffee</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern, modernization, advanced, cosmopolitan</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical architecture: old, ancient, historical, ornate buildings, side streets, landmarks</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Markets, business, trading, bazaars, mall towns</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuisine, cultural food, good food</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High population: lots of people, many people, crowded streets</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation: isolated, isolation, remote, travel time</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History: historical, historical sites</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotels: big hotels, luxury hotels, nice hotels middle east</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strict, restrictive, secret police, people being beheaded in public, no freedom, conservative</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology: innovation, cool engineering</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun, fun activities</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low population: small population, not very populated, small villages</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aladdin</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

61
The Second open-ended question asked “when you think of Saudi Arabia as a travel destination, how would you describe the atmosphere or mood that you would expect to experience there?” This question intended to capture the perceived atmosphere or mood expected by respondents while visiting Saudi Arabia. The most frequently mentioned atmosphere/mood were
“lively”, “sunny”, “cultural”, “welcoming”, “tense mood”, “dangerous”, “unfriendly”, “calming”, and “religious”. The least frequent answers were “amazement”, “clean”, “educational”, “scarcity”, “similar to the United States”, and “tech advance”.

According to these answers, respondents’ perceptions of Saudi Arabia in terms of atmosphere/mood were a combination of true and false perspectives. Descriptions such as “tense mood”, “dangerous”, “unfriendly” and “similar to the United States” are not true from the researcher’s point of view as a Saudi. Probably, the explanation of feelings like “dangerous, “tense mood”, and “unfriendly” could be due to the suspicion of Saudi Arabia’s relationship to 9/11 attacks and the general public’s connecting terrorists to Saudi Arabia. In addition, Saudi Arabia and the United States are very different in culture, language, government, and lifestyle. The feeling of “similar to the United States” seems to be incorrect. Perhaps the respondent felt that living in Saudi Arabia had no big difference than living in the U.S. Surprisingly, about 3 % of the respondents felt that the country was “secular and not religious at all,” and was another proof of respondents’ lack of information about Saudi Arabia. It was also possible that 14% of the respondents are agnostics, hence, they are not interested about such information. Table 4.3 shows the summary of atmosphere/mood perceived by respondents.

Table 4.3 Atmosphere/Mood of Saudi Arabia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Atmosphere/Mood</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lively (culture/mood/place), vibrant, high energy, lots of things to do, fast pace, activities, colorful, exciting.</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunny, summer mood, sultry, dirt, desert, dry, hot, warm, Arid, sweaty.</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural, culturally diverse, culture shock, different, little English.</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere/Mood</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming, welcoming attitude, inviting, friendly, hospitable, kind, light hearted, open, polite, sociable.</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tense mood, intense, depression, gloomy, melancholy, sad, negative culture, not relaxing, on edge, roughness, uncomfortable, uneasy, stressful, terrified people, unhappy, anger.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dangerous, unsafe, worried, scared, thrilling, threatening, nervous, anxious feelings, violence, war, harassment.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfriendly, unwelcoming to Americans, outsiders, hostile, mean, arrogant, bad, rude, nasty people, scam, sketchy, corruptive, uncivilized.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calming, peaceful, laid back atmosphere, quiet, tranquil, relaxing, serene.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious, Muslim, solemn, theocratic.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial/Hardworking /Business /Commercial</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative, reserved, restrictive, strict laws, oppressive</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxurious, fancy, rich, glamour, wealthy, money, expensive high class, extravagant, opulence, royal</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun, activities, party, playful</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolated, isolation, wide open space, barren, empty</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aggravated mood, frustrated, annoyed easily, chaotic, crazy, crowded, loud, wild</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touristy, tourism destination, nice place to go, resorts</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discriminative (against females), bad, strange for women/patriarchal/</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>don't know</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exotic, unique, interesting</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boring, dull, not interesting, no difference</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great, wonderful experience, enjoyable, happy, pleasant, cheerful</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nostalgic, old country, older stuff, traditional</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backward: less technology, no electronics, not modern, poor, third-world country</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar to Caribbean atmosphere, Dubai, morocco, the rest of middle east</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful scenery (architecture, culture, sites)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cool architecture, experience, music, place</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventurous</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere/Mood</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic, truthful, not touristy, natural</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amazement, wow</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarcity (hard time to find water and food)</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar to us</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tech advance</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third open-ended question asked respondents to list any distinctive or unique tourism attraction, events or personalities that you can think of in Saudi Arabia. This question intended to discover the perceived distinctive/unique tourist destinations in Saudi Arabia. Unfortunately, almost half of the participants had no idea or could not think of any. The possible explanation could be the lack of knowledge, or because Saudi Arabia government does not issue tourism visas, at the time of collecting data, except for Hajj and Umrah (pilgrimages of Islam undertaken by Muslims all around the world). The most frequent answers, in addition to “do not know”, were “Makkah and Medina”, “camel riding”, “desert”, “architecture”, “ancient ruins”, “malls”, “mosques”, “festivals”, and “beaches”. Table 4.4 shows the summary of the analysis.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Distinctive Tourism Destination</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don't know, cannot think of any, no idea</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mecca, Medina</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camel riding</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desert, sand, dunes</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building, castle of royal family, kingdom tower</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancient ruins, locations, historical destination, places, war sites</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malls, shopping, souks, bazaars, markets, plazas, street markets</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abraj al bait, temple, mosques</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Festivals, cultural festivals, bonfire events, cool stuff, hajj, parties</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaches, coast</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature, scenery, oasis</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality: Muslim culture, religion</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-star hotel</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaaba</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local, unique food, restaurants</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riyadh, Riyadh tower</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downtown areas/large cities</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality similar to Iraq, Taj Mahal</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality: most people are polite and friendly, welcoming</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museums</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality: Aladdin</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality: respectful</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality: rich communities/people</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al shallal theme park</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bungee jumping off a building</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indoor skiing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large companies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality: extroverted</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality: sexist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality: unsafe</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven wonders of the world</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skydiving</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The capital Riyadh</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3. Images of Saudi Arabia as a Travel Destination Attribute-Based Scales

In this section, respondents were asked to respond to 26 statements based on a 5-point Likert Scale (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree). Most of these statements were adopted from the attributes developed by Echtner & Ritchie (1993 & 2003). Based on the mean, responses were classified into two groups. The first group included attributes that the respondents agree with (the mean is more than 3), representing their perceived image of Saudi Arabia. These attributes were “culture”, “traditional cuisine”, “holy places”, “beautiful architecture”, “knowledge”, “traditional crafts (e.g. pottery, embroidery, woodcarving) and souvenirs” and “the opportunity for adventure.”

The second group comprised attributes that unfortunately Saudi Arabia has but were not recognized by respondents (the mean is below 3). These attributes were “restful and relaxing”, “infrastructure and transportation networks”, “the country is easily accessible”, “a family-oriented travel destination”, “UNESCO World Heritage List sites” and “Prices in Saudi Arabia are reasonable”.

To distinguish between the previous responses according to the “cognitive” and “affective” attributes, respondents agreed with 5 cognitive attributes and two affective attributes. Cognitive attributes that respondents agreed with are; “culture”, “traditional cuisine”, “holy places”, beautiful architecture”, and “traditional crafts (e.g. pottery, embroidery, woodcarving) and buy souvenirs.” The two affective attributes that the respondents agreed with are “the opportunity to increase knowledge” and “the opportunity for adventure.”

On the other hand, respondents disagreed with two cognitive attributes and four affective attributes. The two cognitive attributes are “the infrastructure and transportation networks” and “UNESCO World Heritage List sites.” The affective attributes that the respondents disagreed with
are “restful and relaxing”, “the country is easily accessible”, “a family-oriented travel destination”, and “Prices in Saudi Arabia are reasonable.”

Summing up, the respondents had concerns about the following three major categories: The first major concern is related to safety and reputation, including three statements; “You don’t have to worry about personal safety when traveling in Saudi Arabia”, “Saudi Arabia has a good reputation as a travel destination” and “The general atmosphere of the country is restful and relaxing”. The respondents ranked these statements low. In fact, the attacks of September 11th might have an adverse impact on the reputation of the country. The country was accused of terrorism and faced negative propaganda campaign from Western media. Therefore, the respondents showed safety concerns of traveling in Saudi Arabia.

The second major concern is related to the natural environment of Saudi Arabia, representing by two statements; “Saudi Arabia has comfortable climate that favors traveling”, and “There are a lot of opportunities to observe natural beauty in Saudi Arabia (e.g. mountains, grasslands).” The respondents ranked these statements low. Although the country has variety of natural topography such as mountains, beaches, islands, it is still presented in media as a desert country. Saudi media still needs to put more efforts to change this image and introduce the natural resources of the country.

The last major concern is more related to the atmosphere of Saudi Arabia, reflecting by the low ranking of the following three statements: “Saudi Arabia is a family-oriented travel destination”, “The country is generally clean”, and “The general atmosphere of the country is restful and relaxing.” The respondents did not expect Saudi Arabia a travel destination for family. The feeling of insecure, unclean environment and tense atmosphere may have an impact for respondents to consider it as an ideal travel destination for families.
Among all statements in this section, the top five cognitive attributes ranked by the respondents are; “There are important religious sites and holy places in Saudi Arabia” 38.5% out of total participants chose “strongly agree” to this statement, “One can see beautiful architecture in Saudi Arabia (e.g. buildings, castles)”, 35.2% out of total participants chose “agree” to this statement, “you don’t have to worry about personal safety when traveling in Saudi Arabia”, 35.2% out of total participants chose “disagree” to this statement, “You can observe people making traditional crafts (e.g. pottery, embroidery, woodcarving) and buy souvenirs” 34.9% out of total participants chose “agree” to this statement, and “You can enjoy modern art events and exhibitions in Saudi Arabia”, 33.9% out of total participants chose “agree” to this statement.

The top affective attributes are; “You can observe local culture (e.g. customs and traditions) in Saudi Arabia”, 36.8% out of total participants chose “agree” to this statement, “Saudi Arabia offers the opportunity for adventure”, 36.1% out of total participants chose “agree” to this statement and “Country holds exotic atmosphere”, 32.9% out of total participants chose “agree” to this statement. Table 4-5 presents the means and standard deviations of the attributes.
Table 4.5 Means and Standard Deviations of the Attributes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You can observe local culture (e.g. customs and traditions) in Saudi Arabia.</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>1.761</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You can sample tasty traditional cuisine.</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>1.833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are important religious sites and holy places in Saudi Arabia.</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>1.939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One can see beautiful architecture in Saudi Arabia (e.g. buildings, castles).</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>1.895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia offers the opportunity to increase knowledge.</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>0.109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You can observe people making traditional crafts (e.g. pottery, embroidery, and woodcarving) and buy souvenirs.</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>1.920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia offers the opportunity for adventure.</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>1.861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are plenty of historic sites, museums, and archaeological sites in Saudi Arabia.</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>2.045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country holds exotic atmosphere.</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>2.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are a lot of opportunities to observe natural beauty in Saudi Arabia (e.g. mountains, grasslands)</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>1.856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You can enjoy modern art events and exhibitions in Saudi Arabia.</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>1.966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi cities are interesting and offer varied activities.</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>2.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia has comfortable climate that favors travelling</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>1.508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You can visit abandoned sites in Saudi Arabia.</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>2.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People in Saudi Arabia are friendly and hospitable.</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>1.860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The country is generally clean.</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>1.776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Businesses in Saudi Arabia offer high quality of service.</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>0.112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia has a good reputation as a travel destination.</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>0.090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You can visit numerous battle sites and memorials.</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>1.984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You don’t have to worry about personal safety when travelling in Saudi Arabia.</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>1.324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The general atmosphere of the country is restful and relaxing.</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>1.696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local infrastructure and transportation networks are well developed in Saudi Arabia.</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>1.836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The country is easily accessible.</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>1.479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia is a family-oriented travel destination.</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>0.091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are UNESCO World Heritage List sites in Saudi Arabia.</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>1.793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prices in Saudi Arabia are reasonable.</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>1.639</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1= Strongly disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Neutral; 4= Agree; 5= Strongly agree

Regarding the interest in visiting Saudi Arabia in the future, which considered a conative attribute, the majority of the participants had the interest to visit the country (76.8%) in different levels. To illustrate, 56.7% were slightly interested or moderately interested, and 20.1% were very interested or extremely interested. Only 23.2% had no interest at all. Table 4-6 shows the details of the analysis.
### Table 4.6: Intention to Visit Saudi Arabia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Interest</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all interested</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly interested</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Interested</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very interested</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely interested</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 4.4 Affective Impression of Saudi Arabia as a Travel Destination

Five semantic differential questions regarding “affective attributes” were asked to generate respondents’ feelings about Saudi Arabia as a travel destination. Respondents were asked if they felt Saudi Arabia is “relaxing or distressing”, “pleasant or unpleasant”, “exciting or gloomy”, “friendly or hostile”, and “secure or insecure”. To answer this question, respondents were asked to rank their impressions from 1 to 5 between bi-polar adjectives, for example, secure and insecure, relaxing and distressing, friendly and hostile. To illustrate, a statement like “Relaxing ← 1 2 3 4 5 → Distressing” the ranking of 3 was “Neutral”, the ranking of 1, 2, 4, and 5 indicated more feeling toward the adjective at the end. According to the respondents’ answers on average, all “means” were between 3.41 and 2.31. The respondents reported the feelings more toward insecure than secure, more distressing than relaxing, more hostile than friendly, more pleasant than unpleasant, and more exciting than gloomy. Table 4.7 shows the results by means and standard deviations.
Table 4.7 Affective Impression of Saudi Arabia as a Travel Destination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affective Attribute Statement</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secure ← 1 2 3 4 5 → Insecure</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>0.982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxing ← 1 2 3 4 5 → Distressing</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>0.953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly ← 1 2 3 4 5 → Hostile</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>0.970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant ← 1 2 3 4 5 → Unpleasant</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>0.948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exciting ← 1 2 3 4 5 → Gloomy</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>1.165</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.5. Information Distribution Channels

Respondents were asked about how frequently they used the eleven sources of information to learn about Saudi Arabia (1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Always). One open ended choice was included to allow the respondent to list additional source of information that was not asked. The eleven sources were; news, movies, travel agencies, travel magazines, word of mouth, social media (Facebook, Twitter, blog, LinkedIn), major travel websites (i.e., Trip Advisors, Expedia, etc.), Saudi Arabia tourism brochures, Saudi Arabia tourism ads, Saudi Arabia tourism websites, and documentaries.

The channels most frequently used by the respondents to receive information about Saudi Arabia are “News”, “Social media”, “Movies”, “Documentaries”, and “Word of mouth” respectively. On the other hand, the least frequently channels used by the respondents are; “Saudi Arabia tourism website”, “Saudi Arabia tourism ads”, “Saudi Arabia tourism brochures”, “Travel agencies”, and “Travel magazines.” Additional information sources indicated by respondents included “course work” specifically,” History class” and “travel show”. Table 4.8 presents the ranking of the channels used by respondents. However, none of the means of the responses were
more than 3 (3= sometimes, 4= often, 5= always), indicating the lack of receiving information regarding Saudi Arabia regardless the type of channels.

It was interesting to find that channels created by the government administration to promote the tourism were least used by the respondents to receive information regarding Saudi Arabia. All the top frequently channels that the respondents used were either no-Saudi media or personal interacting.

Table 4.8 Usage of Information Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>1.063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media (Facebook, Twitter, blog, LinkedIn)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>1.088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movies</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>.0911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentaries</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>1.074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word of mouth</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>1.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major travel websites (i.e., Trip Advisors, Expedia, etc.)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>0.872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Magazines</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>0.858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Agencies</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia tourism brochures</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>0.785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia tourism ads</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>0.803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia tourism websites</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>0.798</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (course work, history class)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Framed on Echtner and Richie’s model, three models were created to present the components of Saudi Arabia’s Image perceived by American college students.

### Functional
- Beautiful scenery (12)
- Luxury (17)
- Resorts (14)
- Festivals and mega events “Hajj” (11)
- Religious sites (31)
- Historical sites (34)
- Traditional cuisine
- Hot climate and desert (286)
- Wealth economy (63)
- Modern architecture (45)
- Camel back riding (32)
- Oil (29)
- Beaches (24)

### Holistic
- Relaxing atmosphere (21)
- Culture and tradition (41)
- Opportunity to increase knowledge
- Friendly and hospitable people (36)
- Religious (33)
- Repressive toward women (13)
- Lively mood and exciting (92)
- Tense mood and gloomy (33)

### Psychological
- Historical sites (34)
- Luxury (17)
- Resorts (14)
- Beautiful scenery (12)
- Mosques (11)
- Makkah and Madinah (31)
- Festivals and mega events “Hajj” (11)
- Traditional cuisine
- Historical sites (34)
- Unique
- Lively mood and exciting (92)
- Culture and tradition (41)

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**Figure 4.1.** Functional/Psychological and Attribute-Based/Holistic Continuums of Saudi Arabia’s Image

**Figure 4.2.** Functional/Psychological and Common/Unique Continuums of Saudi Arabia’s Image

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Figure 4.3. Common/Unique and Attribute-Based/Holistic Continuums of Saudi Arabia’s Image
5. CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section is a summary of the research findings. Second section is about the study implications and recommendations that the Saudi tourism administrators can apply. The third section explains the limitations of the study and suggestions for future studies.

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

This study aims to understand the American college students’ perceptions of Saudi Arabia from three perspectives; holistic images, the mood they expect to experience, and to discover the perceived distinctive/unique tourist destinations in the country. The information gleaned from this study can provide insight to help Saudi tourism administrators and planners to position the country and develop strategies to market to American college students, a potential tourism target market of Saudi Arabia.

The results show that the holistic images about Saudi Arabia in the respondents’ minds are positive in general, except “hazardous.” Images of Saudi Arabia include hot weather, wealthy economy, modern architecture, being religious, and rich in culture. The atmosphere that the respondents expected when traveling to Saudi Arabia was positive in general except security issues. Respondents expected the country to be lively, cultural, welcoming, calming, and religious. On contrast, the most significant negative image of Saudi Arabia was related to security and hazardous. Negative atmosphere such as “dangerous”, “tense mood” and “unfriendly” were perceived by respondents. This negative image might be due to the consequence of 9/11 attacks through a heavy Western media propaganda. Even though these attacks happened 16 years ago
and the Saudi government had been making efforts to rebuild its image within the United States, the memory of terrorist attacks seem to have a substantial impact on American college students’ perceptions of Saudi Arabia. More efforts are required from the Saudi government to remove such negative image and reposition the country’s positive image in the minds of American citizens. This problem needs awareness campaigns by Saudi government that emphasize on the true Islam, its principles, and how it is a religion of peace in order to raise the Westerners’ public awareness. Although the Saudi government has initiated attempts to fight extremism, it is obvious from the results of this study that the Saudi media channels failed in delivering the information and reaching the Western audience. Strong media channels and strategy are key factors that the Saudi government should invest in to deliver the message. The islamophobia is not only a Saudi concern. It is the concern of all Muslim countries. Hence, Saudi government can cooperate with other Muslim countries, especially those who have succeeded as travel destinations and are not affected by such propaganda, to gain advantages from their experiences beside the recent efforts with the international community to combat extremism.

It was obvious that the participating American college students had poor knowledge about Saudi Arabia since almost half of them could not think of any unique tourism attractions or events there. Instead, some respondents mistook that Dubai, Oman were in Saudi Arabia and indicated that they could find pyramids and the Taj Mahal in Saudi Arabia. In fact, the country has four registered UNESCO World Heritage sites and plans to increase them to ten, representing real distinctive unique attractions in Saudi Arabia. Unfortunately, it was not recognized by American college students participating in this study.

This lack of knowledge about Saudi Arabia could be justified by respondents’ low usage of information sources regarding Saudi Arabia. The most frequently used channel for them to learn
about Saudi Arabia was through news. Unfortunately, some of the news may have a biased report of Saudi Arabia, leading to a negative image of the country. The SCTH has its official website to provide tourism information and the usage by the respondents was low. This could be due to the fact that the nation’s travel policy is limited to pilgrims and not fully open to the world yet. This may explain why this official tourism website was not used frequently by respondents. Since this study is concerned about American students as a potential market, there is a propitious opportunity that SCTH can take advantage of. According to the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission in the United States (SACM), there are more than 250 Saudi student clubs and organizations in the United States universities (sacmclubs, 2, October, 2017). SCTH can cooperate with these clubs and organizations to promote tourism and educate American students about Saudi Arabia. This opportunity will provide direct interactions with not only American students, but also all international students in the United States and travel agencies. Moreover, this strategy can be applicable in 35 countries that have Saudi Arabian Cultural Missions and Saudi students.

5.2 Implications.

The marketers of Saudi Arabia must acknowledge both the negative and positive images and recognize that there is a lack of awareness among US college students of the country’s attractions and tourist activities. One of the most important implications of this study is that the negative image linking to terrorism and a lack of effective information dissimilation channels. It is critical to develop effective marketing strategy to address these issues and remove the negative image of Saudi Arabia.

Botha, Crompton, and Kim (1999) recommended that for positioning, what can be reinforced are the attributes that already exists in the tourist’s minds. The findings show that the
top images of Saudi Arabia in the respondents’ minds are desert and hot climate, culture, tradition, architecture, historical sites, event and exhibitions. Tourism organizations in Saudi Arabia should focus on these attributes and try to use them as competitive advantages to create uniqueness and niches that differentiate the country from its competitors. The government’s official tourism website should include information regarding culture, tradition, architecture, historical sites, event and exhibition information, and adventurous tour packages to attract potential visitors. Any promotional advertisements or brochures should be created to address the both the cognitive and affective attributes of Saudi Arabia, including culture, tradition, architecture, historical sites, events and exhibitions, as well as the lively, vibrant, exciting, sunny, welcoming, inviting atmosphere.

To enhance the image of Saudi Arabia in the minds of American college students, Saudi tourism planners can benefit from the eight Marketing Mix “product, price, promotion, place, packaging, programming, people, and partnership.”

With regard to product, Saudi Arabia has its unique culture, tradition, historical sites, architecture that can distinguish itself from other countries. These niches should be used to position the country as an attractive travel destination. Chacko suggested that “If tourism products are mostly intangible, they have to be marketed with tangible evidence. This is what is referred to as "tangibilizing the intangible" (1996, p. 70). To enhance the destination image of the country, it is suggested that the country tangibilize the intangible tourist experiences by creating symbols and souvenirs to tourist.

In terms of price, according to the survey, the respondents actually did not believe that “Prices in Saudi Arabia are reasonable”. The cost of the trip should be made affordable to target tourists. Comparing the living expenses between Saudi Arabia and the United States, consumer
prices, restaurant prices, and groceries prices are cheaper in Saudi Arabia (NUMBEQ, 2017). However, hotels, which is an important element for travelers, are more expensive in Saudi Arabia than the United States and some other countries. This may due to the fact that the lodging industry is still developing and the demand in the market does not support the need of the market. Saudi government should encourage investors to invest in hotel sector to increase the lodging capacities in the country as well as offering affordable accommodation prices for tourists.

Regarding to promotion, it is important to choose the right communication tools to distribute the information. The study showed that news, social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, blog, LinkedIn) and movies were the three most used channels for respondents to learn about Saudi Arabia. To promote the country effectively, the government should make good use of these channels to reach out to potential travelers. It would be beneficial if the government could sponsor world-famous movie producers to shoot movies in Saudi Arabia, thus presenting the positive image of the country globally. Although the respondents relied on the internet to access social media, they seldom used the official tourism websites. The Saudi government and tourism organizations need to make more efforts to increase the awareness and the usage of the websites. It is also important that the government will make sure the website is well designed to promote the positive images of the country and to provoke website visitors’ intention to visit Saudi Arabia. Other promotional strategies could include hosting mega events or shows in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the destination marketing organizations (DMOs) in Saudi Arabia should fully utilize the “promotion mix” (sales, personal selling, advertising, merchandising, public relations, publicity, and social media) to promote Saudi Arabia as a travel destination. Although the strategy of public relations is not widely used in Saudi Arabia yet, the government or DMOs can take
advantage of PR to reinforce the unique travel attributes in the country, therefore, removing the misconceptions held by Westerners.

The tourism industry is a *people* industry. The success of the tourism depends on high quality tourism providers. The government and tourism organizers should emphasize tourism education and training professionals so that they can deliver quality services to tourists. This can be achieved by establishing hospitality and tourism programs in colleges and professional training centers in major cities to provide trained employees to feed the tourism industry. Since tourism is a new industry in the country, tourism organizations in Saudi Arabia should cooperate with universities and tourism organizations from leading countries in tourism industry to gain more advantages from their experiences.

With regard to *packaging* and *programing*, the respondents seemed to have an unnecessary concern about the safety traveling in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, offering package such as group trips may help relieve such concerns and make they feel more comfortable. The travel organizations can develop niche travel packages that address the needs of American college students, such as an adventure tour package to offer the adventurous experiences, educational tour packages to visit renowned architectures, historical sites, or to learn about the Islamic religion and culture.

To encounter the negative image of Saudi Arabia, the Saudi government can partner with major universities in U.S. and sponsor American college students on a special culture learning tour and study exchange programs to allow them to learn the real life in Saudi through their own eyes. These students can become the ambassadors for the country and spread out good word of mouth for the country. Other suggestion is to invite celebrities and famous stars from various fields to Saudi Arabia as honored guests in some occasions, especially since the country is witnessing
quantum leaps and mega projects recently. These celebrities are influential people and there news can make good advertisements to the country. Moreover, inviting travel agents, reporters, journalists, and authors for familiarity trips to the country will allow them to live the experience and express it to the audience.

5.3 Limitations and Future Study

Due to time and financial constraints, a convenience sampling method was employed for this study. Data were collected from two 4-year universities in the United States, therefore, the generalization of this study was limited to the type of universities and students from the sample. However, this study can serve as a pilot study for a future large-scale study among U.S. college students. Future study can adopt stratified sampling to increase sample size and its representativeness, therefore, increasing the generalization of the findings. This study is limited to American college students. Future study can expand to general American citizens to discover their perceptions of Saudi Arabia as a travel destination. It also would be interesting to investigate if there are any image changes before and after the visit of Saudi Arabia. Further study can recruit travelers who have visited the country to obtain better understanding of any perception changes between pre-visit and after visit.
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