U.S. Citizen's Images of South Korea as A Travel Destination

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Abstract : The U.S. is the third largest inbound travel market for South Korea and has enjoyed good growth in recent years. Despite this market's strategic importance, there has been little research on how U.S residents perceive South Korea as a travel destination. This paper analyzed the images of U.S. residents using an online survey. The image statements with the highest levels of agreement were on Korea's long history, the opportunities to increase knowledge of the Korean culture, the degree of crowding in South Korean cities, and the martial arts of Korea. Several negative images of South Korea were also found. Additionally, the respondents were not clearly able to differentiate South Korea from China and Japan. The study outlines several marketing needs and recommendations for South Korea's tourism.

Key Words: Destination Branding, Destination Image, Online Survey, Positioning, North Korea, South Korea

Introduction

In the past 15 years, South Korea has gained the attention of people around the world due to its dramatic economic growth, the Summer Olympics in Seoul in 1988, the 2002 Pusan Asian Games, and the 2002 World Cup. More recently, the tense political situation in the Korean peninsula has focused greater attention on both North Korea and South Korea. During the past 30 years, tourism in South Korea has experienced significant growth. According to the Korea National Tourism Organization (KNTO, 2003), the number of foreign visitors to South Korea has gone from a mere 11,109 with $1.4 million in total earnings in 1961 to 5.35 million visitors and $7,641.5 million in earnings in 2002.

Importance of the U.S. Market to South Korea

U.S. citizens are the largest spenders in the world with total expenditures of around $64.5 billion in 2000 (World Tourism Organization, 2003), and the U.S. represents a very important target market for most countries. In 2002, the U.S. accounted for the third largest number of visitors to South Korea,

after Japan and China (KNTO, 2003). U.S. visitors grew by 45.2% between 1991 and 2000. During the last six years, the growth rate of U.S. visitors has averaged 3.5% per year. U.S. residents stayed longer than South Korea's other major inbound markets (12.1 days in 2002) and spent more money. For these reasons, the U.S. is a critical for the well being of South Korean tourism when compared to visitors for other countries.

Images of South Korea in the U.S.

Recently, the image of South Korea has improved among other Asian countries due to the exporting of Korean products, music, soap dramas, and other items. However, while Korean products have also gained in popularity, it seems that South Korea's images among U.S. residents have been more influenced by television programming (e.g., M*A*S*H, Seoul Olympics, World Cup), recollections of the Korean War, and the recent political tension due to North Korea's stance on nuclear weapons. Moreover, it is believed that most U.S. residents have little knowledge of South Korea as a travel destination despite the country's many attractions. ·

Chon (1991) examined changes in pre- and post-trip perceptions of South Korea as a travel destination among U.S. visitors, using the traveler behavior model originally suggested by Gunn (1972). This research was based on a survey conducted in 1985 and since then South Korea has significantly changed in terms of its economic situation (dramatic growth and IMF), worldwide sports events (1998 Seoul Olympics, 2002 Asian Games, 2002 World Cup), and the uncertainty of the political situation in the Korean peninsula. However, apart from Chon's (1991) study, little other research has been conducted on U.S. visitors to South Korea and what they think of South Korea as a travel destination.

Given the gap in image research on South Korean tourism, this study was designed to determine U.S. residents' current images of South Korea as a travel destination, and whether they were able to distinguish South Korea from the neighboring countries of Japan and China. The specific objectives of the study were to: 1) determine U.S. citizens' images of South Korea as a travel destination; 2) investigate whether they distinguish South Korea from China and Japan; and 3) identify groups of U.S. citizens who share similar images of South Korea as a travel destination.

Destination Positioning, Branding and Image

Tourism scholars believe that the images of destinations play a significant role in travelers' destination choices (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Gartner,

1989; Reilly, 1990). According to Baloglu and Brinberg (1997), "Image differentiates tourist destinations from each other and is an integral and influential part of the traveler's decision process."

Destination Marketing Strategies and Branding

Generally the steps taken by places to create destination images are considered to be part of the destination marketing effort and more specifically represent an element of a

marketing strategy (Morrison, 2002). As suggested by Kotler, Bowen, and Makens (2003), market segmentation and market targeting should be the first two steps in marketing strategy development. Once the target markets are chosen, the positioning approaches are selected. In this respect, Kotler, Bowen, and Makens suggest that organizations must establish images that differentiate them from competitors.

Destination branding is a relatively new development in practice and as a field of academic investigation. Marketing experts feel that destination branding can be effective in differentiating competitive destinations, but the concept is still in an infancy stage. For example, Cai (2002) stated, "while brands are found in many categories of tourism goods and services, and permeate almost all facets of tourism activities, the concept is not studied and practiced as vigorously in destination marketing as in the general field." The challenge of branding a destination is complicated by the variety of decision processes used by travelers, and by the diversity of the product and the target markets. For the traveler, the destination selection decision involves greater risk since the purchase often involves buying a bundle of goods and services that have never been experienced before and that may be relatively expensive. As such, the decision-making process may be exhaustive and require an extensive information search. Decisions tend to be made based upon people's perceptions of how a potential destination will meet their needs. Therefore, the destination brand incorporating the brand image and identity can be instrumental in forming sharper images and perceptions among potential travelers (Morgan, Pritchard, and Pride, 2002). In Cai's (2002) model of destination branding, the three most important building blocks are the brand element mix, brand identity, and brand image building. Cai explains that the brand element mix incorporates such things as logos or slogans. These elements communicate a strong and consistent set of brand associations that are relevant to the target markets.

Destination Positioning

In the contemporary notion of destination branding, positioning can be

thought of as a tool of brand image building and brand communication. The positioning concept predates the discussion of destination branding in the tourism literature, and is attributed to writing of Al Ries and Jack Trout, two advertising agency executives. According to Ries and Trout (1981), marketers first must look inside the minds of their customers to determine the images they have of the destination. Next, they must decide how to confirm, strengthen, or change that image in customers' minds. When customers have all destinations well organized (positioned) in their minds, they choose the most appealing ones from their decision sets. If a destination has a poor or unclear image, it does not have a chance of being considered. People will not only have greater difficulty in remembering that destination, but will also drop it faster from the consideration set during destination selection. Therefore, positioning the destination is a highly important tool of destination branding in attracting potential visitors.

Nickerson and Moisey (1999) argued in favor of simplifying branding and positioning by concentrating upon the features that attracted visitors in the first place to the destination. Their research indicated that as a result of visiting a destination, travelers' images tend to be more realistic, complex, and differentiated. Thus, it is crucial to understand what attracts visitors since this can provide one of the bases for image building and positioning. It is also important to know how visitors' images of a destination are different from those of people who have never visited that destination.

Destination Image

The measurement of destination image has been of great interest to tourism researchers. Moreover, the accurate assessment of image is a key to designing an effective marketing and positioning strategy (Reilly, 1990). Much of the previous research on destination image has employed structured methodologies. Gartner (1989) used structured methodologies to measure the image of four states (Utah, Montana, Colorado, and Wyoming) with multidimensional scaling techniques. Crompton (1979) measured the image of Mexico in different states in the U.S. using a structured methodology (30 attributes on a seven-point Likert scale). Gartner and Hunt (1987) measured the change in Utah's image over a 12-year period using structured methodologies with a five-point Likert scale. Few previous destination image studies have incorporated unstructured methodologies. One such study was by Reilly (1990), who used unstructured methodologies (incorporating open-ended questions) to measure the image of Montana.

Since previous studies using only structured methodologies did not examine the full range of the unique characteristics and complex nature of

destination images, Ecthner and Ritchie (1991,1993) suggested that a combination of structured and unstructured methodologies should be used, and presented a three-dimensional model, with image separated into two components (attribute-based and holistic). Each component (Figure 1) has items with functional or psychological characteristics, and each characteristic can reflect common or unique features of the destination. Thus, a three-dimensional diagram is the best way to illustrate the components of destination image. As Figure 1 shows, the model has three scales. The first scale, attribute-holistic, is based on the idea that image is composed of specific attributes (such as good restaurants, relative cost, receptiveness of the people) and mental pictures (holistic) such as people visiting a historic temple or families playing on a beach. Each of these components has functional and psychological characteristics. Functional characteristics are more tangible destination features, such as historic sites, mountains, ski hills, and shopping centers, and psychological (abstract) characteristics, which include items such as friendly people, safety, and a general feeling or atmosphere. The third scale, common-unique, is based on the idea that images range from "common" functional and psychological traits to unique or more distinctive features, events, feelings, or atmosphere.
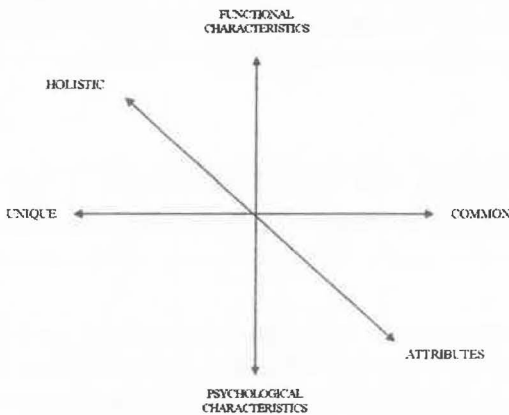
Figure 1: The Components of Destination Image

Ecthner and Ritchie, 1993

Destination Image of South Korea

Chon (1991) examined visitors' perceptions before and after their trips to South Korea using Gunn's (1972) traveler behavior model in an empirical analysis of U.S. residents traveling overseas. The study showed that there were significant differences especially with respect to the scenic beauty of South Korea, shopping opportunities and related attractions, and general

attitudes towards traveling to South Korea. Chon and Shin (1990) suggested that South Korea was a late starter in tourism compared with many other Asian nations. The Korean government has organized efforts to sell tourism abroad and this has been quite successful. However, Chon and Shin argued that the Korean War and the negative images associated with South Korea's political instability have made it difficult to promote the country as a desirable travel destination.

According to Ahn and Ahmed (1994), despite the challenges, South Korea is an increasingly popular international travel destination. They stated that the first problem with South Korea's image is what one might call the "M*A*S*H syndrome." Other negative perceptions were thought to include harsh winters, inferior consumer goods, high prices, and rampant prostitution. The success of the 1988 Olympics created a favorable image of South Korea, but this must be maintained in the minds of travelers. According to Ahn and Ahmed, the way to correct negative impressions is to make certain that travelers know the facts.

In summary, there have been several studies regarding the images of South Korea as a travel destination. However, most of this work was completed more than a decade ago. Additionally, South Korea has significantly changed during the past 15 years, and it is necessary to develop a more contemporary understanding of the images of South Korea as a travel destination.

Method

Population, Sample and Data Collection

The population for this study was U.S. citizens interested in travel and to sample this population, online discussion groups on travel and tourism were used.

Most image research has been conducted through mail or by personal interviews. To date, not much destination image research has been done online. Although online surveys have some recognized disadvantages (e.g., incompatibility, Internet accessibility, and security concerns), they have distinct advantages over traditional survey methods in terms of lower costs, added convenience, and quicker execution and responses (Mills, Morrison, and Ismail, 2002). Moreover, the online survey method is beneficial when dealing with a national sample of respondents.

Travel and tourism related discussion groups were identified through search engines and directories including Yahoo and Google, and also based on previous work conducted by Rezende (2002). A total of 29 online discussion

groups were contacted and messages were posted to their subscribers. The online survey received 334 hits with 201 respondents completing the survey, and, therefore, the sample size for this study was 201 U.S. citizens with an interest in travel.

Content Analysis, Focus Group, and Survey Questionnaire

This study adopted the combination of structured and unstructured methodologies suggested by Echtner and Ritchie (1993) in developing the survey questionnaire. At first three open-ended (unstructured) questions were borrowed from Echtner and Ritchie's (1993) study on destination image. These questions are thought to be effective in capturing the unique and holistic components of image and they were as follows:

• What images or characteristics come to mind when you think of South Korea as a travel destination?

• How would you describe the atmosphere or mood that you would expect to experience while visiting South Korea?

• Please list any distinctive or unique tourist attractions that you can think of in South Korea?

The next section was comprised of a set of 50 statements or attributes of South Korea. These were developed over several stages including a content analysis, a focus group session, and a literature review. After the content analysis of materials published in the U.S. about Korea, a focus group was conducted to assess U.S. citizens' images of South Korea as a travel destination, and to pilot-test and refine the survey questionnaire. The participants in the focus group were U.S. citizens with an interest in international travel. In completing the pilot questionnaire, the participants were asked to rate the 50 attribute statements about South Korea on five-point Likert scale from one, for strongly agree, to five, for strongly disagree. Six of the statements were about Korean culture, costumes, food, architectural styles, and addressed the second major objective of this study (whether respondents could differentiate South Korea from China and Japan). The last survey section sought demographic information (gender, age, education, household income, and marital status) and also included questions regarding the respondent's interest in visiting South Korea in the future.

Following the focus group, some revisions were made to the draft questionnaire. Then, two experts with academic and professional backgrounds in tourism reviewed the final set of attribute statements to ensure content validity. Finally, a pretest was conducted in November 2002, involving 38 students in a tourism marketing class at a major U.S. university. The Cronbach's alphas measuring the internal consistency of the statements in this pretest

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were quite acceptable. Most of the alphas were more than 0.70. However, tourist facilitation, resort atmosphere/climate, and inexpensiveness were lower at 0.62 to 0.67. The decision was made to retain the scale items as is for the online survey.

Data Analysis

Two different kinds of software were employed to analyze the qualitative and quantitative data. The three open-ended questions produced the qualitative data, which was analyzed by the CATegory PACkage (CATPAC) II Windows 2.0 program. CATPAC is a self-organizing artificial neural network that has been optimized for reading text. CATPAC identifies the most important words and determines patterns of similarity based on the way the words are used in the text. CATPAC allows more than one description/word per person (Woelfel, 1998; Woelfel and Stoyanoff, 1998). The most frequently used words were combined with the answers to the attribute-based questions in constructing diagrams of the components of destination image as suggested by Echtner and Ritchie (1993), and these are shown in Figures 2, 3, and 4.
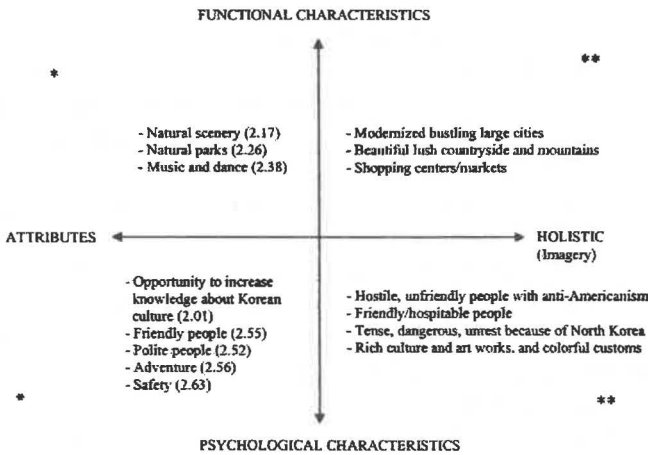
FUNCTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

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- Natural scenery (2.17)
- Natural parks (2.26)
- Music and dance (2.38)

- Modernized bustling large cities
- Beautiful lush countryside and mountains
- Shopping centers/markets

ATTRIBUTES ← → HOLISTIC (Imagery)

- Opportunity to increase knowledge about Korean culture (2.01)
- Friendly people (2.55)
- Polite people (2.52)
- Adventure (2.56)
- Safety (2.63)

- Hostile, unfriendly people with anti-Americanism
- Friendly/hospitable people
- Tense, dangerous, unrest because of North Korea
- Rich culture and art works, and colorful customs

**

PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Figure 2: The Attribute/Holistic and Functional/Psychological Components of South Korea's Image

* Information in this quadrant developed from the attribute statements

** Information in this quadrant developed from responses to open-ended questions

To analyze the quantitative data, simple descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and mean scores for the 50 attribute statements were used. The next step was a factor analysis on the 50 attributes to condense the information for the original items into a smaller set of new dimensions or

constructs. A principal components analysis with a Varimax rotation was used with a predetermined cut-off Eigenvalue of one. The statements with factor loadings of less than 0.4 were removed from the analysis.
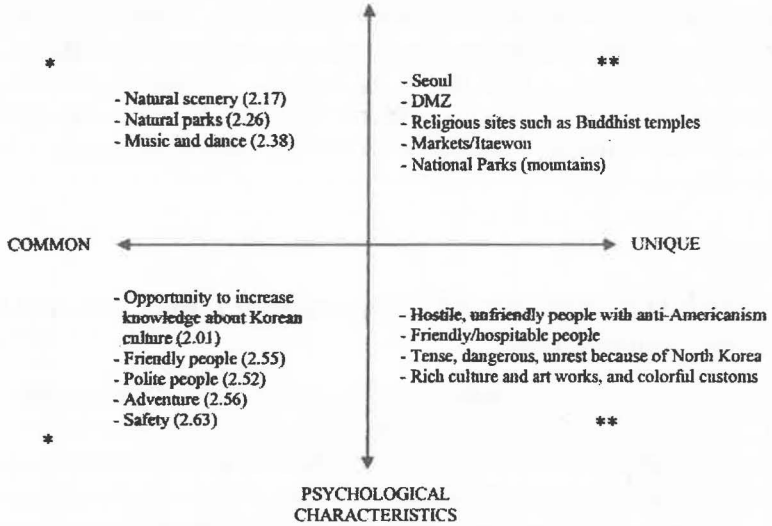
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*   **

- Natural scenery (2.17)   - Seoul
- Natural parks (2.26)   - DMZ
- Music and dance (2.38)   - Religious sites such as Buddhist temples
                            - Markets/Itaewon
                            - National Parks (mountains)

COMMON ⟵————————————————————⟶ UNIQUE

- Opportunity to increase
   knowledge about Korean
   culture (2.01)   - Hostile, unfriendly people with anti-Americanism
- Friendly people (2.55)   - Friendly/hospitable people
- Polite people (2.52)   - Tense, dangerous, unrest because of North Korea
- Adventure (2.56)   - Rich culture and art works, and colorful customs
- Safety (2.63)

*   **

PSYCHOLOGICAL
CHARACTERISTICS

Figure 3: The Common-Unique and Functional/Psychological Components of South Korea's Image

*   Information in this quadrant developed from the attribute statements

** Information in this quadrant developed from responses to open-ended questions

            - Natural scenery (2.17)   *
            - Natural parks (2.26)
            - Friendly people (2.55)
*   - Polite people (2.52)   - Modernized bustling large cities
            - Adventure (2.56)   - Beautiful lush countryside and mountains
            - Safety (2.63)   - Shopping centers/markets
            - Opportunity to increase
              knowledge about Korean
              Culture (2.01)

ATTRIBUTES ⟵————————————————————⟶ HOLISTIC
                                               (Imagery)

- Seoul
- DMZ   - Hostile, unfriendly people with anti-Americanism
- Buddhist temples   - Tense, dangerous, unrest due to North Korea
- Markets/Itaewon   - Rich culture and art works, and colorful customs
- National Parks (mountains)

                                    **

**

UNIQUE

Figure 4: The Attribute/Holistic and Common/Unique Components of South Korea's Image

* Information in this quadrant developed from the attribute statements

** Information in this quadrant developed from responses to open-ended questions

Cluster analysis was performed on the resulting factors to determine groups of U.S. citizens holding similar images of South Korea. Ward's hierarchical clustering method with squared Euclidean distance as the similarity measure was used to determine the number of clusters. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) with Sheffé post-hoc tests was performed to verify if statistically significant differences existed among the clusters. In addition, to better understand the clusters, chi-square analyses were conducted to determine if there were any statistically significant differences among the groups in demographic characteristics.

Results

General Description of Respondents and Interest in Visiting South Korea

More than half of respondents were male (57.7%), and the majority was aged from 35 to over 65 (80.1%). Married persons represented more than half of the respondents (59.2%), while 29.9% were single. Most of respondents (97%) had a college education experience. Some 68.7% of them had earned Bachelor's degrees, and 31.9% had postgraduate degrees. Overall, it appeared that well-educated U.S. citizens were the most interested in completing the survey. The proportion of high-income ($80,000 plus) respondents was 42.8%, while 28.9% were in the medium-income ($40,000-$79,999) range.

Overall, more than half of the respondents (56.2%) were very interested or interested in visiting South Korea, while 37.3% were not interested. These positive responses should not be assumed to mean that a high percentage of all U.S. citizens are interested in visiting South Korea. The sample was composed of U.S. citizens with a known interest in travel and tourism and, therefore, they were predisposed to knowing more about foreign cultures and destinations than the general population.

Overall Images of South Korea (Research Objective 1)

Overall, neutral to agree images (means of less than three) were found for 35 statements, while there were 15 neutral to disagree images (means above three) of South Korea as a travel destination. Only one item (Korea has a long history) had a mean score in the strongly agree (less than two) or strongly disagree (more than four) range (Table 1). The items with the highest level of agreement were:

- Korea has a long history (1.69)
- There are several opportunities within South Korea to increase my

knowledge about Korean culture (2.01)
- South Korean cities are crowded (2.02)
- Korea has its own martial arts (2.08)
- South Korea has natural beauty (2.17)
- Most people visit South Korea because of business (2.19)
- South Korea is a good place for shopping (2.25)
- Korean food is spicy (2.28)
- South Korea offers much in terms of natural scenic beauty (2.28)

Table 1: Images of South Korea as a Travel Destination: Attribute Statements

Attribute Statements	Mean
1) In general, South Korea is a safe place to visit	2.63
2) There are many attractions to visit in South Korea	2.66
3) South Korea is an exciting place to visit	2.70
4) People in South Korea are friendly	2.55
5) Traveling to South Korea is convenient and easy	2.92
6) Good quality hotels are easy to find in South Korea	2.38
7) The standard of living in South Korea is high	2.62
8) South Korean cities are crowded	2.02
9) A vacation in South Korea is a real adventure	2.56
10) South Korea is restful and relaxing place to visit	3.16
11) South Korea offers much in terms of natural scenic beauty	2.28
12) South Korea offers a variety of music and dance	2.38
13) Most people visit South Korea because of business	2.19
14) The environment within South Korea's large cities is much different than in large U.S. cities	2.66
15) South Korea has natural beauty	2.17
16) There are several opportunities within South Korea to increase my knowledge about Korean culture	2.01
17) South Korea is a good place to go for the beaches	3.18
18) Tours with guides are not available in South Korea	3.69
19) Vacations in South Korea are inexpensive	3.25
20) Local architecture styles in South Korea are similar to those of Japan	3.01
21) South Korea has good nightlife	2.56
22) Good tourist information is readily available for South Korea	2.57
23) Korea has a long history	1.65
24) Not many people speak English in South Korea	3.14
25) The culture, art, and customs of Korea are very similar to that of Japan	3.18
26) South Korea is an exotic destination	2.48
27) There are many packaged vacations available to South Korea	2.89
28) There are many mountains and natural parks to visit in South Korea	2.26
29) South Korea has its own martial arts	2.08
30) There are many sports and recreational opportunities in South Korea	2.48
31) There are many exhibitions in South Korea	2.52
32) South Korea has pleasant weather for traveling	2.89
33) There are many festivals in South Korea	2.33
34) Korean food is spicy	2.28
35) South Korea is a good place for shopping	2.25
36) People in South Korea are very polite	2.52
37) Korean food is similar to Japanese food	3.50
38) Transportation in South Korea is inexpensive	2.80
39) South Korea is only worth visiting while touring neighboring Asian countries	3.06

40) The political situation in the Korean peninsula has little to do with my image of South Korea as a travel destination	3.49
41) Korean food is similar to Chinese food	3.42
42) South Korea is a good place to take children	3.21
43) Local standards of cleanliness and hygiene are high within South Korea	2.74
44) Quality restaurants are easy to find in South Korea	2.46
45) Transportation within South Korea is convenient	2.58
46) Local architecture styles in South Korea are similar to those in China	3.07
47) South Korea is not a safe place to visit because of North Korea	2.99
48) Public transportation is safe in South Korea	2.55
49) South Korea is a destination that people dream of visiting	3.85
50) The culture, art, and customs of Korea are very similar to that of China	3.29

The attribute statements were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree)

The items that respondents tended to disagree most with were: Tours with guides are not available in South Korea (3.69); the political situation in the Korean peninsula has little to do with my image of South Korea as a travel destination (3.49); and South Korea is a destination that people dream of visiting (3.85).

In order to capture the unique and holistic components of images, three open-ended questions were borrowed from Echtner and Ritchie's (1993) study on destination image. For the first open-ended question, respondents were asked to provide the images that came to their minds when they thought of South Korea as a travel destination. The most frequent answers were: friendly/nice/hospitable people (35.3%), shopping, goods, markets (26.9%), wonderful, nice, beautiful nature or scenery (mountains, countryside, hills, lush, beaches) (21.4%), rich culture, arts, colorful customs (16.9%), modernized, industrialized, large cities, buildings (15.9%), and food (Kimchi, rice, Oriental) (15.4%). The negative characteristics mentioned were DMZ, military, unrest, dangerous place (21.4%), anti-American/demonstrations (16.9%), and the Korean War (5.5%). Recent television programming in the U.S. perhaps influenced these negative images. For example, this survey was conducted during the time of demonstrations to mourn the deaths of two Korean schoolgirls killed by U.S. soldiers during a military exercise in South Korea. The respondents might have been affected by a 60 Minutes report that covered these demonstrations and that definitely communicated an anti-American theme.

The second open-ended question asked the respondents to describe the mood or atmosphere that they would expect to experience in South Korea. Anti-Americanism, hostile, and unfriendly was the most popular set of answers (37.8%). Again, there was a concern for the political situation in the Korean peninsula, reflected by 18.4% of the respondents who expected an atmosphere that was tense, somber, fearful, dangerous, uncomfortable, and

having some unrest. In contrast, views were expressed about friendly or nice people (34.3%), a welcoming, helpful, warm, favorable, hospitable people and environment (12.4%), and the polite and gracious people (5.5%). Images were also prevalent about the modern and busy environments in South Korean cities, e.g., busy, bustling, crowded, congested, hectic (14.4%), and modernized (4.0%).

The last open-ended question was "Please list any distinctive or unique tourist attractions that you can think of in South Korea." Of those who answered this question, 31.8% mentioned Seoul as a unique attraction in South Korea. The reason for this might be because Seoul has been publicized many times in the media as the capital city of South Korea, the site of the 1988 Summer Olympics, and the co-host of the 2002 World Cup. The next most cited items were the DMZ (19.4%), Buddhist temples (13.4%), and shopping areas such as Itaewon (12.4%). Only 9.5% of respondents mentioned Cheju Island, one of major tourism attractions in South Korea. Some 19.9% of the respondents were not aware of any unique tourist attractions, indicating that South Korea's attractions are not well known among U.S. citizens.

Factor analysis using principal components with a Varimax rotation was performed to group the 50 attribute statements to determine the underlying dimensions of South Korea's image. Twelve factors with Eigenvalues greater than one emerged from the first analysis and the total variance explained was 67.2%. However, the Cronbach alpha coefficients of the last five factors were low (0.45, 0.47, 0.49, 0.25, and 0). To improve the results, an analysis of the correlations between each item and the total score from the scale was conducted to find statements that did not correlate well with the overall score from the scale. Four items were removed due to their greater influence in lowering the reliability coefficient; "There are many packaged vacations available to South Korea;" "South Korea has its own martial arts;" "Korean food is spicy;" and "South Korea is a destination that people dream of visiting." The factor analysis was repeated and ten factors emerged in a new solution. A cut-off point of 0.4 for factor loadings was used instead of 0.3.

Cronbach's alpha, the most commonly used reliability measure, was applied to test the reliability of the factors. The factors with alphas of more than 0.6 were retained for further analysis. An alpha of 0.6 and higher indicates that there is a reasonable level of internal consistency among the items making up the factor (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black, 1998). Three of these factors were dropped due to lower Cronbach alphas (0.44, -0.57, and 0). Again, factor analysis was conducted and the final solution had seven factors and 39 statements, which explained 55.1% of the total variance.

The first factor extracted was composed of ten attribute statements and' was named "natural attractions and interests" (Table 2). Five statements were about attractions, natural scenic beauty, beaches, mountains, and natural parks. The other five statements were related to the overall character of South Korean vacations and interests such as places to see and things to do. This factor had the largest Eigenvalue (6.85) and explained 14.9% of the total variance.

Table 2: Factor Analysis of Attribute Statements about South Korea

Factors (alpha values)	Loadings	Variance Explained (%)	Eigenvalue
Factor 1: Natural Attractions and Interests (0.91)		14.895	6.852
South Korea offers much in terms of natural scenic beauty	.817		
South Korea has natural beauty	.760		
There are many attractions to visit in South Korea	.705		
South Korea is an exciting place to visit	.696		
A vacation in South Korea is a real adventure	.685		
South Korea offers a variety of music and dance	.680		
There are many mountains and natural parks to visit in South Korea	.665		
There are several opportunities within South Korea to increase my knowledge about Korean culture	.665		
South Korea is an exotic destination	.664		
South Korea is a good place to go for the beaches	.530		
Factor 2: Tourist Facilities, Transportation, and Information (0.90)		13.012	5.985
Good quality hotels are easy to find in South Korea	.759		
Quality restaurants are easy to find in South Korea	.731		
Transportation within South Korea is convenient	.698		
The standard of living in South Korea is high	.659		
South Korea is a good place for shopping	.634		
Traveling to South Korea is convenient and easy	.623		
Local standards of cleanliness and hygiene are high within South Korea	.596		
Public transportation is safe in South Korea	.588		
Good tourist information is readily available for South Korea	.512		
Transportation in South Korea is inexpensive	.504		
South Korea has good nightlife	.431		
Factor 3: Safety and Comfort (0.85)		7.279	3.348
South Korea is not a safe place to visit because of North Korea	.747		
In general, South Korea is safe place to visit	.729		
The political situation in the Korean peninsula has little to do with my image of South Korea as a travel destination	.702		
South Korea is a good place to take children	.632		
South Korea is restful and relaxing place to visit	.519		

Factor 4: Cultural Comparisons: China (0.79)		5.280	2.429
Local architectural styles in South Korea are similar to those in China	.829		
The cultural, art, and custom of Korean are very similar to that of China	.821		
Korean food is similar to Chinese food	.745		
Factor 5: Cultural Comparisons: Japan (0.80)		5.241	2.411
The culture, art and custom of Koreans are very similar to that of Japan	.856		
Local architectural styles in South Korea similar to those of Japan	.808		
Korean food is similar to Japanese food	.758		
Factor 6: Recreational Opportunities and Events (0.79)		4.948	2.276
South Korea has pleasant weather for traveling	.701		
There are many exhibitions in South Korea	.542		
There are many sports and recreational opportunities in South Korea	.525		
There are many festivals in South Korea	.426		
Factor 7: Images of Korean People (0.69)		4.438	2.041
People in South Korea are very polite	.726		
People in South Korea are friendly	.686		
Not many people speak English in South Korea	.474		
Total Variance Explained		55.1%	

"Tourism facilities, transportation, and information" was the second factor. This factor had an Eigenvalue of 5.99 and explained 13% of the total variance. Most statements were related to tourism facilities such as the quality and variety of hotels, restaurants, shopping, and nightlife. Others were related to the transportation in South Korea, specifically its safety, relative costs, and convenience. Also included were statements about the living standards, levels of cleanliness and hygiene, and quality of tourist information.

Factor three ("safety and comfort") grouped five statements about the safety, political situation, and comfort level in visiting South Korea. It had an Eigenvalue of 3.35 and explained 7.3% of the total variance. The fourth and fifth factors included the cultural comparison statements being used to determine whether respondents could differentiate South Korea from Japan and China. The fourth factor, cultural comparisons with China, had an Eigenvalue of 2.43, while the fifth factor of cultural comparisons with Japan had an Eigenvalue 2.41. These two factors together explained 7.7% of the total variance.

Factor six was named "recreational opportunities and events." It included four statements about exhibitions, festivals, sport and recreational opportunities, and pleasant weather for traveling. Factor six had an Eigenvalue

of 2.3 and explained 5.0% of the total variance. Factor seven was labeled "images of Korean people" and included three statements about whether Koreans were very polite, friendly, and spoke English. The last two factors had Eigenvalues of 2.3 and 2.0 respectively and together explained together 9.4% of the total variance.

Perceptions of South Korea vs. China and Japan (Research Objective 2)

The comparisons of perceptions were used to determine whether U.S. citizens could distinguish South Korea from China and Japan. For the three statements comparing South Korea and Japan, the overall means scores were generally around the neutral value of 3.0; "Local architectural styles in South Korea are similar to those of Japan" (3.01), "The culture, art, and customs of Koreans are very similar to that of Japan" (3.18), and "Korean food is similar to Japanese food" (3.5) (Table 1). Therefore, while U.S. citizens seemed to be able to slightly differentiate South Korea from Japan in terms of food, they were unsure about differences in the architecture styles, culture, art, and customs of South Korea and Japan.

The results showed that respondents also seemed to know the difference between Korean and Chinese food; "Korean food is similar to Chinese food" (3.42). For local architecture styles, culture, art, and customs, respondents did not know the differences between Korea and China; "Local architectural styles in South Korea are similar to those of China" (3.07) and "The culture, art, and customs of Koreans are very similar to that of China" (3.29).

Cluster Analysis of Groups of Respondents (Research Objective 3)

Cluster analysis was performed on the resulting factors to achieve the last objective of grouping respondents with similar images of South Korea. Two different types of cluster analysis techniques were employed to identify groups of U.S. citizens who shared similar images of South Korea. First, a Ward's hierarchical clustering method with squared Euclidean distances as the similarity measure was used to determine the number of clusters. The cluster dendrogram and the agglomeration coefficients suggested four clusters. This number of clusters was then used in a follow-up, non-hierarchical (K-means) cluster analysis to confirm and define cluster membership.

ANOVA tests with Scheffé post-hoc comparisons were used to determine if there were statistically significant differences among the four clusters for the seven image factors. Table 3 shows there were statistically significant differences for all seven factors at $p = 0.01$. Also, to better understand the

clusters, chi-square analyses were performed to determine if there were significant differences among the groups in demographic characteristics. Table 4 indicates there were no significant differences in the five demographic factors among the four groups.

Table 3: Means of Image Factors for the Four Clusters

Factors (Dimensions)	Cluster I n = 36	Cluster II n = 86	Cluster III n = 26	Cluster IV n = 53	F-Ratio	Sig. Level (p)
Natural attractions and interests	2.88c	2.24a	2.61b	2.62b	14.275	.000
Tourism facilities, transportation, and information	2.52a	2.42a	2.51a	2.62b	18.274	.000
Safety and comfort	3.52b	2.78a	3.09a	3.34a	5.116	.002
Cultural comparisons: China	2.79a	3.18b	3.32b	3.67b	16.272	.000
Cultural comparisons: Japan	3.17b	2.92a	4.05c	3.38b	41.652	.000
Recreational opportunities and events	2.90c	2.40b	2.27a	2.71b	10.800	.000
Images of Korean people	2.51a	2.73b	3.00b	2.42a	21.273	.000

Note: Values are means based on a 5-point Likert scale. Means with a different superscript are significantly different from each other based on Scheffé tests at p = 0.05. For example cluster I (a), II (a) and III (a) did not significantly differ from each other with regard to the tourism facilities, transportation, and information factor, but Cluster I, II, III differed from Cluster IV (b).

The first cluster had more positive images (lower mean scores) than the overall average for "tourism facilities, transportation, and information" (2.5) and "images of Korean people" (2.5). However, this cluster had a somewhat more negative image of

"safety and comfort" (3.52) and the most neutral images of "natural attractions and interests" and "recreational opportunities and events" (2.9). They were the only group that considered the features of South Korea to be like China (2.8). A majority was male (61.1%), over 55 years old (52.8%), and married (61.1%). Some 83.3% of this group had a Bachelor's degree or higher and it had the highest proportion with high incomes at 52.8%.

The second cluster had the most positive images (lowest means) of South Korea for three of the seven factors: "natural attractions and interests" (2.2), "tourist facilities, transportation, and information" (2.4), and "safety and comfort" (2.8). This cluster was the only one that saw similarities between South Korea and Japan (2.9), but overall they were close to being neutral. Some 60% were male, 59.3% were over 45, 52.3% were married, and 57% of had Bachelor's degrees or higher. The second cluster had the highest proportion with medium and low incomes (52.3%).

Table 4: Demographic Characteristics of Clusters

Characteristics	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	Chi-square (χ^2)	Sig. Level (p)
	n = 36	n = 86	n = 26	n = 53		
Gender					$\chi^2 = 1.11$	0.777
Male	61.11%	60.05%	53.85%	52.83%		
Female	38.89%	39.95%	46.15%	47.17%		
Age					$\chi^2 = 21.026$	0.457
18-19	0.0%	2.33%	3.84%	3.38%		
20-24	6.72%	6.98%	0%	5.57%		
25-34	8.33%	16.28%	11.54%	9.43%		
35-44	11.11%	15.12%	26.92%	16.98%		
45-49	11.11%	13.95%	15.38%	11.32%		
50-54	1.39%	24.42%	15.38%	15.09%		
55-64	30.56%	13.95%	15.38%	26.42%		
65 +	22.22%	6.98%	11.54%	11.32%		
Marital Status					$\chi^2 = 13.638$	0.553
Single	25.00%	33.72%	15.38%	24.52%		
Married	61.11%	52.32%	80.77%	58.49%		
Separated	2.78%	1.16%	0%	1.89%		
Widowed	2.78%	1.16%	3.84%	3.78%		
Divorced	2.78%	9.30%	0%	9.43%		
Others	5.56%	2.30%	0%	1.89%		
Education					$\chi^2 = 23.604$	0.168
Left high school	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%		
High school	0%	4.65%	0.0%	0.0%		
Some college	8.33%	27.91%	19.23%	13.21%		
Associate's degree	8.33%	8.14%	11.54%	9.43%		
Bachelor's degree	36.11%	31.40%	38.46%	45.28%		
Master's degree	36.11%	18.60%	26.92%	30.19%		
Doctoral degree	11.11%	7.00%	3.85%	1.89%		
Others	0.0%	2.32%	0.0%	0.0%		
Income					$\chi^2 = 12.983$	0.163
Low (< $39,999)	11.11%	22.09%	0.0%	11.32%		
Medium ($40,000-79,999)	25.00%	30.23%	34.62%	26.42%		
High ($80,000 +)	52.78%	34.89%	42.31%	49.06%		
Unwilling to answer	11.11%	12.79%	23.08%	13.21%		

The third cluster had the most positive image of South Korea for one of the statements: "recreational opportunities and events" (2.27). By contrast, they had the highest mean score for "images of Korean people" (3.0), which was a neutral opinion. This group was the clearest in being able to differentiate South Korea from Japan (4.1). Some 53.9% were male, 57.7% were over 45 years, 80.8% were married (the highest married percentage), 69.2% had Bachelor's degrees or higher, and 42.3% had high incomes.

The fourth cluster most clearly differentiated South Korea from China (3.7). They had the most positive "images of Korean people" (2.4) among the four groups, and the highest proportion of females (47.2%). Some 64.2% were over 45, 77.4% had Bachelor's degrees or higher, and they had the second highest percentage

with high incomes (49.1%).

Conclusion :

In conclusion, this study's results indicated that there were a variety of images of South Korea as a travel destination among U.S. citizens. Some of these images were positive, but some were negative. Another major conclusion was that these U.S. citizens were unaware of most of what South Korea has to offer as a destination, both in terms of its major attractions and the specific activities that are available for visitors. It was also concluded that U.S. citizens generally are not clearly able to distinguish South Korea from China and Japan. In addition, it was found that not all U.S. have the same images of South Korea as a travel destination, and four distinct image clusters of respondents were identified.

The results for both the unstructured and structured questions used in this study showed that U.S. citizens have a mixture of positive and negative images of South Korea as a travel destination. On the positive side, South Korea is perceived to be a country with a long history and a rich culture. It is considered to have great natural beauty, and friendly and hospitable people. The uniqueness of Korean food and its martial arts also appear to be well recognized among U.S. citizens. Finally, there is an image that South Korea has modern cities, and that the country offers good opportunities for shopping.

It was obvious from the results of this study that South Korea tourism must counter some prevalent negative images within the U.S. The country appears to be a victim of past history (the Korean War of 1950-1953), the difficult current political situation in the Korean peninsula caused by North Korea's nuclear arms threat and the U.S. military presence in South Korea, and the perception of anti-American sentiments in South Korea that have been widely publicized in the U.S. media. Together, these historical and present conditions may be the root cause of some U.S. citizens feeling that it is unsafe to visit and that South Korea residents are anti-American and unfriendly. The geographical proximity to its poorer neighbor, North Korea, perhaps when added to some remaining memories of the M*A*S*H movie and television series, may be contributing to some people's images that South Korea is somewhat of an impoverished nation. By contrast, some people have images of South Korea as being modern with busy and highly congested cities.

The answers to the open-ended questions and focus group results suggested that there is a distinct lack of awareness among U.S. citizens about what specifically South Korea offers in terms of attractions and activities. For example, one of its major attractions, Cheju Island, is not well known despite the efforts of the KNTO and tour operators' efforts to promote that destination. This lack of awareness may be compounding the problems caused by the just mentioned negative images of South Korea. In addition, South Korea seems to lack the types of major "iconic" attractions that most destinations have, including for example the Great Wall and Xi'an in China, and Mount Fuji in Japan.

The overall responses to the questions on cultural comparisons between South Korea, China, and Japan, suggested that U.S. citizens cannot clearly and

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consistently differentiate among the three nations. While the respondents tended to be better able to differentiate South Korea in terms of food, they were not as able to distinguish the architecture styles, culture, art works, and customs. The increased popularity of "Oriental food" could be one of factor contributing to the greater recognition of differences between Korean, Japanese, and Chinese food.

In summary, South Korea at this time seems to be faced with a major set of challenges in its image as a tourism destination. These challenges are three-fold in nature with respect to potential visitors from the U.S.: 1) negative images; 2) lack of awareness; and 3) inability to differentiate from neighboring countries and competitive destinations.

The study found that the images of South Korea varied among sub-groups of respondents in perceived safety and comfort, and cultural comparisons among South Korea, Japan, and China. Some of the four groups had concerns about the level of safety in Korea, while others considered South Korea to be safe. Some groups were able to distinguish South Korea from Japan, but the others were better able to distinguish South Korea from China. These results indicate that it would be very unwise for South Korean marketers to assume that all potential visitors from the U.S. are alike, since this research showed that images vary considerably in the U.S. market.

Marketing Implications

South Korea must determine U.S. citizens' current perceptions of the country, and acknowledge both the negative and positive images. Moreover, the marketers of South Korean tourism must recognize that there is a lack of awareness in the U.S. of the country's major attractions and vacation activities. One of the most fundamental implications of this study is that South Korea lacks a clear image in the U.S. market as a pleasure travel destination. A comprehensive new marketing strategy is required to address this gap in awareness, as well as to counter the negative images of South Korea that seemingly gained momentum in 2002 and 2003.

The more specific marketing needs resulting from this research are as follows:
- The need to address the perceptions of a lack of safety, comfort, and welcome for U.S. residents in South Korea.
- The need to more clearly differentiate South Korea from two of its closest neighbors, China and Japan.
- The need to disassociate South Korea's image as a tourism destination from the general images of North Korea.
- The need to more firmly establish one or more "icon" attractions, such as Cheju Island, in the minds of potential U.S. travelers.
- The need to more fully capitalize on the most recognized assets of South Korea among U.S. citizens, including its history, natural beauty, culture, food, and martial arts.

In meeting these needs, it is believed that the Internet can be a very effective tool, especially in reaching a market so distant from South Korea. Establishing more effective Internet marketing strategies aimed at potential U.S. visitors is required.

Limitations of the Study

The results of this study should be considered with caution because of

sampling limitations. First, the population for this study was defined as U.S. citizens interested in travel. These respondents should have had more knowledge of differences among tourism destinations around the world than other U.S. citizens. Therefore, the study's findings cannot be generalized to the U.S. population as a whole.

Next, those respondents who already had an interest in South Korea were perhaps more willing to participate in the survey. Due to data collection method, it was impossible to determine the response rate or to evaluate if there was a non-response bias. Additionally, there was no way to know from which online discussion group participants came.

Gartner and Shen (1992) stated there is autonomous image formation agent that can dramatically affect an area's image in a short period of time through second-party sources such as media channels. The survey for this study was conducted during the peak of the media reporting about demonstrations in South Korea regarding the two schoolgirls killed in a U.S. military accident, and on the nuclear issue with North Korea. Thus, it is possible that the respondents were affected by the adverse media stories at the time on both South and North Korea, and that this represented the influence of an autonomous image formation agent, as envisaged by Gartner and Shen.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Further research should be conducted to identify the main sources of information about South Korea that have influenced the current images that U.S. citizens have of the country. Perhaps, such a study could help explain why differences in the culture and customs of South Korea and neighboring Asian countries are not very clear.

A larger and more representative survey of the general U.S. population should be conducted to supplement the findings of this research. More research should be conducted on U.S. travelers to South Korea to identify their motivations, levels satisfaction levels, and changes in images after their trips.

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