ABSTRACT

‘The “Made-in” notion is a matter of tremendous importance in international marketing strategy, public policy making and research’ (Bilkey, 1993: xix).

There is an obvious impact of perceptions and generalizations about a country on a person's evaluations of the country's products and/or brands. From this, it is posited that the image a person has about a country and its product offerings influence buying intention, in this case, the choice of destination. Therefore, that to determined marketing strategy and production sourcing, measurement of the CO construct is necessary so.

The country of origin concept has been defined in 1992 by Roth and Romeo as “the overall perception that consumers form of products from a particular country, based on their prior perceptions of the country’s production and marketing strengths and weaknesses”.

One key drawback of current COO studies is the fact that there is a lack of applicability of this concept to the services market. However, the literature has not clearly paid sufficient attention to the service side of the Country of origin theory.

On the other hand, when firms expand into the global marketplace they face several critical decision alternatives, including production locations, entry modes, advertising and promotions, which have significant ramifications for corporate global performance. The choices of specific strategic alternatives that are made may also have significant impacts on consumer product evaluations.

The World Tourism Organization notes that, tourism as a service, at the start of the millennium, is firmly established as the number one industry in many countries and the fastest-growing economic sector in terms of foreign exchange earnings and job creation. Ashworth (2004) affirmed that the Mediterranean beach holiday transformed the economies, social expectations, political structures and not least the physical environments of a large part of the world, while introducing the idea of foreign, and specifically warm holiday destinations to a generation of largely western Europeans in a period of only around 30 years.

Ashworth in 2004 declares that Tourism destinations reinvent themselves for various reasons ranging from intrinsic characteristics of tourism demand, economic behaviour and attitudes towards environments and local communities. Business organisations in the travel and tourism industry sell different products or services to different types of customer. It involves identifying the main and particular characteristics of each of the segments: Leisure/Business customers, Independent travellers, Package holidaymakers, Age-specific groups and so on, in a tourism market and treating them in a more individualised way.
Focusing on the destination to study (Spain) The Economist Intelligence Unit Ltd. Journal in 2005 affirmed that the climate and physical beauty of the Spanish coastline have contributed to a dynamic tourism industry, centred particularly on the Mediterranean coast and the island communities. The country is now the world’s second most important tourist destination after France as it is shown in the World’s top ten tourism destination ranking of the WTO in 2005.

This research seeks to identify the effect of the Country of Origin theory in the Spanish travel industry across a sample of UK respondents in the grey market. Arguments are proposed which finds gaps in the application and analysis of the COO theory to the service as an economy sector.

Nowadays, the "grey market", or the over-50s, is the fastest growing sector of the UK population. It accounts for 40% of the UK population but controls 80% of its wealth, according to research by marketing company Millennium.

The stereotype of the average heritage tourist has been summarised by many observers (Prentice, 1993; Ashworth & Tunbridge, 1990; 2001; Boniface & Fowler, 1993; Page & Hall 2003). The almost universal caricature of the stereotypical 'Baedeker/ Michelin tourist', is aged 45-65, with higher than average disposable income, education, and travel experience, holidaymaking independently in a group of two and staying in hotel accommodation. This remains the most profitable sector and is likely to remain so as a result of demographic, educational and economic trends.

Furthermore, due to the flexibility in the research and the will to intensify the information to get, a longitudinal study was leaded by running several personal interviews with those mid-age British. The longitudinal study was used by considering the stages of youth, maturity and the old age. Those groups were assumed to have the similar characteristics in terms of living area and lifestyle. Furthermore, the aim was to create a continuous that will help to discover how today’s impressions from the young sector would be transformed in the mature age and therefore in the elder age.

A main idea is suggested for future marketing research, from a “brand” point of view, since destinations are the world’s biggest brands and will thus promote competition. The Destination Marketing Organisations should somehow develop a brand identity that encapsulates the essence or spirit of a multi-attributed destination representative of a group of sellers as well as a host community. Such a brand identity should serve as a guiding focus for the marketing activities of the DMO and stakeholders. (Pike, 2004)

This issue has its importance in the sphere of tourism marketing since it has been demonstrated that it helps to create the image, positioning and marketing of Spain as a brand of tourism destination, and are the key concepts in global marketing, COO and Tourism marketing.

Therefore, the Spanish tourism marketers must emphasize in a future marketing research strategy those positive different strengths, its culture, historical heritage and traditionalism and thereby contributing to the discovery and development of these new areas as yet uncommercialised.
“For me Spain is a step-back” (Male, A1)

AIM - INTRODUCTION (Raison d’etre)

In this paper the research is lead to analyze the Spanish tourism which could be seen as one of the sectors that developed into one of the most important ones of the Spanish economy in an extremely short period of time. This research seeks to identify the effect of the Country of Origin theory in the Spanish tourism industry across a sample of UK respondents in the grey market. Arguments are proposed which find gaps in the application and analysis of the COO theory to the service as an economy sector.

The image of products, companies and countries can present different values to consumers in different countries. All of this is related to the stereotyped national image which is more widely explained under the umbrella of the Country of Origin effects.

The importance of CO images in international marketing and cross-cultural consumer research is well appreciated. Heslop and Papadoulos (1993) have counted more than 300 publications on the topic since Nagashima’s (1970) pioneering work in the field. Additionally, consumer perceptions of foreign products have been examined from practically every imaginable consumer perspective (Wood and Darling, 1993): affect cognition, awareness, familiarity, perceived risk, and consumer comprehension of the total marketing activities undertaken by companies from foreign countries.

Yet, relatively few if any articles of Country-of-origin image articles have focused on the tourism sector. The main areas of research within the tourism field in this paper are though the Country of origin effect in combination with the Tourism marketing destination. What they look for is filling the gap of the applicability and research of the first of them in services (mainly in Tourism). However the impact of CO information on consumer purchase behaviour has inspired a large body of literature.

Papadopoulos, Heslop and Bamossy (1990) contend that country of origin and brand name will continue to be widely used as a means of evaluating products. Hooley, Shipley and Kreiger in 1998 argued that the country of origin effect exits when product choice is influenced by the product’s source country and is revealed as an important extrinsic information cue for the evaluation of consumer products (Baughn and Yaprak, 1993)

Accordingly, the brand name contributes toward not only the information of consumer quality expectations but also, consumer purchase behaviour (Saunders 1993) and price paid (Rao and Monroe 1989). Morgan and Pritchard, 2003 cited Bilkey and Nes, 1982 who said that evidence exists with the respect to goods-based products to suggest that country of origin and brand name interact and contribute to the overall perceived quality of a product. They quoted as well de Chernatony, 1983 who argued that ‘consumers enrobe themselves with brands, partly for what they do, but more for what they help express about their emotions, personalities and roles’.
When consumers make brand choices about products – including destination – they are making lifestyle statements since they are buying into not only an image but also an emotional relationship (Sheth, Mittal and Newman, 1999; Urdde, 1999). Another important concept to note was announced by Nagashima (1970) who is credited with first defining country image as “the picture, the representation, and the stereotype that businessmen and consumers attach to products of a specific country. This image is created by such variables as representative products, national characteristics, economic and political background, history and tradition”.

1. GLOBAL EXPORT MARKETING "think global, act local" mantra

The main idea is that the discipline of marketing is universal. It is natural that marketing practices will vary from country to country due to the fact that countries and peoples of the world are different. Those differences do not mean marketing approach success in all the countries. (keegan & Green, 2005)

Keegan and Green in 2005 defined what is considered an important risk in global marketing which is learning to recognize the extent to which marketing plans and programs can be extended worldwide, as well as the extent to which they must be adapted. They found that the way that a company addresses this task is a reflection of its global marketing strategy.

Global Marketing Strategy (GMS) would be defined as an extent to which a company has operations in major marketing world markets (Keegan & Green, 2005). This concept presents a controversial frame: Standardization, in terms of homogeneity of each marketing mix elements versus adaptation (executed in different ways) of them in various country markets. Due to the above, GMS has three different dimensions that pertain to marketing management:

If we have a look around us, we could notice that global brands come from countries which are ‘brand images’ of their own, and the product is quite often strongly linked with that image. It is an Italian cars, French perfumes, Japanese television, American fashion… that is it! Nation brands evoke certain values, qualifications and emotional triggers (note in here the link with COO) in the consumer’s mind about the likely values of any product that comes from that country.

The role of COO in information processes and its impact on product/country evaluation are approved in many studies (Al-Sulaitu & Baker 1998; d’Astous & Ahmed 1999). Various authors suggest that COO affects product evaluation and succeeding purchase behaviour not only directly but also indirectly through beliefs (Erickson et al. 1984; Han 1989; Hong & Wyer 1989). An initial awareness of a product’s COO often sets off a global evaluation by which consumers conclude all mode of quality, performance or product attributes which they are not capable to evaluate directly (Strutton et al. 1994). These incidental evaluations reveal halo effects or stereotyping. The other function of COO effects is derived by the summary function, where COO helps consumers summarise product information as they become more familiar with a country’s product.

Consumers are predominantly prone to use the COO category – by which the information is summarised – to rationalize their decision making when the amount of attribute
information is large and otherwise difficult to integrate (Huber & McCann 1982; Bodenhausen & Lichtenstein 1987).

To run through, it could be said that the country of origin effect (COO) is primarily deep-seated in cognitive aspects of information processing such that country of origin sometimes signals product quality (Johansson 1989), or other times it is viewed as a product attribute (Hong and Wyer 1990).

However, COO can use its influence on consumer behaviours via affect without influencing their cognition. That is, even when an advertised product's country of origin does not have a negative impact on the cognitive component of attitudes, it can still result in negative consequences for affect, and consequently, behaviour.

Let us illustrate widely the process as a chain in which all is correlated: firstly, information is captured indistinctly under circumstances of low or high involvement depending on the customer situation (experts versus novices) (Al-Sulaitu & Baker 1998; d'Astous & Ahmed 1999). Various authors suggest that COO affects product evaluation and subsequent purchase behaviour not only directly but also indirectly through beliefs (Erickson et al. 1984; Han 1989; Hong & Wyer 1989). That information is summarised by considering several aspects as where the product is made, “country quality” and reliability, “brand origin” associations and product’s attributes which associated with prior knowledge create the categorises of the products.

COO could be generally defined then as a cue to generate inferential beliefs when other information is not available (Han 1989). This definition is clearly applicable to products as tangible goods. Subsequently, the main COO cues to consider are underlined and summarised in the country image concept which helps to create consumers' perceptions about a country's ability to produce goods and services and is viewed as a "halo" or summary construct by consumers who are unfamiliar with a country's products (Han, 1989, Hong and Wyer, 1989 and Knight and Calantone, 2000).

However, if this study is about Tourism, there is a need to consider services but one key drawback of current COO studies is the fact that there is a lack of applicability of this concept to the services market. Nevertheless, the literature has not clearly paid sufficient attention to the service side of the Country of origin theory.

COO (services): There has been incredible world-wide strengthening in the services sector, leading to a substantial increase in economic contribution by services to most national economies. Since they are intangible, they evade normal habits procedures and cannot be controlled or accounted for using methods developed for merchandise (Ascher and Wichard, 1987). According to Dahringer (1991, p. 7), the "... difficulties in marketing services internationally are due largely to the close cultural relationships between a society and the services offered in that society".
Morgan and Pritchard, 2003 find mere emotion not enough when differentiating through loyalty and the emotional appeal of brands, rather than through discernible, tangible benefits (Westwood et al., 1999), the key is to develop a strong brand which holds some unique associations for the consumer – while emotion has always been an important component of branding, emotion in the absence of a point of difference that can be articulated and firmly seated in the memory is arguably a recipe for consumer confusion’ (Hallberg, 1995). They suggest that a destination brand should have a simple, easy to understand message in order to stand out from the clutter of messages in the daily life.

There is a need to examine the characteristics specific to services – notably intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity and perishability – and the marketing mix, in terms of the unique problems they may create in the international marketing of services. Thus, the intangibility is the essential characteristic of the services. It is not possible to experience most services prior to their purchase which creates several marketing problems. Consumers, then, rely on surrogates (mostly tangible cues) – past experiences, personal selling and Word of Mouth – to make judgements, to a far greater extent than with tangible products. (Nicoulaus, 1986)

All of above make noticeable the need of a deeper research in the connections between the key concepts in global marketing, COO and Tourism marketing in the services field. Those are related to “destination branding”, “destination image”, “destination positioning” and “destination marketing”. Consequently, there is a wide range of definitions and viewpoints but there is not visible links and further research in the applicability of COO to services, therefore in the Tourism marketing and all other related issues in this field.

2. TOURISM MARKETING + COO

Marketing Plan

Papadopoulos in one of his article about the Tourism in 1989 referred to Kotler who in 1984 suggested that formal marketing planning confers several benefits, such as more systematic thinking and better co-ordination of company efforts which lead to improved sales and profits. Further, as Wahab in 1979 puts it, the formulation of a tourism plan at various levels is essential, especially when the tourist sector has to priority in a country’s overall development choices.

Papadopoulos recommends that for a national tourist organisation to achieve its objectives and meet conditions in a rapidly changing environment, a well co-ordinated tourism marketing planning process is vital in order to survive and prosper in the tourist industry. He developed a conceptual framework which can be used by various policy makers within the whole spectrum of the leisure and tourism field in designing tactical marketing plans and target marketing strategies. It may have wider applicability in the tourist industry and emphasises customer orientation rather than product. The model is focused on: Where is tourism now? How did we get there? Where do we want tourism to go? and how do we get there?

The main emphasis in his model, therefore, is on a dynamic and continuous process with interrelated and interacting variables commencing with tour operator/tourist, tourist marketing audit, gathering, processing, utilising, tourism marketing strategy development and
implementation, allocation, execution and control. The ending is the client. The heart of this tourism marketing planning model is the tourism marketing information system.

However, let us find the connection between the tourist’s holiday decision model, COO and Tourism marketing. A dictionary definition of image is “mental conception, perception or idea” This accords quite closely to that adopted by Murphy (1985) in his examination of demand for tourism in which he equates images to mental maps of the world and argues that they constitute perceptions. Lawson and Baud-Bovy (1977) consider image to be: “the prejudice, imaginations, and emotional thoughts an individual or group have of a particular object or place”.

On the other hand the when talking about brand and CO information Ahmed, Pei Ling, Wai Fang and Hah Hui in 2001, found that information and image are clearly linked as well. That is, in cases where the brand is not strong but is associated with a positive CO perception, promotional literature and marketing campaigns should emphasize this association, since a positive CO image can compensate for a weak brand. In contrast, where the CO image is poor, the best course of action would be to change the associated CO to one with a more positive image, since a strong brand was not found to compensate for a negative CO perception.

Figure 1. Tourist demand and supply and the creation of image. (Mathieson and Wall, 1982)

However, what seems to be clear is the fact that “image” is the common factor in the models. Images, with respect to recreation and tourism, might arise such as expenditure, travel, excitement, hedonism, relaxation and social interaction. Referred to specific countries or regions, they might be favourable or unfavourable.
On the other hand, from a “brand” point of view, it has been suggested that the future of marketing will be a battle of the brands, and that in tourism; destinations are emerging as the world biggest brands. Thus, the Destination Marketing Organisations should, somehow, develop a brand identity that encapsulates the essence or spirit of a multi/attributed destination representative of a group of sellers as well as a host community. Such a brand identity should serve as a guiding focus for the marketing activities of the DMO and stakeholders. (Pike, 2004)

3. CUSTOMER PURCHASE PATTERNS & MOTIVES IN THE INTERNATIONAL TOURISM MARKET

It has been widely suggested that various tourist visitation patterns are the result of a destination choice process that, in turn, is influenced powerfully by tourists’ motives and backgrounds (Um and Crompton 1990; Lue, Crompton, and Fesenmaier 1993). Mansfeld (1992) suggested that both travel choice and travel behaviour will be understood better if travel motivation theory and measurement are improved.

The potential exists of course, for other research on travel motivation to advance parallel theoretical actions such as Plog’s (1974) allocentric-psycho-centric theory, Iso-Ahola’s (1982) optimal arousal theory, and Beard and Ragheb’s (1983) leisure motivation approach.

Customer Motivation for Travel and Destination Appeal

Unlike the frequently measured purpose of travel (e.g., “for business” or “for pleasure”), which is considered to be evident, the motivations or underlying reasons for travel are covert in that they reflect an individual’s needs and wants (Gee, Choy, and Makens 1984). French, Craig-Smith, and Collier (1995) noted that travel motivation research is challenging because of both the wide range of human needs and methodological difficulties. Then, travel may be one of several means of satisfying a need. (Holloway, 1999)

The process of translating a need into the motivation to visit a specific destination or to undertake a specific activity is quite complex, and can best be demonstrated by the following diagram by Holloway (See Figure 4).

However, a holiday is a high-risk purchase because, disparate most other retail purchases, the tourist can neither directly observe what is being bought, nor judge it expensively. Previous experience of the holiday-maker or his connections is similarly a poor predictor of
future satisfaction as the circumstances determining the success are specific in time and space. (Goodall and Ashworth, 1988)

The Tourist Decision Making Model

Basically, the decision to take a holiday comes from both needs and desires. Holloway and Goodall agree to define needs, as said above, such as innate, intrinsic conditions and on the other hand desires as extrinsic, feelings that the individual would get pleasure or satisfaction from doing something (Goodall, 1988). Then, both concepts together result motivations.

Figure 3. The tourist’s a holiday decision (Goodall, B. and Ashworth, G.)

The images in people’s mind are the basis of the evaluation or selection process. All activities and experiences are given mental ratings, good or bad, and each individual, given their personal likes and dislikes, has a preferential image of their ideal holiday. This conditions their expectations, setting an aspirational level or evaluative image, against which actual holiday opportunities are compared (Goodall, 1988)
On the other hand, Goodall and Ashworth do mention the information available from formal source, travel agencies, holiday brochures, or informal sources, let us say, friends, as an important factor that constructs a naïve (or factual) image of each destination.

All of above constitutes the basis for holiday selection within the limits imposed by generation point characteristics. Then, when the tourist identifies the holiday in a particular destination which appear to exceed the aspiration level by the greatest amount, makes a booking. However, the common point of Goodall, Holloway, Pearce and Lee is the “experience” in part or overall, as one of the main drivers when choosing destination. Goodall saw an anticipatory phase between booking and departure during which an individual’s expectations and perceptions may be refined as more information is obtained.

The next stage is the holiday as such, and the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction that induces feedback effects on motivations, preferences and perceptions of a reinforcing nature, where the experience, in part or overall, was not up to expectation. From the visit, the tourist then accumulates and bears on mind different images about a variety of holiday experiences in a number of destinations (Holloway, 1999).

How COO fits into the model above and the consumer decision making process

Previously, in the Goodall, B. and Ashworth, G. Model it was found the COO room within the Tourism marketing in the image box. To summarise, image was explained as a “mental conception, perception or idea” that accords quite closely to that adopted by Murphy (1985) in his examination of demand for tourism in which he equates images to mental maps of the world and argues that they constitute perceptions. Lawson and Baud-Bovy (1977) consider image to be: “the prejudice, imaginations, and emotional thoughts an individual or group have a particular object or place”.

But then, when analyzing the connections between the tourists’ holiday decision model, COO and Tourism marketing, it may be underlined that COO in the case of services, has not a strong incursion and that forces one to ask for the relation and possible configuration of a country as a proper brand. From that point, Pike, in 2004 suggested that the destination could be seen as a brand and make applicable all its essential elements to it (brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, values, mission, vision, identity/essence statements…)

It was described the “image” concept as the common factor in the models. Images, with respect to recreation and tourism, might arise such as expenditure, travel, excitement, hedonism, relaxation and social interaction either to specific countries or regions as favourable or unfavourable indistinctly.

After all, it has been demonstrated the Country of Origin theory’s importance in the Tourism sector. It was exposed that COO is one of the facts of life in global marketing, that means that perceptions about and attitudes toward particular countries often extend to brands, products and services originated in those countries.
In this paper the research is lead to analyze the Spanish tourism which could be seen as one of the sectors that develop into one of the most important ones of the Spanish economy in an extremely short period of time. In 1960s particularly due to the travel trade of foreign tour operators was the cause of the rise in tourist arrivals; they started to provide low/priced package holidays on a massive scale.

4. DESTINATION SPAIN AND SPANISH TOURISM MARKETING

The Economist Intelligence (2005) states that the climate and physical beauty of the Spanish coastline have contributed to a dynamic tourism industry, centred particularly on the Mediterranean coast and the island communities. The country is now the world’s second most important tourist destination after France as it is shown in the World’s top ten tourism destination ranking of the WTO in 2005.

Spain as a Destination for the Over 50s British Tourist Market

Over the past few years, the UK has supplanted Germany as Spain's most important tourist market. As recently as 1998, German visitors outnumbered their British counterpart, but in 2002, over 14.5 million Britons visited Spain, compared to just over 10 million Germans. The UK now accounts for 30.1% of the entire Spanish tourist market.

The majority of travellers go to Spain for holidays or other leisure pursuits. According to Frontur, 82.7% of all arrivals in Spain are holidaymakers. Around 7.8% of visitors came for either work or study, while 6.1% of arrivals were visiting friends or family. Seniors have more leisure time than younger people and choose to spend more of this time travelling. The stereotype of the average heritage tourist has been summarised by many observers (Prentice, 1993; Ashworth & Tunbridge, 1990; 2001; Boniface & Fowler, 1993; Page & Hall 2003). The almost universal caricature of the stereotypical ‘Baedeker/ Michelin tourist’, is aged 45-65, with higher than average disposable income, education, and travel experience, holidaymaking independently in a group of two and staying in hotel accommodation. This remains the most profitable sector and is likely to remain so as a result of demographic, educational and economic trends.

Nowadays, the "grey market", or the over-50s, is the fastest growing sector of the UK population. It accounts for 40% of the UK population but controls 80% of its wealth, according to research by marketing company Millennium.

The Over 50s Travel Market and the COO Effect on Destination Choice

Labour Force Survey in 2005 explains that increasing life-expectancy will impact on pensions. As the number of pensioners’ increases, more tension will be placed on government resources. By now, in England, reports are emphasizing the importance of saving for retirement, as indications are that there is not enough money in pension funds to provide a comfortable retirement for today’s working population which Mintel’s forthcoming Personal Pensions – UK, Finance Intelligence, March 2005 report investigates.

In addition, MINTEL in March of 2005 illustrates that the main driver of population growth will come from the over-60s. Between 2004 and 2009, this sub-group is projected to grow at over five times the rate of the general population. As such, they will represent an
increasing proportion of society: in 1999, the over-60s population accounted for 20.7% of the general population – in 2009 this share is expected to increase to 22.7%.

On the other hand, information stored in long-term memory seems to stay relatively stable or even increase with age (Baltes 1987). Older people may therefore be able to draw on their experience in order to compensate for less in information processing capacity (Baltes et al. 1984). Indeed, Schaie (1977) suggests that older people enter a stage of cognitive development, termed "re-integrative", where problem-solving is simplified and increasingly carried out with reference to the individual's life experience. Mental categories, or stereotypes, used to group "things of a kind", are an important part of human cognition and their main purpose seems to be to reduce mental processing effort (Lakoff 1987).

Kogan 1974; CicireUi 1976 affirm that older people employ different categorisation strategies from younger people in so far as they seem to "chunk" information into larger units, i.e. they use fewer but broader categories. If they try to compensate for this through the increased use of categories they may tend to rely more strongly on extrinsic product cues, such as country of origin, brand name, price, etc. If older adults additionally tend to "chunk" information into fewer but broader categories, they may prefer to rely on wider cues, such as country of origin, rather than narrower ones, such as brand name. Older consumers may therefore show stronger country of origin effects though.

5. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS: SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

As tourism destinations become more substitutable due to increasing competition in global tourism markets, destination personality is seen as a viable metaphor for building destination brands and crafting a unique identity for tourism places. (Ekinci and Hosany, 2006)

Thus, Ekinci and Hosany, 2006 saw destinations described using human personality traits, they remitted to Morgan and Pritchard, 2003, who illustrated Europe as traditional and sophisticated; Wales as honest, welcoming, romantic, and down to earth; London as open minded’ unorthodox, vibrant, and creative; and Paris as romantic (Morgan and Pritchard, 2003).

Hence, the question that configures the first of the research objectives will be formulated as: what is the Spanish figurative illustration for those British who are more than 50 years old? In other words, what is their perception? That question will be address us to know what the over 50's British travellers’ mind when travelling to Spain, what is the country image? But then, where is the location of COO in all of that? Furthermore, the effort will be on discovering the applicability of all the COO’s characteristics for products to the country “Spain” and its tourist.

Ekinci and Hosany, 2006 referring to Hong and Zinkham, 1995, also explained that consumers can satisfy and enhance their self-consistency and self-esteem through this kind of consumption. Ekinci and Hosany referred to others researchers’ papers in the attempt to find the influence of symbolism in products in which preferred products are seen as extensions of themselves, and, consequently main factors in their purchasing behaviour. Sirgy (1982) introduced the self-concept theory that explains why consumers are motivated to buy certain
products due to their symbolic value wherein the choice of destination is located; depending on the degree of similarity between the personality traits communicated by the country and the personality they wish to project of themselves.

Following Brown’s words (1992) in Ekinci and Hosany’s paper, in the tourism experience there are symbolic as well as physical consumption of places. According to this thought, another interesting question to pose as a research objective is: What is the symbolic value of Spain that is related to the over 50 British tourist personality?

Country of Origin effects are of particular interest to international marketing researchers because of their impact on the product evaluations that help to influence customers’ purchase decisions (Ahmed, Johnson, Pei Ling, Wai Fang, Kah Hui, 2001) Hence, how CO is conceptualized and operationalized may significantly alter the findings of empirical studies; researches are advised to include and compare several configurations of CO variables (Ettenson and Gaeth, 1991,). That is the reason of the importance of the effect of product brand image.

And here is where a new researchable point arises, under the British tourists’ point of view; does Spain have a unique selling proposition? If so, what is it? In other words, what is the core of the destination brand?

In contrast, Ahmed, Johnson, Pei Ling, Wai Fang, Kah Hui, 2001 argued that as the services increase in importance globally, marketers need to be more aware of the underlying factors considered by consumers when evaluating services. This is particular crucial in light of the higher levels of perceived risk that consumers associate with the purchase and use of services compared with goods (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996). In this respect, Tourism segment is a representative international service industry, since it reflects many of the characteristics of industries in the service sector. The tourism, therefore, is marketed as a destination.

‘The values of the country image reside in the mind of the consumer, not in the factory of the producer, and, once created, that makes them surprisingly difficult to destroy’ (Morgan and Pride, 2003).

6. THE RESEARCH

Secondary Research

Secondary research was conducted on data published previously on database resources (e.g. Business Source Premier, Emerald and Mintel), either on the internet or references books as it costs far less than primary research and is more accessible and available for the researcher to be gathered, previous to carrying out any further research. (Malhotra, 1999).

However, regarding the nature of the theme of the research, limitations were found with this secondary data collection. The main restriction was the lack of research in the topic and therefore the relevance in the study followed by the credibility, reliability and precision.
Nevertheless, that research helped her arrow the subject matter and create an adequate background theories and awareness.

**Primary research**

*Qualitative Research*

Due to the nature and formulation of the topic, a qualitative research appears to be the most appropriate method since it involves an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons that govern individual’s conduct.

Within that kind of method, Focus groups were run to unravel what the objectives were enquiring. Kitzinger & Barbour in 1999 described focus groups as a qualitative research methodology that can be used to obtain information about the opinions, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and insights of a small group of people. Krueger, 1994 says that this tool is helpful in evaluation and understanding how people look upon a specific experience or event.

**Sample**

The number of focus groups that were run was three, as Calder (1977) suggests on average when assuming this sort of research. The group size has been widely recommended by many authors to be between five and eight. In this case, eight was the size of each reached (n=24). The allocation of participants to focus group was random. They were just stopped in the street and random coffee shops and asked to participate.

Although the population of interest in this research is those British over 50s who either might have or might not have visited Spain, a younger sector was engaged as well to get involved in order to convey deeper and more accurate exploration of the phenomena to study. As a result, they were structured parallel from two different perspectives: young’s people and that over 50’s senior sector’s judgment and vision. The only classification factor employed though was the age. The vacation in the country was used as a variable of influence.

Furthermore, due to the flexibility in the research and the will to intensify the information to get, a longitudinal study was leaded by running several personal interviews with those mid-age British. The longitudinal study was used by considering the stages of youth, maturity and the old age. Those groups were assumed to have the similar characteristics in terms of living area and lifestyle. Furthermore, the aim was to create a continuous that will help to discover how today’s impressions from the young sector would be transformed in the mature age and therefore in the elder age. The allocation of the participants was again random.

**7. FINDINGS**

**Presentation of findings**

The secondary research indicates that the average stay of the British holidaymaker in Spain is 10.2 days, according to the Barclays-IESE Barometer in November 2005. Also, the percentage of British tourists travelling to Spain increases every year making a major impact on budget airlines. These budget airlines comprise 35% of all the air traffic between the United Kingdom and Spain as well as bringing people to the Canary Islands – the British tourist’s main
destination; also, Andalusia (10.8%), Valencia (8.4%) and Catalonia (8.2%) (Barclays-IESE Barometer 2005).

Where do they stay?

Last year, 66% of the British tourists who came to Spain stayed in hotels (10.8 million tourists) compared to 33.9% who chose non-hotel accommodation (5.6 million tourists). However, while the usage of hotel accommodation rose by 1.8%, usage of non-hotel accommodation rose by 4.9%. Within the latter, the most significant growth has been in using accommodation where the visitors did not have to pay, tourists choosing to stay at a property that they themselves own, or at one owned by family members or friends.

How much do they spend?

According to the Instituto de Gastos Turísticos (Institute of Tourism Expenditure) report in 2004 those British tourists who spend less than 100€ per day whilst on their vacation travel to Spain to visit either friends or relatives and usually stay in their homes. Furthermore, those who spend less than 50€ a day, usually own and stay at their own properties. This kind of tourist is mainly found in the Canary Islands.

Qualitative research

For the purposes of the current work individuals observed were grouped into three bands according to age, namely, young individuals from 18 to 30 years old, adult individuals from 31 to 50 years old and senior individuals aged over 50. In so doing, this work imitates a longitudinal study as a correctional research study that involves observations of the same items over long periods of time.

The approach to present the results follows the earlier stated research objectives. Once the respondents’ data had been analysed, the set of statements allowed them to be allocated into set categories: From the focus groups a lot of information was obtained. One key issue which emerged was the relationship between age and perception. Nevertheless, when asked for words to define Spain, for young people who have never been to Spain, the answers all note that Spain is all about holidays, beaches and the art in Barcelona as emblematic buildings of the Catalan architects (e.g. Antonio Gaudi).

The word “traditionalism” was the most used by the middle-aged people. For those medium-age people who have been to Spain, this country is stylish, traditional and economic. Furthermore, they normally have family or relatives living there. Other than that, they don’t have an opinion about the commercialized side of Spain and tend to characterize Spain with terms such as cool, vibrant, El Toro (the bull), San Miguel, bullfighting, football and rustic. The diversity of research findings in this current work suggests that traditional values and more up-to-date approaches to life apparently happily co-exist side by side in modern Spain.

They offer their feelings about the personalities of the Spanish people, with positive connotations. When describing what is in Spain that is related to their personality, they found in Spain very close ideals…

Somewhat surprisingly, perhaps, it was found that the over 50s are found to have completely different opinions to their younger counterparts. For those who have never been
there, Spain is defined by the sun, high-rise buildings, and the very Southern tip of Europe, flamenco, tapas, paella, sangria and Benidorm. For them, Spain has lost its culture; there is no attractiveness left; it is perceived as having become an underprivileged destination.

Alternatively for those who visited Spain, the descriptive phrases are: beaches, sun, coast, hot, alternative to England, friendly, wine, old fashioned and traditional family habits. Generally, the older people’s responses within these discussions highlight two different sides of the country: the touristic and overdeveloped side along with the more traditional rustic elements.

Moreover, referring to the previously stated analysis of a symbolic consumption of any given destination, it has been exposed that a tourism destination is viewed as an amalgam of individual products and experiences that combine to form the total experience of the area visited (Murphy, Pritchard, and Smith 2000).

Indeed, this particular area seemed to be the most complicated for the participants to understand. Generally, most of them just explained the reasons and main motives that would cause them to think in a particular way. Indeed, any inherent symbolism only became apparent when analyzing interviewees’ answers.

Again it would appear that the young people who have never visited Spain were unable to provide feedback analysable in symbolic terms. Indeed, they affirmed that their main motives to visit are the social events.

Despite this, those who already visited Spain found in the Spanish people a very close personability. They argued that Spanish folks are very friendly, open and welcoming, funny and talkative. They make the tourist feel at home and like a member of a community. Conversely, the mature sector well acquainted with Spain described it as “la vida espanhola” which is in its food, culture, people and so on. On the most pragmatic side, they just perceived Spain as a convenient destination easily accessible and extremely economical.

Nevertheless, in the elder sector, for those who have not been to Spain, there seems to be no symbolism within Spanish tourism. For them, Spanish tourism merely represents over-commercialised coasts full of English communities.

Within a media studies perspective, and related to the previously mentioned unique selling positions (USP’s) through product-services, country-of-origin and/or brand name attributes, all three main groups generally agreed that the English media portrays mainly the most commercialized aspects of holidays in Spain whilst the older people that never visited Spain argued that there is a lack of emphasis on the cultural and historical side of Spain – this subgroup’s preconceived impression of Spain, dictated by the media exposure they grew up with, is more traditionally focussed and subsequently they are unable to appreciate the co-existence of traditional and modern ways of life exhibited in Spain.
Again, for young people who have not been to Spain the English media dictates that Spain offers only pack holidays and beaches, even if they would not be interested in that. They affirm that the series, soaps and programs on television simply show the negative image of Spain.

Barcelona was mentioned again by those young British who had already spent a period of time in Spain, but in this case, the view was from a different perspective. It was remarkable to see how interested and enthusiastic they were when answering the questions. They enjoy watching Spanish’s films by Almodovar (the Spanish film’s director) but what really motivated them to visit Spain is “word of mouth” - either from Spanish or English friends or family.

The same idea was argued by those who had visited, that media is all about beaches and holiday resorts. Someone from the medium-age group also mentioned a beer advert featuring by a Spanish flamenco dancer, David Beckham – and consequently, all related to him in Spain, and how to buy properties in Spain. The information sources most often used by British when looking for a house there are the Internet, word of mouth, local real estate agencies and magazines. Undoubtedly, the most powerful media element that influences on the British tourist is the TV.

**CONCLUSION**

Over the course of this work has been shown the importance of the Country of Origin theory in the Tourism sector. It was indicated that COO is one of the facts of life in global marketing which may mean that perceptions about and attitudes towards particular countries often extend to brands, products and services originating from those countries.

MINTEL in March of 2005 says “Spain has been the leading destination for British holidaymakers for several years now and between 1992 and 2003 the number of UK visitors has increased by 140%, compared with a 30% rise in the number of visitors to France, formerly the top destination”. This is an interesting forecast when bearing in mind that by 2020 more than 25% of English people will be over the age of 60. Furthermore, many of today’s residents were tourists in the past.

This intention to travel or visit is defined by the symbolic consumption of Spain as a destination by the British and it encompasses a wide touristic spectrum. The research indicates that English visitors to Spain vary greatly in their product requirements, raising further questions for the tourist industry and service providers concerned. Nevertheless, it has been shown that Spain offers a wide variety of interests to a broad spectrum of tourists, the more canny consumers, perhaps, seeking solutions to the overcrowding of this tourist destination by venturing away from the “Costa del Sol” and exploring “The Green Spain”. From a research perspective, there are grey areas between the more traditional holidaying visitor and those people with holiday homes or second properties who may effectively be living in Spain.

Conversely, consumer purchase intent and behaviour will still be influenced by consumers’ general perceptions of services, from a source country (GSA: general services
attributes) – which may be a subject for further research - as well as by perceptions of the source country and its people.

The relationship between the GCA and the GSA notwithstanding, this work has seen a discrepancy between the preconceptions of those who have not visited and the understanding of experienced tourists. Perhaps it is ironic that the inexperienced tourist might call into question issues of lifestyle and service provision in Spain as the volume of visitors in itself can be seen as a major factor in terms of Spain’s social stability.

On the other hand, it is known that acculturation can cause “changes in the original culture patterns of either of both groups” (Redfield, Linton and Herskovits, 1936) so whilst those who know Spain recognize a strong undercurrent of non-materialistic family values, making it a good location not just for a second home but indeed as a place to settle and bring up children, perhaps they risk threatening the stability of the social climate which originally attracted them.

Overall, the tourism has had beneficial effects not only in terms of boosting economic growth, but also with regard to Spain’s image. There exists saturation of beach resorts by English people, and also engineering of areas to remove traditional cultural aspects, replacing them with commercialized tourist ideals and desires. Subsequently the remarkable issue is that the tourists did not find any Spanish culture left, possibly making Spain less attractive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A main idea is suggested for future marketing research, from a “brand” point of view, since destinations are the world’s biggest brands and will thus promote competition. The Destination Marketing Organisations should somehow develop a brand identity that encapsulates the essence or spirit of a multi-attributed destination representative of a group of sellers as well as a host community. Such a brand identity should serve as a guiding focus for the marketing activities of the DMO and stakeholders. (Pike, 2004)

In other words, when applied to this work, emphasis must be placed, when designing marketing strategies, on the more traditional, positive aspects of Spain such as the vibrant culture, the traditions, and vibrant celebrations, including the historical elements. Concerns raised by the saturation of tourist areas must be counteracted by traditional marketing of social, cultural and historical positives.

“I am sure that it is a fantastic place if you go to the hard midland Spain but again, I heard a lot of pick-pocket stories and minor crimes that make you feel unsafe and therefore that sort of thing affects to the bad perception of Spain” (Male, O2)

“Spain is the only country in Europe I have never been to... mainly because it is seen to be that middle-ground where the police doesn’t take any particular care of the tourist and that contributes to create a bad perception” (Male, O2)
Emphasis must be placed by the destination managers and their advertising agencies on making sure that the promotion of Spain does persuade uncommitted potential vacationers to visit by trying to replace the bad perceptions with informed and unbiased intentions to visit.

“I went once to Benidorm and I would not come again, never ever; the services were rubbish, it is just rubbish” (Female, O2)

Acculturation takes into consideration the fact that both groups exchange culture patterns, however, what needs to be considered is a saturation of tourists bringing their own lifestyles, creating their own communities, apparently implying a loss of Spain’s own culture and features. The current work would benefit from a mirror study done in Spain to determine Spanish’s wants and needs regarding tourism services for the English.

“I think Spanish people have become so tired of tourism, mainly English, that is why the Spanish waiters are so incredibly rude compared with Portuguese people for instance; they detect English” (Male, A1)

This issue has its importance in the sphere of tourism marketing since it has been demonstrated that it helps to create the image, positioning and marketing of Spain as a brand of tourism destination, and are the key concepts in global marketing, COO and Tourism marketing.

Therefore, the Spanish tourism marketers must emphasize in a future marketing research strategy those positive different strengths, its culture, historical heritage and traditionalism and thereby contributing to the discovery and development of these new areas as yet uncommercialised.

"... discovering the whole country is my attraction” (Male, O1)

REFERENCES/BIBLIOGRAPHY


