**Perceived Destination Image of**

**Guest House-based Backpackers in Seoul**

Pam Lee : pampam@khu.ac.kr

Jiyeon Park : with-jyp@khu.ac.kr

Seungha Sim : seungha56@gmail.com

Convention and Exhibition Management Dept.

Kyunghee University, Seoul, Korea

**Abstract**

This paper reports on an interpretative study of visitor experiences about image of Seoul, South Korea and focuses on how these experiences vary among different groups who are staying in guest houses across the town. The statements representing different image experiences were q-sorted by a non-random sample of backpacking visitors. This paper introduces Q-methodology, a method of research that tourism researchers rarely use and that can provide useful information in critical tourism research concerning the exploration and exposure of subjectivity.

**1. Introduction**

Destination image is highly complex and complicated to mange, yet it is one of the most critical factors that determine the competitiveness of tourism destinations; thus, destination image should receive high priority on the part of destination promoters. Generating and maintaining an appealing destination image is more important than ever, as consumers have a wide variety of destinations to choose from.

Today more than ever, Destination Marketing Organizations invest considerable resources in order to achieve and maintain the desired image. Substantial effort are being directed towards exploring the traveler’s image, as well as the dominant factors that influence it, as this understanding is critical for developing effective planning, development and marking strategies.

There are many studies regarding the ordinary travellers however, there has been only few systematic social scientific research into backpackers experience of Seoul as a tourism destination despite the rapidly growing importance of tourism to Seoul.

**3. Methodology**

**Q-methodology**

Q-methodology relies on methods of impression (as opposed to objective methods of expression) to discover the subjective meaning or significance items have for respondents. The observation perspective focuses on the internal frame of reference used by each respondent about the relative significance and meaning of individual subjectivity (Stergiou & Airey, 2010).

In Q-methodology, a concourse is structured in feelings rather than facts; each of these statements expresses feelings and emotions (not necessarily knowledge) driven by immediate experience and lived through personal experience (McKeown, 1990). In the context of tourism research, scholars have employed as ‘statements’ a selection of photographs representing different landscape experiences and visitor activities (Davis, 2003; Dewar, Li, & Davis, 2007; Fairweather & Swaffield, 2001). More commonly, however, Q-methodologists employ sets of statements.

Q-methodology includes five steps:

(1) The first step involves identifying a ‘concourse’, which is a technical concept used in Q for a contextual structure of all the possible statements that respondents might make about the subject at hand (Stephenson, 1993);

(2) The second step is a sampling task where the researcher uses a structure for selection of a Q-sample (or Q-set) from the concourse. Researchers (Stainton Rogers, 1995) consider a Q-sample of 40–80 statements as adequate for stable results, without overwhelming participants;

(3) The third step, after the construction of the Q-sample, involves the selection of individuals who will sort the items. These participants are known as the person sample (P-sample).

(4) In the fourth step, respondents have to express their views on the topic by placing all statements in a pre-structured Q-sort table (Figure 1).

As Figure 1 shows, the Q-table that participants use to sort the statements also dictates the number of items that can be assigned to each ranking position.

**Study Design**

As of December 2014, there are 185 guest house registered at the Seoul Tourism Organization. Majority of guest houses are located in Sinchon & Hongik University area (58).

We have visited more than 20 guest houses across Seoul, and we have received 30 responses.

**Table 1. Guest houses in Seoul (Dec. 2014)**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Area** | **Numbers** | **Area** | **Numbers** |
| Gwanghwamun & City Hall | 8 | **Cheonggyecheon & Jongno** | **16** |
| **Myeong-dong & Namdaemun** | **15** | Insa-dong & Bukchon | 6 |
| Daehangno & Dongdaemun | 12 | **Sinchon & Hongik University** | **58** |
| Itaewon | 8 | Yeouido | 7 |
| **Gangnam area** | **21** | Other areas | 34 |

**4. Results**

Q sort factor analysis was performed using PCQ software and judgmental rotation, and it produced four factors out of five that accounted for 24 of 30 sorts, with levels of significance ranging from 0.77 to 0.40. Only one sort was confounded, or found to be statistically significant in more than one factor, so it was excluded from the following analysis. The 24 sorts, four factors and scores, and descriptions of the respondents were filtered via factor analysis.

The subjectivity characterizing each cluster was decided after the brief post-sort interview with the respondents. In this study, three established viewpoints were found (clusters A, B and C) and one emergent theme was found (cluster D) (Van Exel & De Graaf, 2005).

**Cluster A-Seoulizer**

Cluster A is the largest cluster which contains 16 respondents. Commonly, the respondents in this cluster agreed that customs are different from their perspective and they can enjoy diverse nightlife activities while staying in Seoul. In addition, they all thought that they face some difficulties when accessing websites for online information. However, they were satisfied with rich pop cultures Seoul offers and well furnished shopping facilities. In this sense, cluster A seemed to fully enjoy diverse aspect of Seoul Therefore, this cluster can be defined as Seoulizer who experienced dynamic attractions Seoul has.

**Cluster B-Patternizer**

In Cluster B, five respondents were included and they similarly chose seemed quiet negative which is big difference among other clusters. First, they strongly thought that overall prices are high when traveling in Korea. Also, this cluster agreed that Seoul does not provide abundant tourist attractions. Moreover, respondents were dissatisfied with the poor English skills of Koreans when met in the streets. Surprisingly, it is found from the interview that respondents in this cluster were mostly first or second time visitors to Seoul. As this cluster had overall negative impression and considering the fact that most of them are first time visitors, it was assumed that the respondents expected but failed to find patternized and typical destination image of Seoul. So this cluster was named as “Patternizer” with somewhat disappointment.

**Cluster C-Utilizer**

Two respondents were categorized as cluster C. They are long-stay visitors to Korea who visited other cities outside Seoul. One of them was from the U.S and been to Jeonju, Daejeon and Suwon. Another respondent was from China who planned to travel around Korea for 18 days and have stayed a week in Seoul. Both of them disagreed with the idea that the lifestyle of Seoul is similar to their culture. Different from Cluster A, this cluster showed opinions on local characteristics such as public transportation and accessibility issue. Also, the respondents seemed to prefer quiet places in Seoul where people are not much crowded and this resulted in agreement with the statements that Seoul has quiet places and not crowded with people. Thus, this cluster was named “Utilizer” who tend to value the practical aspect.

**Cluster D-Socializer**

Only one respondent was in this Cluster. This was recognized as unique cluster due to the statements the respondent chose. In the study, this cluster was defined as “Socializer” who interacts well with Koreans. The statements “I think Koreans are well mannered” and “I think Koreans are friendly” were accorded with the respondents’ viewpoint. On the other hand, the respondent seemed to disagree with the statement “I feel that only few Koreans can understand English” and thought that there was no problem with speaking English with Koreans. Respondent was with traveling around Korea with Korean friends and stayed in friend’s house as well as guesthouse. This may have resulted in distinguishing aspects of other clusters since the respondent had more time to socialize with Koreans.

References

Echtner, C. M., & Ritchie J.R. B. (2003). The Meaning and Measurement of Destination Image. The Journal of Tourism Studies, 14(1), 37-48.

Chen, C., & Phou, S. (2013). A closer look at destination: Image, Personality, relationship and loyalty. Tourism Management, 36, 269-278.

Fakeye, P. C., & Crompton, J. L. (1991). Image Differences between Prospective, First-Time, and Repeat Visitors to the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Journal of Travel Research, 30(2), 10-16.

Exel, Van NJA, & Graaf, G de. (2005). Q methodology: A sneak preview. www.jobvanexel.nl.