# The Relationship Among Positioning, Value, Satisfaction and Loyalty

## Abstract

Although the image has been presented as an important variable to promote tourist destinations, based on marketing concepts, its positioning is more important, because costumers compare some destinations when deciding about their trips. This study aims to examine the relationship among positioning, value, satisfaction and loyalty, in the destination choice context. Data from 747 Brazilians was collected using online questionnaires. Based on SEM (Structural Equation Modeling) analysis, the results show that positioning have high influence on perceived value, and confirm the strong relationship between satisfaction and loyalty.

Keywords – Positioning, Loyalty, Destination.

## Introduction

The competitiveness of tourist destinations has been much discussed by academics, because it is understood as a fundamental condition for a destination to be chosen by potential tourists and, then, to obtain the benefits of a developed tourism (González & Ruiz, 2006; Vieira & Hoffman, 2012).

Already in the 1990´s and 2000´s, Poon (1993) and Moutinho (2000), respectively, showed the increasing of competition among destinations, which had a big impact on the sector and demanded adequate strategies and actions by public agents and organizations that act in the sector.

In regards to the marketing scope, many authors consider the image of a destination as essential (Gallarza, Garcia, & Saura, 2002; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Chi & Qu, 2008; Chen

& Tsai, 2007; Beerli & Martín, 2004; Martín & Bosque, 2008), because they believe that based on this, the potential tourist decides their choice and purchase.

Therefore, on the marketing literature, the decisions relating to product choices consider the positioning as the main factor that influences them, and not the image, which is a static perception about a specific product.

In addition, some studies present a direct influence of the destination image on satisfaction (Chi, 2012; Sun, Chi, & Xu, 2013). However, theoretical foundations to sustain it are weak, because it means that just because a tourist has a positive image about a destination, he is satisfied with it.

Satisfaction with a destination has been considered as main antecedent of tourist loyalty (Chi, 2012; Stepchenkova & Juline, 2010). Thus, several studies have researched variables that influence the satisfaction such as services quality (Baloglu, 1999; Gallarza, Gil, & Calderón, 2002). Furthermore, several studies consider the perceived value as the main condition to consumer satisfaction, i.e., the perceived value of a product influences the purchase intention (Chang & Wildt, 1994; Dodds, Monroe, & Grewal, 1991).

The relation between image and satisfaction, and between satisfaction and loyalty has been largely researched (e.g. Chi, 2012; Sun, Chi, & Xu, 2013; Stepchenkova & Juline, 2010). But studies that consider positioning, value, satisfaction and loyalty are scarce, mainly on tourism context.

Thus, this study aimed to know the relationship among positioning, perceived value, satisfaction and loyalty relating to touristic destinations.

## Theoretical Review

## Positioning

Image and positioning in business literature appears as part of an evolutionary process. Trout (1969) explains that until the 1950s, communication and marketing have lived in an era marked by the USP (Unique Selling Proposition), which gave rise to the era of the image. And, just as the USP was closed, the image was also gone, giving rise to the "age of positioning", where creativity alone is no longer sufficient, implying the need to think and act strategically (Trout, 1969, p. 52-53; Trout, 1971, p. 117).

The concept of positioning differs from the concept of image, especially because it is not restricted to an intrinsic view, i.e., it implies a frame of reference, which are competitors (Aaker & Shansby, p 1982).

It is important and adequate in a tourism context, because customers consider some destination alternatives for evaluation to decide on their trips (Decrop, 2010).

Positioning means occupying a distinct space in the mind of the potential tourists when considering destinations (Kim, Chun, & Petrick, 2005; Botha, Crompton, & Kim, 1999).

Therefore, a position is a relative state, i.e. the positioning is a concept that involves the comparison among competing destinations, from the viewpoint of the potential tourist, of valuable aspects for him (Pike, 2006; Kotler, Bowen, & Makins, 2009).

Thus, positioning relates to a value proposition that interests the destination (managers, companies and citizen), that is meaningful to a potential tourist, which in his perception is more attractive than the proposals perceived by competing destinations.

**Value**

Value is a basis of longevity to companies, since costumers perceive it and pay for it (Porter, 1985). And, due to difficulties in evaluating the value of a product, even after experiencing it, costumers consider some indicators to do it, like advertising, reputation of the brand/company, pack, appearance of employees, installations and information presented during sales (Porter, 1985).

The development and delivery of value to costumers is an essential strategy to competitive companies (Woodruff, 1997). Value is the element that provides satisfaction and, consequently, loyalty. Thus, it is important to discover values that costumers look for and express them through products which satisfy their expectancies (Woodruff, 1997; Kotler & Keller, 2014).

According to Kotler (2014), *value* is the capacity of the products to satisfy costumers necessities. Thus, each product has a specific value which is both perceived by costumers, and considered when deciding on their options.

The total value for costumers is the set of hoped benefits from products and services (Kotler & Keller, 2014). Besides that, costumers are value maximizers, i.e, they look for best values that can be obtained, considering costs, mobility and revenue (Kotler & Keller, 2014).

Zeithaml (1988) consider that value is all evaluation of product utility, based on the costumers' perception of what is received against what is given.

A concept of value based on several authors was made by Woodruff (1997): the perceived preference of a costumer for a product, based on his evaluation of its attributes, performance, and ease of its use.

A problem is that sometimes, the perception that a company has of its products is different to the target's perceptions (Zeithaml, 1988).

## Satisfaction and Loyalty

Studies in the tourism area consider that tourist satisfaction is a result of meeting their expectations (Zehrer, Crotts, & Magnini, 2011), which can be considered a set of ideas or desires to be obtained when purchasing a service or product, which is strongly influenced by the information obtained (Aksu, Içigen, & Ehtiyar, 2010; Djafarova & Andersen, 2008; Molina, Moreno, & Moreno, 2010).

Hence, the confrontation of the perception in regards to the experience of using a product or service, and the expectations of it, results in a satisfaction level (Johnson & Fornell, 1991; Oliver, 1997; Faullant, Matzler, & Mooradian, 2011).

Based on this, satisfaction can be considered from the trial of consumption and experiences (Fournier & Mick, 1999). It is considered, therefore, a cognitive and affective processes to explain the variation in the judgment of satisfaction (Oliver & Westbrook, 1993).

Thus, consumer satisfaction refers to the favorable assessment subjectively derived from an individual of any results and / or experience associated with the consumption of a product (Westbrook & Oliver, 1991).

Still on satisfaction, Cronin, Brady and Hult (2000) point out two main definitions that stand out in the literature, as shown in Table 2.

Table 1. Main approaches of satisfaction (adapted from Cronin, Brad, & Hult, 2000)

| Concept | Authors |
|---------|---------|
| Potential influence on consumer behavioral intentions and customer retention | Anderson & Fornell, 1994; Anderson; Sullivan, 1993; Bolton & Drew, 1994; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Fornell, 1992; Oliver, 1977, 1980, 1981; Oliver & Swan, 1989. |
| Evaluation of emotion based on possession or use of products | Hunt, 1977; Rust & Oliver, 1994; Oliver, 1997; Westbrook & Oliver, 1991. |

Ardabili and Daryani (2012), advocate the need to understand the antecedents and consequences of customer satisfaction.

Customer satisfaction indicates how the delivery of the product or the encounter with the service meets the consumer's expectation (Fountain, Espiner, & Xie, 2011; Chi, 2012; Rojas & Camarero, 2008), or simply the opposite of dissatisfaction: if the expectations are higher than the result obtained, the consumer is dissatisfied; if performance exceeds expectations, satisfaction comes also responsible for repurchase intention, positive word-of-mouth, and construction of relationships (Ellyawati, Purwanto, & Dharmmesta, 2012).

Despite some researchers presenting scales whit several items to measure satisfaction, satisfaction is also a global evaluation that buyers have as a result of the costs and benefits incurred (Westbrook, 1980; Churchill & Surprenant, 1982).

## Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical review above, four hypotheses are proposed:

**H1**: The positioning of a destination positively influences its perceived value.

**H2:** The perceived value positively influences the satisfaction.

**H3**: The satisfaction positively influences the loyalty.

## Research Methodology

A survey was carried out in early September of 2014, to collect data from Brazilian people that had chosen a travel destination in the last two years. Data was collected online with Qualtrics® tool.

Based on the snowball technique about 2,325 people received the questionnaire and a total of 892 (38.37%) responses were received, but of these, 16.26% of the questionnaires were unusable. Thus, a total of 747 questionnaires were considered valid.

## Questionnaire Design and Measures

The questionnaire for the current study was composed of two sections. The first contained questions related to the research problem, which measured on existing scales and specific questions based on the theoretical review, defined to measure each construct considered. The second section of the questionnaire contained questions related to the respondents' demographic characteristics. To prevent duplicated responses, IP addresses available in the Qualtrics were analyzed.

As the questions were relating to a past purchase-making decision, a filter was defined to consider or not the respondent to the study. On that, the respondent should mark if he/her had chosen a travel destination in the last two years. This time was defined because the pre-test indicated that people do not remember details of their decisions beyond this period. So, data was only collected from people who answered "yes" to this question.

Positioning was measured based on Echtner & Ritchie (1991), Choi, Chan and Wu (1999), Grosspietsch (2006), O'Leary and Deegan (2003), Pan and Li (2011), Rezende-Parker, Morrison and Ismail (2003). However, considering the specific aim of this research, competing destinations and valuable attributes are not pre-defined; they were asked to respondents, with the following questions: "When you started to decide where to travel to, what other destinations did you consider, besides that which you had already visited? (until 5)"; "What are the main attributes/ characteristics that you consider when you are deciding about a trip" (until 5); "Rate each attribute mentioned in terms of the importance for you from 1 (irrelevant) to 7 (fundamental), and finally, "Rate each attribute of each destination considered when you are deciding your trip, from 1 (terrible) 7 (excellent)". Only this last question was considered in the analysis..

Perceived value was measured by three items (Petrick, 2002; Ruiz et al., 2008; Chen & Chen, 2010), which consisted of the evaluation of attributes that respondents indicate as

important to themselves (from 1 = "extremely unsatisfied" to 7 = "extremely satisfied"), and (2) how it would be if he/she returned to the same destination (from 1 = "terrible" to 7 = "excellent").

Satisfaction was measured by two overall items (Assaker, Vinzi, & O´Connor, 2011; Faullant, Matzer, & Mooradian, 2011): (1) the overall satisfaction with the trip (from 1 = "extremely unsatisfied" to 7 = "extremely satisfied"), and (2) how it would be if he/she returned to the same destination (from 1 = "terrible" to 7 = "excellent").

Destination loyalty was measured by two items: (1) tourists' intention to revisit the destination mentioned in the future, and (2) their recommendation or intention to recommend it to other potential tourists (Chi & Qu, 2009; Chen & Tsai, 2007). These items were measured with a seven-points scale, ranging from "no way" (1) to "certainly" (7).

Instructions to the respondents included the request for them to forward the questionaire link to our contacts, adopting a "snowball strategy".

## Sampling, Data Collection and Data Analysis

This study had, as a target population, Brazilian people that had chosen a travel destination. Due to the majority of the population purchasing tourist locations online, data was collected using a web-based questionaire, with the Qualtrics® tool.

The online research was adequate, because this is the way that consumers research and buy their trips.

In early September of 2014, e-mail requests were sent to students, and personal and professional contacts. In this email, there was information on the purpose of the study, the approximate time needed to fill it out, and the link to access it. The questionnaire was available online between September 20th and October 9th of 2014.

Based on the snowball technique about 2,325 people received the questionnaire and a total of 892 (38.37%) responses were received from participants. However, of theoe, 16.26% were unusable as they did not satisfy the question filter, or were not concluded. A total of 747 questionnaires were considered valid.

Descriptive analysis was used to examine the respondents' demographic profile. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and a structural equation model (SEM) were performed to test the conceptual model, with the software Lisrel 8.7.

## Research Findings

There were more male than female respondents (53.8% *versus* 46.2%). The average age was approximately 33 years old. The majority (89.2%) had been studying or had finished undergraduate courses or higher. The average household income was between USD $3,000 and USD $4,000.

Figure 1. Structural model
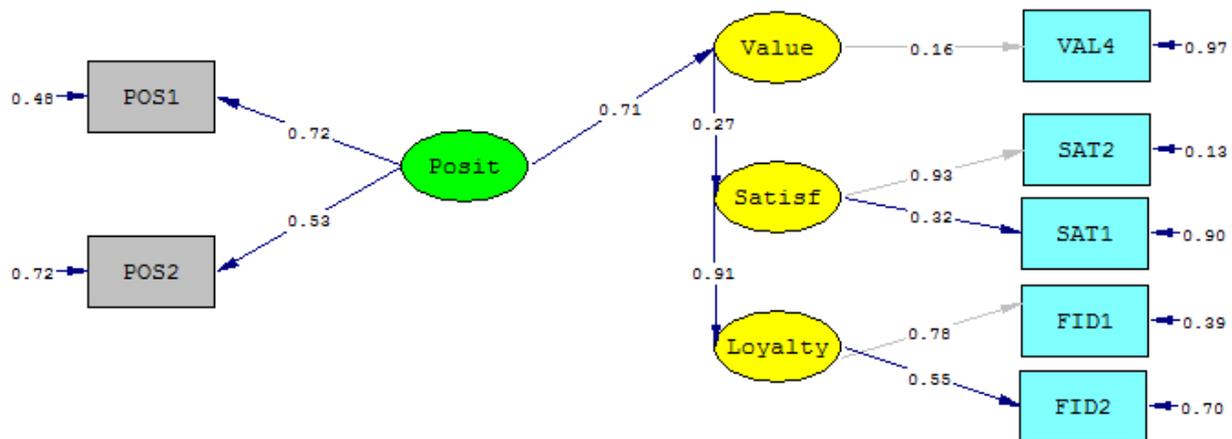


The adjustment indexes where the following: Chi-Square = 30.39 ($\rho$<0.01), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.049 ($\rho$<0.01).

Table 2 shows the quality indexes of the variables. Internal consistency was measured by Cronbach´s Alpha, the discriminant validity was evaluated by factor loads of items, and

the convergent validity, the significance and the magnitude of factor loads were evaluated by the variance extracted average (AVE) (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

**Table 2**. Basic information from constructs.

| Construct | Item | Average | SD | Standardized Loading | t | AVE | CR | Crombach´s Alpha |
|-----------|------|---------|------|---------------------|-------|------|------|------------------|
| Posit | POS1 | 5.51 | 0.92 | 0.72 | 5.62 | 0.40 | 0.56 | 0.78 |
|  | POS2 | 3.89 | 1.32 | 0.53 | 5.44 |  |  |  |
| Value | VAL | 5.80 | 1.65 | 0.16 | 2.82 |  |  | - |
| Satisf | SAT1 | 5.99 | 0.99 | 0.93 | 6.89 | 0.48 | 0.60 | 0.879 |
|  | SAT2 | 5.81 | 1.32 | 0.32 | - |  |  |  |
| Loyalty | FID1 | 5.90 | 1.10 | 0.78 | - | 0.46 | 0.62 | 0.92 |
|  | FID2 | 6.15 | 1.10 | 0.55 | 12.90 |  |  |  |

In Table 3 it can also be observed that Satisfaction affects proportionally, and to a high degree the loyalty of a destination. Also, the relation between the Positioning and Value is direct and deep. However, Value directly affects Satisfaction to a low degree.

**Table 3.** Relationship among constructs

| Hypothesis | Standardized Coefficient | t | ρ | Test result |
|------------|-------------------------|------|--------|-------------|
| **H1: Positioning → Value** | 0.71 | 1.96 | < 0.01 | support |
| **H2: Value → Satisfaction** | 0.27 | 1.78 | < 0.01 | support |
| **H3: Satisfaction → Loyalty** | 0.91 | 8.94 | < 0.01 | support |

In Table 4 it can be observed that the positioning has indirect effect on satisfaction and on loyalty, with low intensity.

**Table 4**. Direct, indirect and total effects on loyalty.

| Dependent Variable | Independent Variable | Direct Effect | Indirect Effect | Total Effect* |
|--------------------|---------------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Positioning | Value | 0.71 | - | 0.71 |
|  | Satisfaction | - | - | 0.19 |
|  | Loyalty | - | 0.17 | 0.17 |

* Significant at $\rho \leq 0.01$.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to known the relationship among positioning, value, satisfaction and loyalty on decision making process in tourism context.

As considered for Decrop (2010), costumers consider some alternatives to make their destination choices, what mean that positioning is a more important construct than image, relating these choices.

This lack in many studies relating to satisfaction and loyalty on tourism context can be for difficulties to measure the positioning, what can be made with the method used in this work.

The results shown that value can mediate the relationship between positioning and satisfaction, as recognized by Woodruff (1997) and Lambin (2000), which is unconsidered for many authors who stablish a direct relationship between image and satisfaction (Gallarza, Garcia, & Saura, 2002; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Chi & Qu, 2008; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Beerli & Martín, 2004; Martín & Bosque, 2008). This is an important consideration, because the direct relationship between image and positioning do not have a strong foundation in logic and also in literature.

As showed for many studies, there is a strong relationship between satisfaction and loyalty (Chi & Qu, 2008; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Martín & Bosque, 2008).

The results of this study contribute significantly to the existing literature, firstly for discussing the mediation of value between positioning (and also image) and satisfaction, and secondly, for purposing a method to measure the perceived positioning. Besides that, the relationship among positioning, value, satisfaction and loyalty do not had been studied. Furthermore, this study provides a relevant practical contribution, since the destination and communication managers are now able to find more information about tourist behavior regarding their decision-making process of destinations.

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