

# Can marketing create destination personality? The case of Macau

Destination  
personality

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Received 15 March 2020  
Revised 20 March 2020  
Accepted 20 March 2020

## Abstract

**Purpose** – The paper aims to study Macau's brand and destination personality. The data are derived from 91 semi-structured interviews with visitors to Macau at points of departure such as the airport and ferry terminals. Macau is perceived as hospitable and friendly, but complexities and ambiguities exist as the city is a fusion of Western and Asian cultures and locates gaming with a Portuguese heritage. Indeed one informant described the city as an “old person with a young spirit”. Given this, the final discussion is concerned with the concepts of anthropomorphic attributes associated with destination personality when applied to a destination, whereas managerial implications are identified with reference to a need to overcome some deficiencies in a perceived coldness in interactions with industry personnel.

**Keywords** Macau, Brand image, Destination personality, Visitor perceptions

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Destination personality is regarded as a differentiation tool in place branding and marketing (Chen and Phou, 2013; Ekinci and Hosany, 2006; Usakli and Baloglu, 2011). It is akin to brand personality for creating an enduring and distinctive image (Plummer, 2000), creating symbolic value for consumers to express oneself (Belk, 1988; Dolich, 1969; Sirgy, 1982) and fostering a closer brand–consumer relationship (Fournier, 1998; King, 1970).

Tourism researchers have long recognized the value and opportunity of anthropomorphic brand theory for destination marketing Pereira *et al.* (2012), and the topic has attracted noticeable attention. Many have applied a deductive approach by adopting Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale (BPS). Previous empirical studies contributed to the literature by showing that BPS can be applicable to tourism destinations although not all of the BPS dimensions are relevant to a destination (Ekinci and Hosany, 2006; Kaplan *et al.*, 2010; Murphy *et al.*, 2007a). Furthermore, the majority of previous studies discovered that the

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This study is part of a research project funded by Macao Institute for Tourism Studies. The authors are grateful for that.



Tourism Critiques: Practice and  
Theory  
Vol. 1 No. 1, 2020  
pp. 5-20  
Emerald Publishing Limited  
p-ISSN: 2633-1225  
e-ISSN: 2633-1233  
DOI 10.1108/TRC-03-2020-0006

dimensions of destination personality often vary according to each specific destination and culture (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2012; Ahmad *et al.*, 2013; Kim and Stepchenkova, 2016). Such findings raise different questions: If destination personality is “the human side of the brand image” (Ekinci, 2003, pp. 22-23), how human can a destination get? Indeed, is it effective to extract the product brand personality framework from marketing theory and transplant it into a tourism context? Considering the complex nature of a destination, can all the elements related to destination personality be captured by using a structured scale (Kim and Stepchenkova, 2016)?

On the other hand, a significant proportion of past research has focused on the consequence of destination personality such as travel decision loyalty and behavioral intention (Apostolopoulou and Papadimitriou, 2015; Baloglu *et al.*, 2014), sometimes to the point where the antecedence of destination personality is ignored. This study attempts to examine the antecedent conditions of destination personality by presenting aims of a qualitative study in Macau:

- explore visitors’ perceived destination personality;
- uncover the antecedence of destination personality; and
- compare destination personality and destination image to better understand the nature of destination personality.

#### *Study context*

Macau is used as a case to answer the research questions. It is thought to be a pertinent location because it is one of the more popular destinations among the Asian tourist outbound markets, with more than 30 million tourist arrivals in 2018 (MGTO, 2019). Macau used to be a Portuguese colony since the mid-16th century for more about 400 years. After it was returned to China in 1999, the deregulation of the gambling industry attracted foreign investors to build casinos commencing in 2002. Since then, the city has become known as “Las Vegas in the East” because of the proliferation of casino resorts. However, unlike Las Vegas, the city has unique “East meets West” history and culture in the forms of architecture, gastronomy, lifestyle, festival, events and Macanese culture. The historical center of Macau is inscripted on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Tourism diversification has been intensified since about 2010 to reduce the strong gambling image of the city. The city is undergoing continuous development of new tourist products, facilities and events and is actually physically growing with major land reclamation from the sea accounting for almost one-third of its total area. Today, Macau is capitalizing on the opportunities brought about the development of the Greater Bay Area with its position as the World Center of Tourism and Leisure. More recently, the city was designated as UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy in 2018. It can be seen that Macau has rapidly evolved from a less known Portuguese colony to a famous destination of leisure and entertainment in Asia. Numerous promotional efforts were carried out to communicate Macau’s unique and diversified tourism image.

Despite the tourism and casino tax revenue turned Macau into a prosperous city, problems such as high living cost and lack of affordable housing plan have made Macau prohibitively expensive (Lee and Master, 2014). The traffic congestion and the absence of a coherent transportation policy have been debatable issues within the local community (Duarte, 2018). All these have formed the top Macau’s livelihood concerns over the past 20 years (Macau News, 2019). With this background, this study explores the destination

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personality as an important area of research, especially in the context of changing market environment.

## Literature review

### *Brand personality*

The application of metaphorical life to lifeless creatures can be dated from Aristotle's words Paxson (1994), as cited in Brown and Campelo (2014). In anthropology, using human-like attributes to describe non-human objects is called anthropomorphism, animism or personification (Boyer, 1996). The anthropomorphic projection is observed as a natural and spontaneous tendency in the human and even children's cognitive process such as "animals have marriage ceremonies" and "mountains that breathe, rivers that talk" (Boyer, 1996, p. 83). The attribution of personalities to a product originated in the field of marketing as an effective way for product differentiation (Gardner and Levy, 1955). Brand personality as part of the product image which enables a brand to interact with his target consumers (Plummer, 2000) and express oneself (Belk, 1988). The perception of brand personality was suggested to be related to people who associated with the brand such as consumers, product endorsers or employees (McCracken, 1989; Patterson, 1999). Consequently, brand personality is created and maintained by ascribing the user imagery in promotion (Batra *et al.*, 1993; Plummer, 1984).

The topic of brand personality has attracted noticeable attention after Aaker (1997) introduced the BPS. Brand personality was described as "the set of human characteristics associated to a brand (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). Based on the "Big Five" human personality dimensions, Aaker developed a systemic and generalizable scale as a measurement for brand personality. The BPS represents 42 personality traits under five distinct dimensions of sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. However, unlike the "Big Five" model derived from human psychology, which includes negative traits, Aaker's framework's does not measure negative personalities.

The concept of brand personality and its application into marketing and branding process were proved to be valuable among academics and practitioners (Lin, 2010). The BPS contributed to the empirical studies, testing its relationship with other antecedents and consequence. It was however criticized that the dimensions of BPS are relaxing and include other characteristics such as socio-demographic, social class and other functional attributes of a brand, as personality in psychology is regarded exclusively as personality traits without the inclusion of cognitive elements such as abilities and knowledge of a person (Azoulay and Kapferer, 2003; Geuens *et al.*, 2009). The distinctiveness of the concept of brand personality remained to be a continuous concern among marketing academia. However, it was suggested that the evaluation of brand personality should not be isolated from other humanlike attributes (Aaker, 1997; Levy, 1959).

### *Destination personality*

Following the concept of brand personality, destination personality is described as "the set of personality traits associated with a destination" (Elkinci and Hosany, 2006, p. 127). Destination personality, though similar to the concept of destination image, is nonetheless considered to be different (Souiden *et al.*, 2017). Destination personality is the "softer" side of destination image (Hosany *et al.*, 2007; Keller, 1993), and it "brings the destination image alive" (Elkinci, 2003, pp. 22-23). Personifying destinations help to enhance the understanding of destination brand value as human personalities possess universal mental representations (d'Astous and Boujbel, 2007). Through the personification of non-human objects, the world becomes more familiar and simple to understand (Guthrie, 1993). The communication of personality traits of a destination help form tourists' perception of not only functional, but symbolic and experiential value

(Hankinson, 2004). Letheren *et al.*'s (2017) study revealed customer with high levels of anthropomorphic tendency tended to have more affirmative destination attitudes and travel intentions through positive emotions. Branding and marketing scholars contend that destination marketing plays an important role in the forming of distinctive personalities for destinations (Hosany *et al.*, 2007). However, according to Brown and Campelo (2014), cities should be treated as living beings, and a destination personality is organically created by its inhabitants and their stories, intangible cultural heritage and unique beautiful attributes rather than simply the result of branding and marketing.

Many past studies have applied a structured and standardized instrument to measure destination personality. Most adopt the BPS originally proposed by Aaker (1997) for product branding. One of the first studies regarding destination brand personality is that of Ekinci and Hosany (2006). Their study showed that Aaker's five-dimensional BPS when applied in tourism destinations, creates three and not five dimensions, namely sincerity, excitement and conviviality. d'Astous and Boujbel (2007) developed a framework capturing the personality of developed countries that comprises six dimensions: agreeableness, wickedness, snobbism, assiduousness, conformity, and unobtrusiveness. Findings from past research showed that not all dimensions of Aaker's BPS are relevant to destination personality. As suggested by Ekinci and Hosany (2006), holiday vacations are different from consumer products because of the primacy of experiential and emotional experience. Place brand personality is distinctive compared with fast moving product brands. Place brand personality is more complex compared with such product brands because it depends on more diverse factors such as natural and local resources and stakeholder's characteristics (Kaplan *et al.*, 2010). Others criticize the notion of applicability and generalizability of Aaker's framework because of the unique nature of destinations (Kim and Lehto, 2013; Murphy *et al.*, 2007b; Pan *et al.*, 2017). The dimensions of the framework vary based on destinations and across cultures (Ahmad *et al.*, 2013; Kaplan *et al.*, 2010; Kim and Stephenkova, 2016; Maehle and Supphellen, 2011). This finding is consistent with previous suggestions that tourist' perception should be analyzed under a cross-cultural perspective (Reisinger *et al.*, 2009; Reisinger and Turner, 2003). For example, conservatism was identified for the cities in Turkey and includes personality traits such as being uneducated and religious (Kaplan *et al.*, 2010). The same study uncovered a negative dimension malignancy for Turkey – malignancy is associated with negative traits such as unreliability, ingratitude, opportunism, malevolence and deception. Another similar research also revealed that the destination personality scale consists of both positive and negative traits. The destination personality dimensions for India are courteousness, vibrancy, creativity, conformity, tranquility and viciousness (Kumar and Nayak, 2018). BPS dimensions reflect the common value system, lifestyle and beliefs in India. Pan *et al.* (2017) identified unique dimensions such as sacredness and femininity being perceived by Chinese travelers. They questioned the applicability of Aaker's BPS, as only two dimensions of Aaker's framework are applicable when testing it in the Chinese context.

## Methodology

For the purpose of achieving the research objective and gaining rich insights, the study adopted a qualitative approach for data collection and analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in various tourist attractions and the Macau Airport. A purposeful sampling approach was used to reach visitors of different age groups, gender and place of residents. To maximize quality of the interviews and to minimize distractions, visitors who were seated and did not look in a hurry were purposely chosen. For example, visitors who were sitting at the departure area in the Macau Airport and the public area of the A-Ma

Temple and Senado Square were invited to participate in the interviews. Visitor respondents were given an information sheet explaining the research purposes and followed by seeking their consent for participation. A series of open-ended questions were asked to discover respondents' travel motives, perception and feelings about Macau. Questions pertaining to a description of destination personality was asked at the end after a comfortable degree of rapport had been established. A personification projective technique, which is seldom applied in tourism studies, was adopted to define a destination personality which went beyond physical destination attributes to explore feelings (Day, 1989; Prayag, 2007). The respondents were asked to imagine Macau as a person and describe the personality and characteristics such as gender, age and lifestyle. To avoid making biased assumptions of respondents' perceived personality of Macau, respondents were prompted with follow-up questions to elaborate their answers. The difference between perceived destination personality and destination image were compared, as a way to understand better the distinctive nature of destination personality.

The interviews were conducted by the lead author across a period of four months, with each one lasted between 10 and 45 min. Interviews were audio recorded after getting approval from the respondents. A total of 91 interviews were conducted. In addition to achieving data saturation, the reason for the large number of interviews was to increase reliability of the results and to ensure the respondents were representative of the majority of the tourists. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 1. Data were fully transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Smith, 1995). By adopting a reflexive approach, no pre-identified themes were assigned and coding preceded theme development (Braun *et al.*, 2019). The authors made comparisons on the results of their codes and themes until consensus was researched in the end. Seven major themes, namely hospitable, competence, contradictory, middle-age, rich and cold were identified as destination personality dimensions and are discussed in next session.

## Findings

### *Macau personality*

*Hospitable.* A central theme that emerged from the analysis is that of hospitality. This dimension incorporates sub-dimensions such as being friendly, generous, and enthusiastic. Respondents associated these characteristics with the friendly local people. Some respondents described Macau as “a friend” rather than “being friendly”. For example:

“Macau is like a friend to me. A friend in my age. A friend who become more close to me as time passed by. I have this feeling because of the impression of Macau people who

|                               |              |      |
|-------------------------------|--------------|------|
| Sample size                   | 91           | 100% |
| <i>Gender</i>                 |              |      |
| Male                          | 36           | 40%  |
| Female                        | 55           | 60%  |
| <i>Age</i>                    |              |      |
| Mean age                      | 35 years old |      |
| <i>Travel characteristics</i> |              |      |
| First time visit Macau        | 38           | 42%  |
| Repeat visit                  | 53           | 58%  |
| Day trip only                 | 13           | 14%  |
| Overnight visit               | 78           | 86%  |

**Table 1.**  
Sample description

are friendly in general. The other reason is because I keep visiting here since I was thirteen-year-old” (22Y, female, mainland Chinese visitor).

And again:

A friend, happy, unique and harmonious person. For example, once a waitress in the Portuguese restaurant we went to made sure she showed us the right way when we asked her for directions. She was so worried that she showed us a wrong way. She even brought us to where we can catch the bus (65Y, male, Hong Kong visitor).

Furthermore, another factor that brings Macau closer to some respondents is socio-cultural proximity between Macau and their place of residence, Macau has been even perceived as their relatives:

Like my brother and sister. China and Macau are the same family (26Y, female, mainland Chinese visitor).

Like relatives, things are similar, we receive similar media information, similar currency rate and same language (45Y, female, Hong Kong).

This finding indicated that the hospitable personality is central to the destination evaluation of Macau. It is evident that the enthusiastic and friendly local people as well as the cultural proximity are important factors that shaped a hospitable personality. The qualitative finding of this study complements the quantitative model of [Ekinci et al. \(2007\)](#), namely, that host image play a crucial role in the formation of a welcoming and friendly destination personality which can subsequently lead to word-of-mouth recommendation and formation of an intention to return. The qualitative analysis further demonstrated an inextricable link between the hospitable personality and the visitor – destination relationship of a friend, brother, sister or relative ([Fournier, 1998](#)).

*Competent.* Comments such as Macau is open-minded, smart and aggressive made up the competent personality dimension. The competent dimension stems from the rapid diverse development of Macau over the years. For example, two respondents from Hong Kong mentioned the following:

Macau is multi-tasking and knowledgeable because it contains the new, the old element and everything. The new part is the casinos which are very luxurious whereas the retrospective part is the cultural heritage (23Y, female, Hong Kong visitor).

Macau an aggressive and a bit off-balanced Eurasian, though its inner qualities are still outstanding (48Y, female, Hong Kong visitor).

The findings also indicated that the respondents’ views are the result of a comparison between Macau and their own place of origin. For example:

Macau is open since it can accommodate everything from the outside world [...] Macau is an international city and not many cities in China has the similar characteristics (23Y, male, from Mainland Chinese visitor).

Another respondent had a similar view but expressed it in an interesting way:

Macau would be a well-educated or good quality person, who is open-minded, like ‘haōi nà baōi chuān’ (the sea can hold the water from thousands of rivers 海納百川). It’s open to good or bad. However, it absorbs the good, it tolerates the bad. It has its tradition but it does not pick up the bad things like that what we have in mainland China. Macau is a city being return to mainland China. It has conserved the good things from its past. It also absorbs the good people, culture, spirit and life style from mainland China (25Y, male, Mainland Chinese visitor).



Another example:

Macau is a healthy person. Both the mind and the body is healthy. Macau's development and every country knows Macau's gamble industry and how Macau is. People in Macau are blessed. They have good welfare. Haven't you seen in the news that Taiwan is regressing and Macau is progressing. Macau residents are blessed because of the benefits granted and it's progressing (56Y, male, Taiwanese visitor).

These findings imply that Macau, as a destination, is seen as an intellectual person who is open-mind, healthy in body and mind, and possesses inner qualities. These examples reveal the ability of respondents to describe a destination as if it is a person whom they know well. Although it was suggested that a product brand's competence was related to the quality of company employees and moral values (Maehle and Supphellen, 2011), the current study demonstrated that destination development and its socio-political environment form a major part of the competent destination personality.

#### *A Middle-age and mature person*

The dimension of a middle-age and mature person also emerged. Some respondents specifically described that Macau as being 30-40 years old. This finding provided evidence that demographic characteristics such as age essentially help form a destination personality (Levy, 1985). The attributes of historical attractions and new development led to the perceived mature life stage of the destination. This can be seen in two examples:

A person who is thirty or forty years old (mid-age). On the other hand, it is well developed. I meant it has some history. But on the other hand, it has developed other things. It may be like a mid-age man, who has some life experience. And he also tries to develop in further directions. It is likely a man. Because men tend to look for new directions. He uses its own experience and tries to search for new directions. For example, Macau has its own history. Some people may come to see its history and culture which was well conserved. On the other hand, the city has developed the gambling industry. There are also a wide varieties of shops. However, more building construction is being completed. Yes, it's continuing. So I think it is like a mid-age man who uses its own experience as foundation, then go to invest more (33, female, Hong Kong visitor).

Because of the historical part I don't feel that it is too young [...] but on the other hand it has good development and not turning old. Perhaps it is a middle-aged person (30, female, mainland China).

#### *Contradictory*

The attribution of possessing a contradictory destination personality emphasized the pivotal role of the "old-new", "east-west" nature of Macau. As a result, a contradictory destination personality dimension emerged as one of the prominent themes. Macau as a contradictory person rests on combinations of contradictory human characteristics recounted by the respondents. A noticeable number of them viewed Macau as a person who is at the same time old and young, east and west, complicated and simple. Unlike the middle-age and mature dimension, the contradictory dimension characterized by conflicting and yet compatible images of Macau. It is evident from various direct quotes such as Macau is like "an old person with a young spirit", an "old lady with a young heart", "old age but with energy" and a "a Macanese (Portuguese Chinese mixed) uncle but trendy". The energy, trendiness, young spirit and heart symbolized the modern development of a historical city. Essentially, the contradictory image is manifested itself in the union of inherent and outward nature of a person. The personification technique elicited findings which are far richer than the mixed of historical and modern image

found in the previous destination image studies (Ryan and Ninov, 2011; Tasci and Kozak, 2006). For example, one of the respondents commented:

Macau has a very contradictory personality. That is to say, if Macau was a person, it can be a person that sometimes can be outgoing, and sometimes can be introvert. It has a contrast personality. It has new things, and it also has things that are very old. There are some old elements while there are new things. So it is, diversified (30Y, female, Hong Kong visitor)

On the other hand, it is surprising to discover that authentic side and the external side. Two examples of unexpected narratives are as follows:

At the first sight, I should say that Macau is an attractive person. But later on, it is more of someone who is like my “next-door neighbor”. That is after, when you go deeper into Macau. You can find that it’s actually quite “next-door”, a female next door. I can feel that when I was walking up the road to Mount Fortress, which is very refreshing. I think, that area is my favorite (25Y, male, mainland Chinese visitor).

Macau is like a female working in hotels who looks very simple after removing her makeup. She (Macau) looks just as the same as any female that you can find on the street. But after she puts the makeup, her heavy makeup turns out to be something like the Venetian (hotel resort). But when she is off duty, goes back home, removes the makeup, nothing else but her. She looks very simple and that is Coloane (36Y, female, Taiwanese visitor).

This finding showed that visitors who appreciate historical locations, such as Coloane and Mt Fortress are attached to Macau’s simplicity that is hidden amongst the new developments. Similarly, some respondents described Macau as a person wearing a “beautiful dress” and “glittering gold color clothes.” The beautiful outfit is referred to the luxurious hotels which is in contrast to their experience of the “Portuguese style” comprising “some small alley ways”, “history” and the “local environment”.

### *Cold*

Despite the above dimensions showing the positive personality of Macau, some findings uncovered more negative characteristics such as being serious, unenthusiastic and cold. The majority of these comments resulted from the poor service offered by some service employees. It is noticeable that the majority of these negative comments came from Taiwanese respondents.

One respondent expressed her view by referring to the poor service encountered in the casino as well as from another food and beverage outlet:

I think Macau would be a man who is irascible, cautious. It is because people in Macau are unenthusiastic, similar to what my friends told me. People in Macau are nice in an average way, fine but not enthusiastic. Macau has a lower level personality that is irascible and not friendly (40Y, female, Taiwanese visitor).

Another example:

Although I think that Macau is famous for its casino, which is known by everybody, I still think that Macau is serious. Macau people are unenthusiastic. They have no humor. Quite serious, I really think so. Yes, Macau people are serious. When they worked, like the ones working at the front desk, after checking me in, quickly showed me where the room was. Another example, when I was having a meal in a restaurant, I asked some questions. If he couldn’t answer, he should have told me that “I don’t know, please ask others”. For Macau people, I feel they are relatively cold. Macau people are not bad, only cold (52Y, female, Taiwanese visitor).



*Rich*

The rich personality dimension was derived from descriptors such as being rich, expensive, extravagant, money-minded, and unpredictable. Various reasons were given as to why Macau can be described as being a rich person such as “things are expensive”, “the city glitters and people live a night life with extravagance”, “it looks luxurious in many places” and “there are many casinos, the expense is high”. It can be seen that respondents’ perceptions arise from the gaming environment of the city. For example:

A rich person. We called them “new-rich” in mainland China; Those who wear a very big golden necklace on their neck. In Macau, there are rich people from mainland China, also from all around the world, right? They all visit here. Macau is the same as Las Vegas, which is for gambling. Because it is famous for gambling, so many people would like to visit here (30Y, male, mainland Chinese visitor).

I think this is a place [...] make me feel [...] although I have not been many of the places here, but may be because I stay at the Venetian, it gave me the feeling that Macau has changed into a place of “sheng se” (seek sensual pleasure). Macau somehow is a place for the pursuit of money. However, Macau has lots of historical things that can be developed. Anyway, for the sake of economic development, Macau has to focus on this direction (of gambling). Yes, Macau is a bit extravagant (52Y, male, Taiwanese visitor).

One respondent commented that Macau is like a *nouveau riche*. Akin to the contradictory dimension, the description of a *nouveau riche* consists of conflicting human characteristics. This is one such comment:

If you ask me, I would use the most fashionable word to describe Macau, it is a “nouveau rich (土豪)”. Macau’s original quality is high, because Macau is a Special Administrative Region. Macau people’s quality is far much better than that of the mainland Chinese. However, its appearance, except for casinos, Taipa and other places like Avenida de Arrerida Alberio which are good, the rest of Macau looks very old. If Macau is really a person, he has very high human quality but does not care about appearance, you know what I mean, right? For example, no matter whether we arrive at the border-gate or airport, the external appearance of the environment looked poor. Its quality or psychological quality is high. It is confident but there are some areas that I don’t like (28Y, male, mainland Chinese visitor).

Findings of cold and rich personalities are consistent with past studies in that destination personality dimensions can include positive and negative characteristics (Kaplan *et al.*, 2010; Kumar and Nayak, 2018). It is these findings that elicit debate as Aaker’s scale as normally adopted in destination personality studies excluded negative traits. Similar to the snobbish and ego-concentric manner identified in d’Astous and Boujbel (2007)’s destination personality dimension, the responses consistently indicated that the notion of being rich reveals a negative as well as a positive view of a destination.

*Destination image perception and destination personality*

One way to understand better the concept of destination personality is by comparing the respondents’ answers to different questions about personality and image. As is clear from the above text, questions about attributing a personality to a place are drawn from a projective technique. That is not the case when informants describe their own trip experience. This they were asked prior to asking informants to describe Macau as a personality. The analysis of these descriptions of trip experience suggested that Macau is a comfortable, clean, safe, relaxing with friendly local people. Such atmosphere made them feel at home.

Another image perception of Macau is the Portuguese influence. The textual analysis emphasized the important and positive perception of this attribute. Some respondents used the word “unique” to describe how the Chinese mixes Portuguese, East meets West culture of Macau. The Portuguese cultural heritage provided the historical, authentic background to their experience, but then contributed to the personality attribution described above.

Negative perceptions about Macau were identified from the responses. As the earlier findings indicated that Macau is a cold and rich person, findings from the destination image perception illustrated similar characteristics such as it is expensive to travel in Macau, the city is over-developed, and one might encounter poor services. Other negative characteristics are tied to the small-size city, the old and shabby local environment and poor transportation service. The analysis further illustrated that the casinos formed a strong destination image perception of Macau. Although some comments suggested that casinos looked beautiful, the gambling atmosphere contributed to a negative image of Macau. Many of the negative comments came from female respondents who felt that the casinos are too crowded and noisy, which led them to feel uncomfortable. This finding is congruent with the cold and rich personality dimension.

A sequential pattern therefore seems to exist where post-experience image precedes personality where possibly such image creation represents evaluation (cognitive, affective and the possibly conative) and personality represents an anthropomorphic extension to render the place more meaningful. This sequence is consistent with the previous suppositions, and consistent with previous studies that found destination image has a direct effect on destination personality ([Chen and Phou, 2013](#); [Hosany et al., 2006](#); [Souiden et al., 2017](#)). As [Prayag \(2007\)](#) notes, it represents the affective side of the destination image as a projection of emotional feeling is involved.

Of interest, it was also found that some destination image perceptions were not directly reflected in respondents' perceived destination personality. For example, many respondents mentioned that making a trip to Macau is convenient as it is easily accessible from their cities by sea, air or land. Many commented on other destination attributes such as the delicious local food, good shopping places, shows, arts, as well as various types of entertainments and activities in Macau. In fact, those elements were mentioned as respondents' major travel motives. Equally, the reverse was also true and the analysis of destination personality reflected some city attributes not apparent in the data of destination image perception. For example, the competent personality revealed the rapid development, economic prosperity, socio-welfare, political environment and cultural diversity of the city. Taken as a whole, when compared with the findings of image perception, the analysis of destination personality offered a richer and more encompassing view of a destination. This therefore questions the more usual notion that brand image is an encompassing term with brand personality as one of its components ([Plummer, 2000](#)).

The findings of this study indicate that destination image and destination personality are two related, but nonetheless different concepts that can be used in any evaluation of a destination. Destination image is related more to the tourist attributes of place while dimensions of destination personality connect more to visitors' feelings and relationships with a destination, as well as their overall impression of the socio-political and host image of a destination. Of interest, this would see to locate destination personality closer to the concept of place attachment ([Gu and Ryan, 2008](#)), which refers not only to place meanings and identity of place, but also how place shapes self-identity of humans.

## Discussion and conclusion

This study examines the relationship between place image and destination personality in the tourism through adopting a qualitative approach. Such an approach was adopted because it was felt more pertinent to these subjects because it permits respondents more opportunity to provide fuller responses in their own words and reference points. Using Macau as the case, the current study uncovered not only destination personalities, it also addressed a research area rarely explored by identifying the antecedents of the personality dimensions. Six personality dimensions were identified in the case of Macau. The findings reinforced the notion that destination personality is the emotional side of a destination brand (Hosany *et al.*, 2006; Keller, 1993). On the other hand, the findings also support past research that the emotional feeling of tourists is a function of a cognitive-based image. For example, the personality image of being rich is premised on the image of gaming and casinos, while seeing the change and development of Macau provided a personality of competency. Another finding is that the study does partially support the work of McCracken (1989) in that tourist encounters with local residents does play a role in the formation of a brand personality of a destination. In this instance those encounters help formulate a destination personality that includes being hospitable, young, energetic or negatively, cold and rich. Equally, it may also imply that local imagery is a crucial antecedent of destination personality rather than only user imagery (Patterson, 1999).

Although personality and image represent two key components of tourists' perception, they should not be used interchangeably (Hosany *et al.*, 2007). Destination image appeared as fragments of visitors' knowledge of different destination attributes. For example, the data analysis of perceived destination image demonstrated a wide range of tourist attractions, local attributes and emotional image such as comfort, likes and dislikes about a destination. On the other hand, respondents' recalling of a destination personality showed a procedure of how different fragments of perceived destination image is formed and how it is evolved into feeling, attitude and even turn into a tourist-destination relationship. This is why Macau was perceived as a complex person with internal simplicity and external luxury or gaudiness, and as an old person with a young heart. Hence, analyzing data drawn from static and fragmented destination evaluation may lead to the nuancing of the original image perceived or experienced by visitors (Ryan and Cave, 2005).

Findings of this study also revealed that destination personality is a result of image formation being formed by more than just distinctive touristic attributes such as a cultural heritage amid the presence of casinos. In fact, other tourist activities like shopping and dining were rarely expressed by respondents as contributing to destination personality. Instead, destination personality was significantly influenced by other elements such as the social atmosphere, friendly local people, economic development and Portuguese heritage. Most of these are not simply tangible or marketed elements of a destination, but nonetheless contribute to the creation of a positive destination impression. All these inherited socio-cultural elements of a destination formed part of the tourism magnetic atmosphere (the "pull" components as Dann, 1977, noted), and give essence and personality to tourists' travel experience (Jafari, 1974). As Jafari (1974, p. 79) notes, the socio-cultural-historical background evolves throughout history, "and often they make the tourism consumption a qualitative rather than quantitative measurement" (Jafari, 1974, p. 79).

Given that tourism becomes subsumed into the social fabric in the early period of the twenty-first century, it can be suggested that tourism *per se* also contributes to the formation of a destination personality that is connected with the perceived sustainability of a city. It is one of the economic, socio-cultural and environmental elements that are key for a city's competitiveness (Iniesta-Bonillo *et al.*, 2016). Consequently, through the

personification technique, this study suggests that a destination can be treated as a living and sentient being (Brown and Campelo, 2014). For example, Macau was described as “a person has some life experience while trying to develop further” and “it makes its own decisions”. Destination personality is not the same as product brand personality described by Plummer (2000, p. 81) where “the characterizational aspects of the brand or its personality are purely the result of communications because there is rarely anything intrinsic to a brand that makes it lively, or exotic, or sophisticated.” This study, instead, proposes that destination personality is not simply a product of the destination marketing organization, and neither can it be effectively measured through a consumer checklist.

Certainly there are debates regarding the definition of destination personalities and whether the construct of personality should be strictly limited to personality traits as defined in psychology (Patterson, 1999). This study suggests that the process of destination personality formation is similar to the impression formation of human beings that are dynamic and require knowledge of a person’s appearance, history, and behavior. Hence, one’s knowledge of a destination also contain behaviors, attitudes, feelings, beliefs, physical characteristics and demographic information (Park, 1986), as it is evident in this study that Macau can be seen as a person containing bodily appearance as well as mind. It is thought difficult to consider only the personality traits without some demographic characteristics (Aaker, 1997; Singh, 2013). Furthermore, as indicated by the findings, the cold and rich personality dimensions reinforce suggestions that Aaker (1997)’s BPS is limited and misleading by using it in the context of tourism, as Asker’s scale does not include negative personality traits (Kaplan *et al.*, 2010).

In terms of managerial implications, this study is thought to offer information to not only destination managers and practitioners but also governors, social policymakers and urban strategists when dealing with the tourists and the tourism industry in that it identifies some aspects of tourists’ perceptions of Macau. For example, the findings showed that Macau was considered hospitable because of the friendly local people and atmosphere. This result emphasized the primacy of people in the formation of a destination personality, and thereby reinforces a need for urban policies that maintain good social welfare and benefits for local people that foster a friendly local environment. While such policies are normally motivated by reasons of social welfare, the advocates of such policies can also point to their pragmatic consequences such as the support of tourism and the revenues it generates for the city.

The study revealed that the political background and city development helped form a competent and successful personality of Macau. Macau, as a Special Administrative Region (SAR) having the autonomy of casino operations and possessing a positive host image with a European touch, has made Macau a unique destination that is especially attractive to mainland Chinese visitors. The amalgam of these elements have shaped the nature of Macau and its like cannot be found anywhere else within the Greater China Region and the Guangdong-Hong Kong- Macau Greater Bay Area. The fact that all (but one) of the respondents were able to apply human descriptors to Macau is perhaps because of their familiarity of the city, through repeat revisits, media or other social channels. As the result, this study recommends destination promotions are channeled through social media such as Weibo to provide visitors updated information of not only tourist activities, but also local activities and events of Macau, and thereby reinforce through this medium the personification of the city. For mainland Chinese visitors, Macau as a SAR can be promoted as a place to inspire them, to allow them to rest and dream.

Although the casino resorts helped “dress up” the city, and turned it into a modern and entertaining leisure hub, the gaming industry was found to be the source of the cold and rich personality of Macau. It is evident that the poor service encountered by some respondents in

the casino resorts formed the cold personality of Macau. That the gambling industry created, for some, a negative image of the city, is no longer a new finding, but it is important to know that many tourists in Macau visit casino resorts with a high service expectation for accommodation and other entertainment such as exhibits, shows, shopping and sightseeing. Service quality and customer anticipation have become important for the middle-class, sophisticated and well-informed Chinese market. As a large number of frontline service personnel include non-local employees, destination marketers and policy makers may work with hoteliers and retailers together in order to come up with strategies to enhance providers' service skills and understanding of the Chinese market.

### *Limitation and future studies*

Since destination distinctive attributes (Portuguese culture and new tourism development) together with the perceived economic, socio-cultural environment are highly correlated with destination personality dimensions, more future research can explore the relationship between these constructs. For example, which features impact most on a host sustainable image that creates a strong personality and how does determine tourist future behavior. On the other hand, more research effort is needed to explore the effect of destination and culture difference in the shaping or forming of destination personality, since destination personality dimensions may be culture-specific (Kim and Stephenkova, 2016; Pan *et al.*, 2017). If this is the case, it raises the question of whether the findings of an inherent, yet outward looking destination personality in this study is applicable to other destinations. This study sought to identify insights that can shed light on the formation of destination personality, but like any qualitative research, this study is limited by its nature and sampling approach. Subsequent quantitative research with a more representative sample of visitors is needed to test generalizability of this study findings.

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