

The **image** of Serbia as a **travel destination**: Gender standpoints

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Previous researches have mostly analysed the relationship between destination image and other tourism elements, while connections between the former and gender have been of lesser interest. Therefore, this study is set in the context of tourism marketing, more specifically in the process of tourism destination image evaluation from the gender perspective, seeking to examine the image of Serbia as a travel destination. The perceived image of Serbia was examined on a sample of 144 fair visitors at the *Internationale Tourismus-Börse* (ITB) Berlin in 2013. In addition to the Likert five-point grade scale, the data represent the answers to individual questions from the questionnaire (yes/no, i.e., closed-ended questions). In accordance with the authors' interest in data description, comparisons of response differences in respect of gender were conducted. The statistical data analysis applied in the research covered: frequency analysis, descriptive statistical analysis, Pearson chi-square independent test, t-test for the independent samples, and two-way between groups ANOVA. The research was conducted in such way so the results would show fair visitors' attitudes concerning the image of Serbia, which were viewed through the gender criteria. More precisely, the relationships between the perceived image and the visitors' spending, their association, information sources, awareness of Serbia and the socio-demographic characteristic referring to their gender were assessed. In this way, the authors wanted to observe and explain the perception of this target group of the image of Serbia. The research was conducted by surveying a random sample, where participation was voluntary and anonymous. The data collected in the survey were entered into the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) database and all further analyses were conducted using the SPSS, version 20.0.

Part of the research including the descriptive statistics was dedicated to the attitudes referring to the overall image of Serbia and it verified that, from the lowest rank being 1.00 to the highest one being 5.00, the overall mean rank was 3.28, so it can be said that the perceptions of Serbia were average among both genders. When the sample was split into

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men and women, genders' mean scores were almost identical (3.29 for men and 3.28 for women). Moreover, the results indicated that the percentage regarding newspapers and fairs as information sources was twice as high in case of women respondents when compared to men. Men were mostly turning to other sources of information (Internet, TV, friends and family, and other).

Using the chi-square test, one tried to find the statistically significant differences among respondents regarding the issue of their familiarity with Serbia. As a result, men and women were not found different in aspects linked to Serbia's image. On the other hand, the chi-square test showed statistically significant relationship between the variables 'visiting Serbia' and 'association with Serbia', but the effect size was small.

Furthermore, the t-test for independent samples was conducted to determine whether there were differences between 'Serbia's image' continuous scale score with respect to 'gender' and 'visiting Serbia' as independent variables, and scale score as an outcome variable. 'Serbia's image' did not express statistically significant differences in the attitudes of men and women. However, there was a statistically significant difference in the attitudes of people who visited and the ones who did not visit Serbia, determined with the t-test.

Two-way analyses of variance pointed out that 'gender' and 'association with Serbia' did not have significant interaction effect on image of Serbia, implying that there was no significant difference in the effect of association on image for men and women. Since a significant result for the interaction effect was not obtained, it is possible to safely interpret the main effects. There was a significant main effect for association with Serbia but no significant main effect for gender. This means that men and women do not differ in terms of their image scores, but that there is a difference in scores for positive, negative and no associations. The effect size for the association variable was large, according to Cohen's criterion. The results of the Tukey HSD post-hoc test revealed a significant difference in means of each pair of groups.

The results of this research could help destination marketing and travel organizations to assess their marketing strategies for Serbian travel market. These results could be very useful when preparing marketing strategies and developing plans for the tourism sector.