Dimensions of Short Break Destination Attractiveness:

A Comparison of Cognitive, Affective and Conative Perceptions

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Abstract

Although there has been exponential growth in the number of studies of destination image appearing in the tourism literature, few have addressed the role of affective perceptions. This paper analyses the market positions held by a competitive set of destinations, through a compariso n of cognitive, affective and conative perceptions. Cognitive perceptions were measured by trialling a factor analytic adaptation of importance-performance analysis. Affective perceptions were measured using an affective response grid. The alignment of the results from these techniques identified leadership positions held by two quite different destinations on two quite different dimensions of short break destination attractiveness.

Introduction

In an increasingly competitive tourism industry, a key challenge for destination marketers is to somehow succinctly position their multi-attributed product range in a manner that gains 'cut-through' in a dynamic and heterogenous market place. The explosion in destination choice and destination publicity material has only served to increase confusion among potential travellers (Gunn, 1988). Positioning theory is based on three propositions (Ries & Trout, 1986). First, we live in an over-communicated society, bombarded with information on a daily basis. Second, the mind has developed a defence system against the clutter. Third, the only way to cut through the clutter to reach the mind is through simplified and focussed messages:

> Marketing battles are not fought in the customer's office or in the supermarkets or the drugstores of America. Those are only distribution points for the merchandise whose brand selection is decided elsewhere. Marketing battles are fought in a mean and ugly place. A place that's dark and damp with much unexplored territory and deep pitfalls to trap the unwary. Marketing battles are fought inside the mind.
>
> (Ries & Trout, 1986, p. 169).

Image is the key construct in destination positioning. Kotler, Haider and Rein (1993, p. 141) highlighted the way in which minds simplify the process of destination image formation: "Images represent a simplification of a large number of associations and pieces of information connected with the place. They are the product of the mind

trying to process and essentialize huge amounts of data about a place". In the three decades since the first destination image studies appeared (see Mayo, 1973; Anderssen & Colberg, 1973; Matejka, 1973), the topic has become one of the most prevalent in the tourism literature. Chon's (1990) review of 23 frequently cited destination image studies, found the most popular themes were the role and influence of destination image in traveller buyer behaviour and satisfaction. It has been suggested that images held by potential travellers are so important in the destination selection process that they can affect the very viability of the destination (Hunt, 1975). Most tourism products are intangible and can often only compete via images. A major objective of any destination positioning strategy will be to reinforce positive images already held by the target, correct negative images or create a new image.

While it is agreed that destination images can play an important role in travel decisions, the definition of 'destination image' is not so certain. A number of authors have been critical of attempts to conceptualise the construct, with suggestions that most destination image studies have lacked any conceptual framework (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). From a review of fifteen studies between 1975 and 1990, Echtner and Ritchie suggested most definitions were vague, such as 'impressions of a place' or 'perceptions of an area'. Jenkins (1999) found the term destination image had been used in a number of different contexts, including for example perceptions held by individuals, stereotypes held by groups, and images projected by DMOs. The range of different definitions of image used in the tourism literature has been so great that image is becoming another piece of marketing jargon (Cossens, 1994).

Fishbein (1967) and Fishbein and Azjen (1975) argued the importance of distinguishing between an individual's beliefs and attitudes. While beliefs represent information held about an object, attitude is a favourable or unfavourable evaluation of the object. Fishbein proposed attitude comprised cognitive, affective and conative components. Cognition is the sum of what is known about a destination, which may be organic or induced. In other words this is awareness, knowledge or beliefs, which may or may not have been derived from a previous visit. After all, destination images can only exist if there is a small amount of knowledge (World Tourism Organization, 1979 in Milman & Pizam, 1995). Most studies of destination image have analysed cognitive perceptions, focusing on tangible physical attributes (Pearce, 1977; Walmsley & Jenkins, 1992).

Affect represents an individual's feelings toward an object, which will be favourable, unfavourable or neutral (Fishbein, 1967). Gartner (1993) proposed that affect usually becomes operational during the evaluation stage of the destination selection process. Walmsley and Young (1998) proposed this evaluative image component had been overlooked in tourism studies. Only recently have destination studies studied both cognition and affect towards destinations together. Pike's (2002a) review of 142 destination image papers published in the literature during the period 1973-2000 found only six that showed an explicit interest in affective images.

Russel, Ward and Pratt (1981) pointed out that the number of terms used in the English language to describe affect toward a place would be in the hundreds. Following Russel (1980), Russel, Ward and Pratt factor analysed 105 common adjectives used to describe environments. This resulted in the development of an

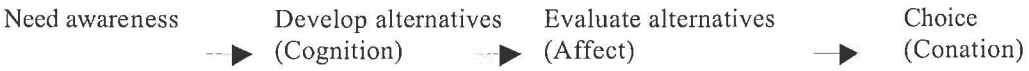
affective response grid, shown in Figure 1. Eight adjective dimensions of affect were included in the model, 45 degrees apart. The assumption was that these dimensions were not independent of each other, but represented a circumplex model of affect. In the model the horizontal axis was arbitrarily set to represent pleasantness, while the vertical axis represents level of arousal. In this way 'Exciting', which is a dimension in its own right, is a combination of arousing and pleasant, while 'Distressing' is a function of arousing and unpleasant.

Figure 1. – Russel, Ward and Pratt's (1981) Affective Response Grid

Using four semantic differential scales, 'pleasant/unpleasant', 'relaxing/distressing', 'arousing/sleepy' and 'exciting/gloomy', Baloglu and Brinberg (1997) demonstrated how the affective response model could apply to perceptions of destinations. The use of these scales in destination studies has also been reported by Baloglu and McCleary (1999) and Baloglu and Mangaloglu (2001).

The findings of Russel, Ward and Pratt (1981) suggested that two dimensions, 'sleepy/arousing' and 'unpleasant/pleasant', could be sufficient to measure affect towards environments. Other studies have demonstrated how this can apply to travel destinations. For example, Walmsley and Jenkins' (1993) principal components analysis of Repertory Grid data produced the same two factor labels. While Walmsley and Jenkins' results were based on Australian domestic destinations, a study by Walmsley and Young (1998) concluded the schema was more appropriate for international destinations, but not significant for local destinations. However, Hanyu (1993) found pleasantness and arousing levels to be the dimensions of residents affect towards Tokyo.

The conative image is analogous to behaviour since it is the intent or action component. Intent refers to the likelihood of brand purchase (Howard & Sheth, 1969). Conation may be considered as the likelihood of visiting a destination within a certain time period. Figure 2 highlights how the cognition/affect/conation relationships might apply in decision-making. The process is similar to the AIDA model followed by advertisers, where the aim is to guide a consumer through the stages of awareness, interest, desire and action.



Source: Myers (1992)

Figure 2. - Cognition/affect/conation

Positioning analysis requires more than an understanding of a product's image in the mind of the consumer. What is also required is a frame of reference with the competition, since a position is a products' perceived performance, relative to competitors, on specific attributes (Lovelock, 1991; Wind & Robinson, 1972). The purpose of this paper is to present the results of an analysis of the positions held by a competitive set of destinations through a comparison of cognitive, affective and conative perceptions. The destinations of interest were five leading domestic holiday areas in New Zealand's North Island: Bay of Islands, Coromandel, Mount Maunganui, Rotorua and Taupo. The first three destinations are coastal, while Rotorua and Taupo are inland lake districts. The travel context was narrowed to that of short break holidays by car. A short break was defined as a non-business trip of one to three nights away, following Ryan (1983). The market of interest was Auckland, which is New Zealand's most populated urban centre, containing almost one third of the country's population. All five destinations are within a comfortable drive of Auckland, which is the largest source of visitors for each.

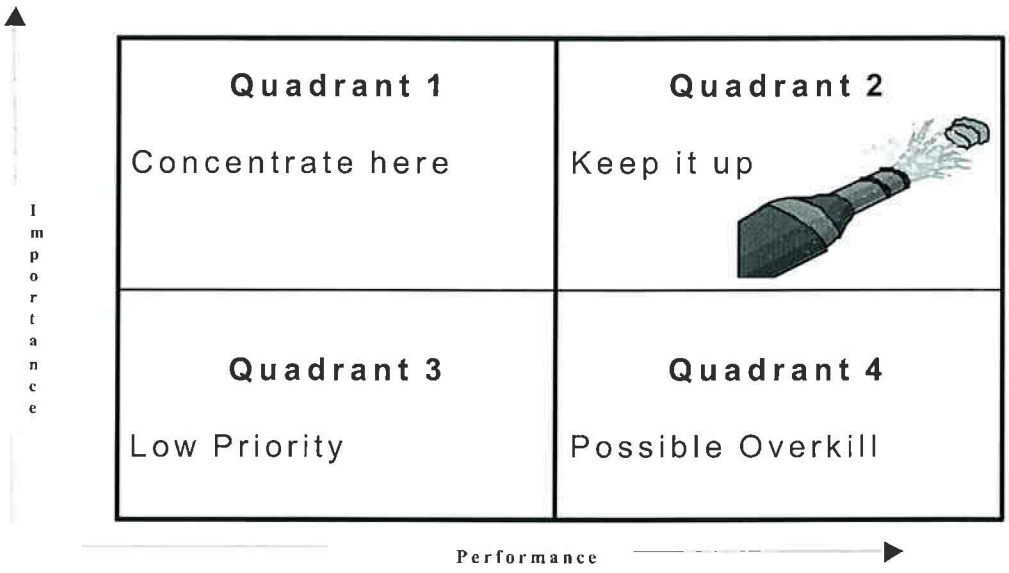
Methods

The range of cognitive attributes deemed important by Aucklanders when considering a short break holiday had not previously been identified. Therefore three techniques were used to develop a set of cognitive scale items. Kelly's (1955) Repertory Grid was used in personal interviews with Auckland residents (n=25). The supply-side perspective was analyzed through personal interviews with tourism decision makers in the five destination areas of interest (n=11). Finally, a content analysis of 84 destination image studies was undertaken to identify attributes used in the literature. A set of 20 cognitive attributes was selected for use in a structured survey. For more details on this research stage the reader is referred to Pike (2003).

A 165-item questionnaire was then developed to incorporate the cognitive, affective and conative scale items. It should be noted that other items were included to address top of mind awareness (ToMA), decision set composition, motivation for taking a short break, and intent to visit each destination. However, these are the subjects of further papers (see for example Pike, 2002b; Pike, 2002c; Pike & Ryan, 2003).

Respondents were firstly asked to rate the importance of the 20 cognitive attributes, using a seven point scale anchored at 'Not important' (1) and 'Very important' (7). In a separate section respondents were asked to indicate the perceived performance of each of the five competing destinations across the same attributes. Again, a seven point scale was used. The purpose of these two sections was to facilitate an importance-performance analysis (IPA) of the cognitive perceptions. Understanding how well a destination's features perform is not sufficient to determine positioning, if they are not also evaluated in terms of importance to the traveller. Destination attractiveness consists therefore, not only of the beliefs about a place, but also the

importance of this belief (Ryan, 1991). IPA, introduced by Martilla and James (1977), was selected as a valid technique suitable for operationalising this aspect of destination attractiveness. Results are plotted on a matrix with four quadrants, as shown in Figure 3. The y-axis records respondents' importance rating of each attribute, while the x-axis plots perceived performance of the destination on the same attributes. Quadrant 1 features attributes that have been rated important, but where the product is not perceived to perform strongly. This signals the need for the marketer to 'concentrate here' to improve perceptions of performance. Quadrant 2 features those attributes rated important and where the product performs strongly. These attributes represent potential strengths. It would be expected that the marketer would focus promotional communications on attributes in Quadrants 1 and 2, since those plotted in Quadrants 3 and 4 are rated lower in importance by the target audience.



Source: Martilla and James (1977)

Figure 3. - IPA m atrix

To enable an affective response grid, two semantic differential scales were used, following Russel, Ward and Pratt (1981). The first was anchored at 'Unpleasant' (1) and 'Pleasant' (7), and the second anchored at 'Sleepy' (1) and 'Arousing' (7). Conation was measured by requesting respondents to indicate the likelihood of visiting each destination within the next 12 months. A seven point scale was used, anchored at 'Definitely not' (1) and 'Definitely' (7).

Following a series of pretests, the questionnaire was mailed to a systematic random sample of 3000 Auckland households during May 2000. A total of 763 useable responses were received, along with 56 that were non-usable. The useable response rate was 26 per cent, which was within the mid-range achieved for previous multi-destination image studies (Pike, 2002b).

Results

The characteristics of the respondents, which are presented in Table 1, were compared to those of the 1996 Auckland Census population (Statistics New Zealand, 1997). Although the sample profile was similar to the Census population, minor differences were noted in the following categories: higher female/male ratio; higher level of 50-64 year olds, and lower level of 18-34 year olds; higher level from affluent suburbs, and lower level from low income areas; higher level of partnered relationships; higher education levels; higher level of respondents born in New Zealand.

Table 1. - Sample characteristics

		N	Valid %
Gender	Male	350	45.9%
	Female	413	54.1%
	Total	763	
Age	18-25	25	3.3%
	26-34	118	15.5%
	35-49	297	38.9%
	50-64	233	30.5%
	65+	90	11.8%
	Total	763	
Household income	< NZ$38,000	161	22.6%
	$38,000-$49,000	119	16.7%
	$49,001-$65,000	120	16.9%
	$65,001-$80,000	76	10.7%
	$80,000-$100,000	104	14.6%
	> $100,000	131	18.4%
	Total	711	
	Missing	52	
Marital status	Single	83	11.0%
	Gay Single	5	0.7%
	Married/De facto	562	74.3%
	Permanent same sex partner	21	2.8%
	Separated/divorced/separated	85	11.2%
	Total	756	
	Missing	7	
Number of dependent children	0	425	55.8%
	1-1	260	34.2%
	3+	76	10.0%
	Total	761	
	Missing	2	
Highest level of education	High school	279	36.8%
	Polytechnic	156	20.6%
	University graduate	105	13.8%
	Professional qualification	152	20.0%
	Post-graduate	67	8.8%
	Total	759	
	Missing	4	

The cognitive attribute importance results are presented in Table 2. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was .83, which Kaiser would have regarded as 'meritorious' and therefore suitable for factor analysis (George & Mallery, 2000).

Table 2. - Attribute Importance

Attribute	Rank	N	Mean	Std
Suitable accommodation	1	753	5.99	1.19
Good value for money	2	752	5.99	1.29
A comfortable drive from home	3	755	5.50	1.42
Natural scenic beauty	4	756	5.37	1.40
Good cafes/restaurants	5	746	5.20	1.62
Good weather	6	752	5.07	1.49
Lots to see and do	7	747	4.85	1.51
Good ocean beaches	8	747	4.50	1.82
Friendly locals	9	742	4.46	1.74
Places for swimming or boating	10	741	4.34	1.92
Not too touristy	11	746	4.34	1.76
Hot pool bathing	12	721	4.15	1.77
Places for walking/tramping	13	734	4.11	1.86
Shopping	14	714	3.82	1.75
Wineries	15	704	3.79	1.93
Adventure activities	16	711	3.56	1.73
Fishing	17	662	3.23	2.11
Close to other holiday destinations	18	696	3.02	1.74
Snow sports	19	634	2.74	1.90
Maori culture experiences	20	663	2.41	1.63
Grand mean			**4.38**	**0.86**

A series of exploratory factor analyses was then undertaken. In searching for a simple structure (see Kline, 1994), where factors have a few high loadings, the cleanest rotated component matrix was generated from an orthogonal analysis using 16 attributes. Four attributes, 'Maori culture experiences', 'snow sports', 'within a comfortable drive' and 'wineries', were not included due to low correlations with other attributes. Principal Components Analysis, with a varimax rotation, identified four factors that explained 55.2 per cent of total variance. The KMO for this analysis was .81, and the Cronbach alpha for the 16 items was .82. The factor loadings are shown in Table 3.

The mean factor scores for attribute performance and perceived performance for each destination are presented in Table 4. These factor means were applied to an IPA matrix, which is highlighted in Figure 4. The y-axis cross hair was plotted at the grand mean of all destinations' performance (4.82), while the x-axis crosshair was plotted at the grand mean for attribute importance (4.38). The first letter of each destination, along with the factor number, has been used to code each data point. For example, in Quadrant 2 nine points are identified: Rotorua (R1) and Taupo (T1) on Factor 1, Coromandel (C2) and Bay of Islands (B2) on Factor 2, and all five destinations on Factor 4.

Table 3 . Exploratory Factor Analysis of attribute importance items

Factor	Alpha	Factor Loadings	Eigenvalue	Variance	Comm.
1. The good life/infrastructure	.69		4.47	27.9%	
Cafes/restaurants		.79			.63
Suitable accommodation		.73			.59
Shopping		.59			.55
Hot pool bathing		.56			.51
Value for money		.44			.43
2. Getting away from it all	.73		2.11	13.2%	
Natural scenic beauty		.75			.62
Not too touristy		.71			.52
Ocean beaches		.64			.61
Walking/tramping		.63			.46
Friendly locals		.43			.44
3. Outdoor play	.66		1.17	7.3%	
Places for swimming or boating		.72			.68
Fishing		.67			.58
Adventure activities		.58			.49
4. Kiwi weather	.64		1.09	6.8%	
Good weather		.75			.63
Lots to see/do		.65			.53
Close to other destinations		.64			.60
Total Variance				55.2%	

Distinctive positions were identified for two destinations. The first was Rotorua's performance on Factor 1 - 'The good life/infrastructure', which featured five attributes: 'good cafes/restaurants', 'suitable accommodation', 'hot pool bathing', 'good value for money' and 'shopping'. Rotorua achieved top rank on the first four of these attributes, and was ranked second for the fifth. The second prominent position was Coromandel on Factor 2 - 'Getting away from it all', which contained five attributes: 'places for walking/tramping', 'natural scenic beauty', 'not too touristy', 'ocean beaches' and 'friendly locals'. Coromandel ranked first for each of these. The other dimension plotted in Quadrant 2 was Factor 4 - Kiwi Weather, which featured three attributes: 'good weather', 'lots to see/do' and 'close to other destinations'. All five destinations were perceived to perform strongly on this factor, with no dominant destination position. The remaining Factor 3 – Outdoor Play, which featured 'places for swimming/boating', 'fishing', and 'adventure activities', was plotted in Quadrant 4. Each destination was perceived to perform strongly on this factor, which rated below the scale mid-point and was not considered determinant.

Table 4 . Factor means

Factor	Importance	Bay of Islands	Coromandel	Mount Maunganui	Rotorua	Taupo
1. The good life/infrastructure	5.1	4.5	4.4	4.8	5.5	5.1
2. Getting away from it all	4.6	4.9	5.6	4.8	4.2	4.5
3. Outdoor play	3.7	5.6	5.6	5.2	5.0	5.5
4. Kiwi weather	4.4	5.3	5.1	5.2	5.3	5.0

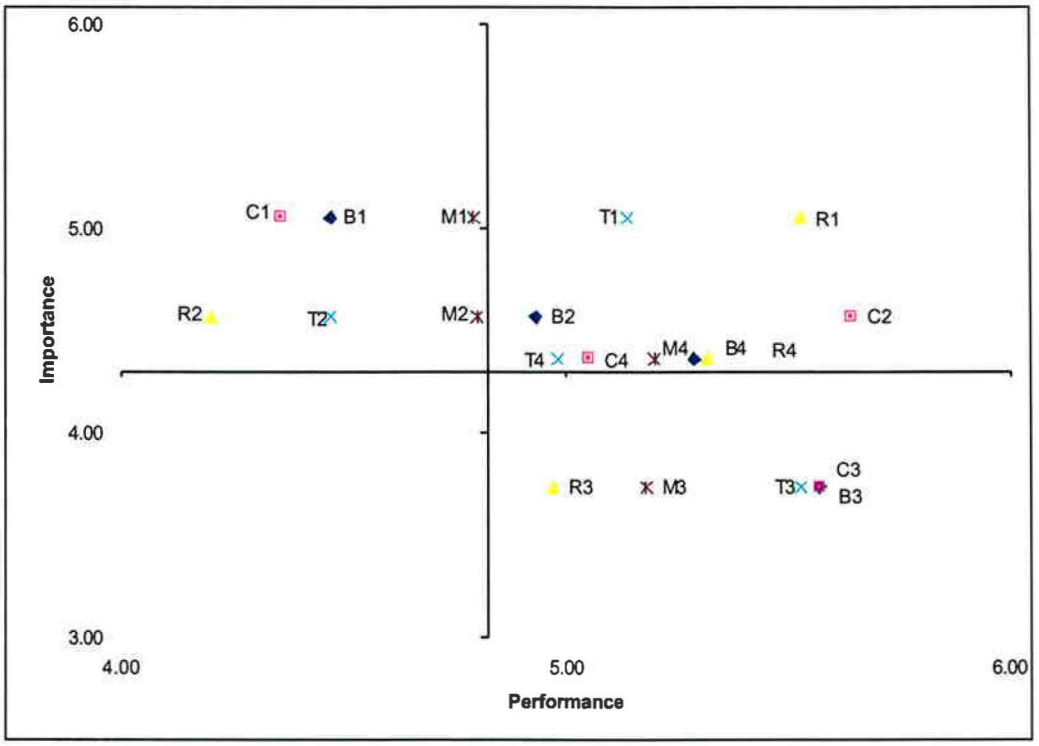


Figure 4. Four factor IPA

Respondents indicated a high level of previous visitation to all five destinations, which validated the destination performance results. The Cronbach alphas for the two affect items, for each of the destinations, ranged from .84 to .61, which were a good indication of reliability for two scales. The two affect items were also correlated with each other, at the $p<.001$ level, for each destination: Taupo ($r = .72$), Rotorua ($r = .69$), Mount Maunganui ($r = 67$), Coromandel ($r = .51$) and Bay of Islands ($r = .44$). Table 5 shows the mean scores for each destination on the first affect item. This seven point scale was anchored at 'Sleepy' (1) and 'Arousing' (7). All destinations' means were on the arousing side of the scale mid-point, with Rotorua rating highest (5.3) and Coromandel lowest (4.6). These results appeared consistent with the factor-analytic IPA performances.

Table 5. - Affect 1: Sleepy/arousing

Rank		N	Mean	Std.
1	Rotorua	756	5.3	1.1
2	Bay of Islands	756	4.9	1.1
3	Taupo	754	4.9	1.2
4	Mount Maunganui	747	4.8	1.3
5	Coromandel	756	4.6	1.4
	Grand mean	761	4.9	0.8

Table 6 presents the mean scores for each destination on the second affect item. This seven-point scale was anchored at 'Unpleasant' (1) and 'Pleasant' (7). Interestingly, given the strong performance in previous sections, Rotorua (5.5) ranked third behind

Bay of Islands (5.8) and Coromandel (5.7). Nevertheless the grand mean of 5.5 reflected positively on the five destinations, and further validated their selection.

Table 6 . Affect 2: Unpleasant/p leasant

Rank		N	Mean	Std.
1	Bay of Islands	758	5.8	1.1
2	Coromandel	757	5.7	1.2
3	Rotorua	756	5.5	1.2
4	Taupo	752	5.4	1.7
5	Mount Maunganui	745	5.1	1.3
	Grand mean	762	5.5	0.8

The affect results were plotted onto an affective response grid, which is presented in Figure 5. The grand means of 'Arousing/Sleepy' (4.9) and 'Unpleasant/Pleasant' (5.5) were used to place the cross hairs. It should be noted that since all five destinations' means rated above the mid-point for both scales, if the scale mid-point was used to place the cross-hairs, all destinations would be located in the arousing/exciting/pleasant dimension. Instead, the grand means were used to provide a guide to how each was positioned relative to the others for each dimension. 'Stressful' was used in place of 'Distressing', while 'Boring' was used in place of 'Gloomy'. Rotorua was positioned closest to three poles: 'Stressful', 'Arousing' and 'Exciting'. Coromandel, on the other hand, was positioned closest to 'Sleepy' and 'Relaxing'. These positions were consistent with the cognitive IPA positions.

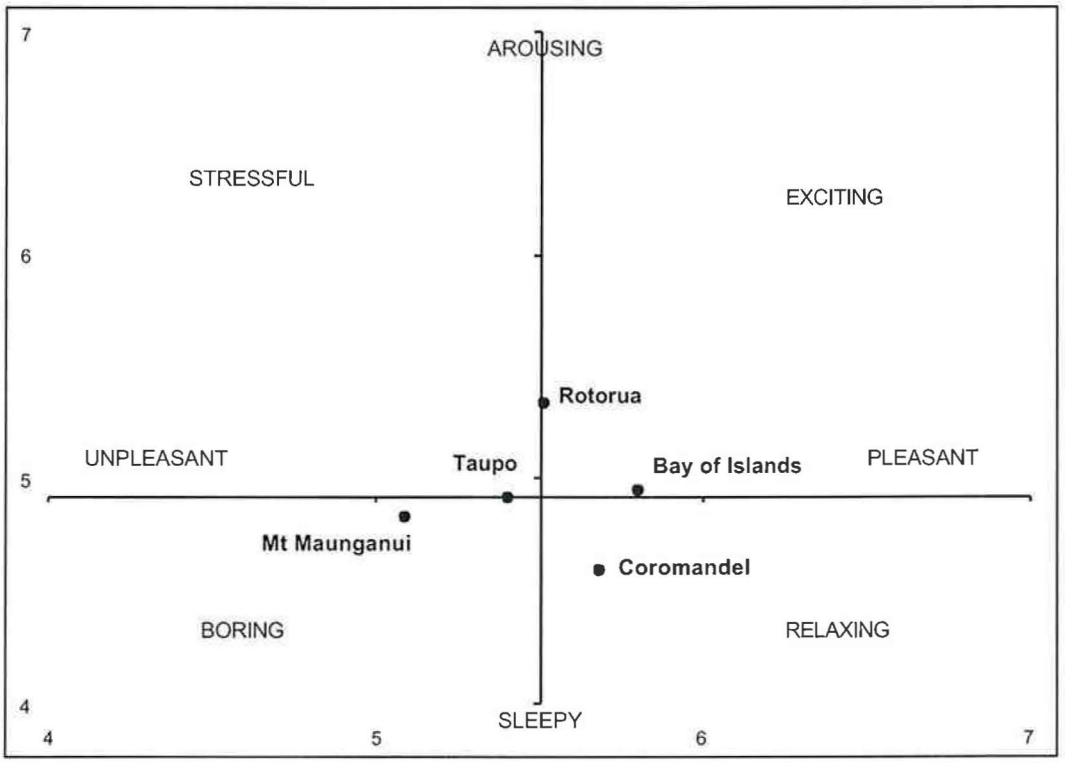


Figure 5 . Affective Response Matrix

The leadership positions of Rotorua and Coromandel were also reflected in the results for respondents' stated likelihood of visiting each destination. These are presented in Table 7. Also highlighted are the number of respondents who indicated a score above the scale mid-point. It can be seen that Coromandel and Rotorua performed strongest for this item, again consistent with the IPA and affect performances.

Table 7 . Likelihood of visiting each destination

	N	Mean	Std.	n=5,6 or 7	%
Coromandel	759	4.8	1.4	471	61.8
Rotorua	759	4.7	1.4	446	58.5
Bay of Islands	760	4.5	1.4	397	52.1
Taupo	755	4.4	1.4	383	50.1
Mt Maunganui	751	4.1	1.4	292	38.2

Conclusions

Effective positioning requires a succinct and focused message. Therefore, positioning a multi-attributed destination in dynamic and heterogenous markets presents a significant challenge for destination marketers. Positioning analysis requires an understanding of how a destination is perceived to perform on attributes deemed important to the target, relative to the competition. Two important implications of positioning theory confront the destination marketer. Firstly, which destination attributes should feature in positioning campaigns and which should be omitted? At a practical level the political ramifications of this decision process can be significant. Secondly, the research requirements to analyse the position held in the range of different markets and travel contexts of interest to stakeholders are likely to be prohibitive. Therefore would one succinct and focussed positioning theme meet the needs of all target markets?

The paper presents the results of an investigation of the positions held by a competitive set of domestic short break destinations in New Zealand. A feature was a comparison of cognitive and affective positioning techniques. Few studies of destination image have included the analysis of affective perceptions. In this case the affective response grid results were consistent with the cognitive perceptions as measured in a factor analytic IPA.

The results suggest four dimensions of short break destination attractiveness to the Auckland market. The leadership positions on these dimensions for two destinations were reinforced by the results for stated likelihood of visiting. Firstly, Coromandel was positioned as the destination offering opportunities to escape and recharge through relaxation. In terms of cognitive attributes Coromandel was perceived to perform strongly on the dimension labelled 'Getting away from it all', featuring 'places for walking/tramping', natural scenic beauty', 'not too touristy', 'ocean beaches' and 'friendly locals'. For affect, Coromandel was positioned as the most 'relaxing' of the five destinations. Secondly. Rotorua was positioned as the destination offering 'the good life/infrastructure', a cognitive dimension featuring 'good cafes/restaurants', 'suitable accommodation', 'hot pool bathing', good value for money' and 'shopping', For affect, Rotorua was positioned as the most 'exciting' and 'arousing' destination.

Intuitively these two dimensions of attractiveness reflected the geography of the two destinations. Rotorua was arguably New Zealand's first tourist destination, and has an established place on group tour itineraries due to a large range of commercial accommodation, attractions and amenities. Coromandel on the other hand features a less developed environment and a relatively small population who elected the New Zealand's first 'Green' Member of Parliament.

Coromandel's main promotional message is 'Escape to the Coromandel'. Given the results of this paper, this theme seems an entirely appropriate strategy for the Auckland short break market. Rotorua's message on the other hand is 'Feel the spirit...Manaakitanga', which is based on the traditional strengths of Maori culture and geothermal activity. This theme is used in all domestic and international markets. The results suggest that the theme may not be maximising the area's strengths as a short break destination in the Auckland market.

While the New Zealand travel context is acknowledged, the dimensions of short break destination attractiveness may be of interest to destination market researchers in other regions. Conceptually, the alignment of the factor-analytic IPA and the affective response grid provides an alternative option for destination positioning analysis.

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