

A positioning strategy for a tourist destination, based on analysis of customers' perceptions and satisfactions

A case of Kashmir, India

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Positioning
strategy for a
tourist
destination

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to measure the perception and satisfactions of consumers of the tourism product of Kashmir region and identify potential niche markets that could be used in the development of the destination's positioning strategy.

Design/methodology/approach – The author used a case study methodology. Self-completion questionnaires were distributed to tourists visiting Kashmir region at the peak of the 2018 tourism season. The scales used were adapted from two authoritative sources. Data from 479 completed questionnaires were analysed quantitatively by a variety of statistical techniques, including factor analysis.

Findings – Four possible niche markets are identified that can inform the development of the destination's positioning strategy: nature based, adventure, cultural and culinary. The overall conclusions and discussion of the findings should provide a case-based framework for the practical planning and implementation of positioning strategies in the tourism context.

Research limitations/implications – The time frame of the study was five summer months in one year, and only actual visitors completed the questionnaire. The study did not assess their evaluation of the quality of the services provided and consumed.

Originality/value – The overall conclusions and discussion of the findings should provide a case-based framework for the practical planning and implementation of positioning strategies in the tourism context.

Keywords Positioning, Customer satisfaction, Kashmir, Destination positioning, Customer perception

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Destinations are the centrepiece of tourism and are acknowledged to be one of the most difficult entities to manage and market. The multiplicity of components that make up the destination product, the complexity of the relationship that exists between them and the involvement of large number of stakeholders are the factors that make a destination more complex. The complexity is further increased when consumer is taken into consideration.



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Consumers of the destination product often differ in their perceptions, expectations and desired satisfaction of the tourism place. It is the customer who decide how and when they access their travel and tourism information and how and through what process they access and purchase their travel and tourism arrangements. Therefore, for destination to be a success, it requires to be positioned in the mind of the consumer through eliciting consumers' perception. [Ries and Trout \(1986\)](#) assert that marketing is more a battle of perceptions than of products and that the customers mind is more important than the market place and it is better to be first in the mind than to be first in the market place. It is, thus, imperative to understand the psychology of the consumers' i.e. consumers' perception.

As mentioned by [Blankson and Kalafatis \(2004\)](#) understanding the customer perspective is essential for the development of a positioning strategy. [Boatswain \(2015\)](#) and [Fuchs and Diamantopoulos \(2012\)](#) are also of the view that that if positioning strategies are based on examination of consumers' perceptions then they are successful strategies and could last longer and should be assessed by measuring consumers' perceptions and preferences for the product in relationship to its competitors. [Dibb et al. \(1997\)](#) also noted that positioning of any product is based on consumer's perceptions and marketers have only partial control of their products positioning in the marketplace. So positioning strategies designed by organisations for the destinations might fail when implemented if they are designed from the organization's perspective and not from the customers' perspective ([Brooksbank, 1994](#)). For this reason, the image or position a product has in the mind of the consumer is more important to success than the product itself ([Jamal and Goode, 2003](#)). This eventually necessitates this research to find a better method of understanding the destination positioning through eliciting consumers' perception.

Kashmir region is one of the most important and famous tourist destinations of India because of its strategic location and uniqueness. It possesses numerous tourist attractions varied in type and appealing to a wide range of interests. The attractions include historical, cultural, archaeological, scenic, climatic, culinary and adventure resources. However, in past decades Kashmir region has become one of the most vulnerable sectors to crises. Crises in region range from political instability, terrorist attacks, war, to various forms of natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods. So one of the biggest impediment to tourism industry in region is crisis and ineffective crises management plans in place ([Saqib, 2018](#)). According to [Beirman \(2003\)](#), long lasting series of crises poses almost a significant threat to the destinations public image and its ability to attract tourists and visitors in articulate and same is true for the region. The region unfortunately has a negative image in the minds of tourists, due to crisis ([Saqib, 2018](#)); therefore, it is necessary that tourism stakeholders and the government ensure to create a positive image through proper destination positioning and provide new opportunities to the region in becoming an attractive tourist destination all over the world.

Responding to the increase recognition on the importance of positioning for Kashmir tourism industry, this research will be an attempt to carry out a positioning exercise for the Kashmir region. This study uses the functional and psychological dimensions of customers' perception and satisfaction as the basis for formulating a destination's positioning strategy. Specifically, this study uses a case study approach to measures customers' images of Kashmir regions tourism products and the attributes that influence tourists' satisfaction, to identify specific niche markets that can be used in the development of the destination's positioning strategy.

Moreover, the primary review of the literature clearly indicates that there is a scope for carrying research on the positioning strategies for tourism industry in India, especially on the positioning strategies for tourism industry in Kashmir since there are not enough literatures on the positioning strategies for tourism industry in India which were published recently and to the best of our knowledge no researches/literature reviews were focussed on

highlighting the positioning strategies for tourism industry in Kashmir region. Hence, this case study will also address this gap in the literature.

The paper is divided into four sections: Section 2 provides a review of the extant literature of positioning strategy, destination image and tourist satisfaction; methodological discussion, including details of sampling procedures and data collection, is presented in Section 3; presentation and discussion of the research findings are given in Section 4; discussion of managerial implications and limitations are presented in Sections 5, 6 and 7.

2. Literature review

It is generally agreed that conceptually, practically and strategically positioning has become one of the fundamental components in modern marketing management, both from the academic point of view (Aaker and Shansby, 1982; Blankson and Kalafatis, 2004; Boatswain, 2015; Fuchs and Diamantopoulos, 2012; Urde and Koch, 2014) and from the practical or business point of view (Ries and Trout, 1986; Trout and Rivkin, 1996). It is because of its inevitable effect on profitability and long term success of the firm it has been applied to tourism destinations (Botha *et al.*, 1999; Claveria, 2016; Echtner and Ritchie, 1993, 2003; Evren and Kozak, 2018; Fyall, 2019; Ibrahim and Gill, 2005; Pike, 2012; Pike *et al.*, 2018; Pike and Ryan, 2004; Pike and Page, 2014; Tasci, 2011; Tasci *et al.*, 2007; Walmsley and Young, 1998; Zins, 2014).

The concept of positioning has a potential connection with destination in that a location is considered to be a product with brand image, loyalty or equity. Destination positioning is the centrepiece and the most critical element of all future efforts for the tourist and probably economic development of an area. This important form of market communication helps to distinguish tourism destinations from similar destinations so that customers can choose the one that is the most attractive. Thus, true positioning differentiates a destination from its competitors on attributes that are meaningful to customers and gives it a competitive edge (Chacko and Marcell, 2007).

Due to the rapidly increasing number of tourist destinations in the marketplace and since tourism destinations have become dedifferentiated with the effect of globalisation and modernisation. DMOs face the challenge of differentiating the tourist destination and the recognition of this differentiation by current and/or potential visitors (Dann, 2000; Evren and Kozak, 2018; Pike, 2012; Plog, 2000) and because of this dedifferentiation, an explicit positioning strategy is valuable in helping to create a distinctive place in the minds of potential tourists, so that they know how a destination differs from competitive destinations, and how it can satisfy their needs (Botha *et al.*, 1999).

Moreover, a major objective of any destination positioning strategy is to reinforce positive images already held by the target audience, correct negative images or create a new image. Therefore, according to Tasci, 2011, the first step of positioning a destination is the assessment of the image of destination attributes in current and potential target markets. Similarly, Reich (1999) is also of the view that the construct of image forms the foundation for the study of positioning and its basis is the perception or opinion that individuals have regarding both intrinsic and extrinsic elements.

Destination image has become a popular area of investigation among tourism researchers as it has been found to influence destination choice, satisfaction, and post-purchase behaviour (Munhurrana *et al.*, 2015; Zhang *et al.*, 2014). Destination image can be defined as a tourist's general impression of a destination (Fakeye and Crompton, 1991), that is, it is "sum of beliefs, ideals and impressions" that a visitor has toward a certain place (Assaker and Hallak, 2013). The image of a destination can have some impact on variables such as the satisfaction or dissatisfaction that a tourist derived from the destination. Chon and Olsen (1991) found that measuring an image by evaluating a list of attributes was significantly

correlated to satisfaction with a destination's products. [Ibrahim and Gill \(2005\)](#) also asserted that a two-way relationship exists between the image tourists have and the satisfaction they derive from their experience. This two-way relationship highlights the importance of placing more emphasis on the measurement/identification of customers' perception and satisfaction of a tourism product for positioning purposes. Although research examining customers' satisfaction with destinations' products and attributes is to be found in the marketing literature ([Crompton and Love, 1995](#); [Spreng *et al.*, 1996](#); [Cho, 1998](#); [Baker and Crompton, 2000](#)), very few research studies acknowledged such a two-way relationship and have attempted to combine the two variables of customer's perception and satisfaction together to inform the development of a destination's positioning strategy ([Ibrahim and Gill, 2005](#)). We believe that these two variables are important and can be combined together to identify the strongest functional and psychological attributes that can be used for positioning and promotion purposes. Therefore, we propose that the measurement of customers' perception and satisfaction when combined together can result in identifying specific niche markets, which can be used in developing and promoting an effective positioning strategy for a destination.

"Tourism satisfaction" refers to the degree to which a tourist's assessment of the attributes of that destination exceeds his or her expectations for those attributes ([Tribe and Snaith, 1998](#)). However, measuring satisfaction is a complex process. According to [Assaker and Hallak \(2013\)](#) and [Yoon and Uysal \(2005\)](#), tourist satisfaction can be measured based on the expectation/disconfirmation paradigm, equity theory, norm models and perceived overall performance. Of these theories, the expectation/disconfirmation theory are the most frequently used ([Kozak, 2001](#); [Skogland and Siguaw, 2004](#); [Hui Wan and Ho, 2007](#); [Chen and Chen, 2010](#)). According to [Chung and Petrick \(2012\)](#) the expectation/disconfirmation theory, which was developed by [Oliver \(1980\)](#), postulates that satisfaction is a result of the discrepancy between expectations and perceived performance. When the performance of a tourism destination, as perceived by the tourist, is higher (lower) than his/her expectations, a positive (negative) disconfirmation will result in satisfaction (dissatisfaction) ([Yoon and Uysal, 2005](#); [Hui *et al.*, 2007](#)). However, this conceptualisation has been problematic, particularly in tourism contexts ([Kozak, 2001](#); [Yuksel and Yuksel, 2001](#); [Millan and Esteban, 2004](#); [Hui *et al.*, 2007](#); [Petrick, 2004](#)). Due to the intangibility of tourism and leisure products, it has been argued that expectations are inevitably less concrete and less useful. [Yi \(1990\)](#) also claimed that the desires of the consumer, as the key determinants of satisfaction, have not been considered in previous research. [Spreng *et al.* \(1996\)](#), therefore, pointed out the necessity of using the concept of desire as a predictor of satisfaction. Desires indicate, "the attributes, levels of attributes, and benefits that the consumer believes will lead to or are connected with higher-level values" ([Spreng and Olshavsky, 1993](#)). [Baker and Crompton \(2000\)](#) also supported this view by indicating that factors such as desires, needs and disposition can influence the measurement of satisfaction'.

"Travel Attributes" are set of attributes that describe a place as a travel destination ([Heung and Quf, 2000](#)). There are several studies in consumer behaviour indicate that the customers consider the attributes to decide on the goods and the same applies to tourists and destinations. [Echtner and Ritchie \(1993\)](#) concluded in their research that every destination has a combination of functional or tangible attributes and psychological or abstract attributes. For example, a destination's image is comprised of beliefs about specific attributes such as accommodation, climate, ease of access, etc. as well as a more overall or holistic impression. The functional psychological dimension distinguishes between the parts of an image which are directly observable (e.g. prices) and those which are intangible (e.g. friendliness). The third element, common unique, recognises what is similar about a destination and what is distinctive about it. Similarly, [Cho \(1998\)](#) has identified a number of attributes that are most important in the measurement of tourists' satisfaction.

From the above literature, one can conclude that to ensure success for the positioning strategy of a destination, it is very much imperative that the image of the destination and the specific product attributes that satisfy the tourists should be identified. Therefore, the measurement of the customer's image of the tourism product (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993) and the satisfaction of the product attributes, combined with the identification of the tourist needs and desires in a tourist destination (Cho, 1998), can be seen as the basis for identifying specific niche markets for the development of a destination's positioning strategy (Ibrahim and Gill, 2005).

3. Method

We administered a survey consisting of the 37 items and demographic variables to tourists coming to Kashmir region at five famous tourist nodes of region (Pahlagam, Gulmarg, Sonamarg, Srinagar and Kokernag). For the present study, Comrey and Lee (1992) sample guidelines were followed. In total, 500 questionnaires were distributed and returned. After excluding cases with missing values, a total of 479 responses were retained for analysis. The participant profiles are shown in Table I.

3.1 Research variables and questionnaire structure

Destination image is typically measured using attribute scales and a structured semantic differential or Likert-scale type methodology (Crompton, 1979; Gartner and Hunt, 1987; Gartner, 1989; Hunt, 1975; Phelps, 1986; Richardson and Crompton, 1988). Ritchie and Goeldner (1987) suggested three basic approaches to constructing a scale. The first is to

Variables	Options	(%)
Gender	Male	54.4
	Female	45.6
Marital status	Married	38.2
	Unmarried	61.8
Age	18-27	26.5
	28-37	36.5
	38-47	16.7
	48-57	12.9
	58 years and over	7.4
Education	Postgraduate or above	52.1
	College level	33.1
	High school or technical school	14.8
	Below high school	—
Occupation	Student	22.3
	Government service	17.8
	Private service	26.2
	Self employed	29.3
	Others	4.4
Income	Below 20,0000	—
	20,0000-49,9999	34.7
	50,0000-99,9999	47.3
	10,0000 and above	18
Nationality	Indian	57
	Foreign (the UK, the USA, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan)	43

Table I.
Demographic profile
of respondents (Total
N = 479)

Source: Based on the primary data

select a scale that has been previously developed and tested by others. The second is to develop a scale either by modifying an existing scale or by introducing a new set of items. The third is to develop a new scale that is valid and reliable. Bearing this in mind, the two key variables customers' perception and satisfaction were used in the study. A 19-item scale used to measure customers' perception of the destination was adapted from [Echtner and Ritchie \(1993\)](#). This framework allows researchers to better measure destination images, measurements that are useful for positioning and promoting destinations. However, given the particular nature of the destination selected some minor modifications were made and more detailed items were added from prior studies of specifically urban destinations ([Choi et al., 1999](#)). Likewise the scale of satisfaction consisted of 18 items was adapted from [Cho \(1998\)](#) with modifications. Of all the studies reviewed, those carried out by [Echtner and Ritchie \(1993\)](#) and [Cho \(1998\)](#) were considered of special interest, due to his emphasising the importance of destination image to tourism as a whole. The questionnaire was structured into three sections comprising of open-ended and Likert scale questions, with a section designed to collect demographic data. The first section explored customers' perceptions, respondents were asked to rate the relative importance of the image attributes on the basis of five-point Likert scale, for example, "How important is scenic beauty for you" – on a scale of one to five (where 1 = *not at all important* and 5 = *very important*). The second section explored customers' satisfaction, respondents were asked to rate the relative importance of the satisfaction attributes again on the basis of five-point Likert scale, for example, "How important is safe and secure environment for you" on a scale of one to five (where 1 = *not at all important* and 5 = *very important*).

To capture the holistic and unique components, the questionnaire also comprised three open-ended questions:

- Q1. What images or characteristics come to your mind when you think of Kashmir as a vacation destination?
- Q2. How would you describe the atmosphere or mood that you would expect to experience while visiting Kashmir?
- Q3. List any distinctive or unique tourist attractions that you can think of in Kashmir. These questions were adapted directly from [Echtner and Ritchie \(1993\)](#) without modification.

4. Analysis and discussion

The two key variables of the study (customer perception and satisfaction) were analysed for the functional and psychological dimensions. The analysis of the open-ended questions was based on the approach of [Finn et al. \(2000\)](#). This required the grouping of similar responses from the open-ended questions and the categorising and labelling of the various descriptions provided by the respondents. This technique was used to identify the most frequent words or phrases used to describe the destination (Kashmir) and its image in the customer's mind. The analysis of the open-ended questions showed that the image of "breathtaking scenery" and "exotic beauty" is closely associated with Kashmir. The "friendly attitude" of the residents was another factor that was prominent as a destination image in the customer's mind, which supported the findings of [Echtner and Ritchie's \(1993\)](#). The most outstanding psychological attributes representing holistic image of the Kashmir region was its relaxing, friendly and laid-back atmosphere. The distinctive and unique attractions (functional attributes) perceived by the tourists were the "Majestic Mountains", "Dramatic Lakes", "Meadows", "Mughal Gardens" and "Flowing Water".

4.1 Customers' perception and destination image

The principal axis factor analysis with varimax rotation was used to reduce the 19 item perception attributes included in the questionnaire to measure tourists perception of Kashmir as tourist destination. The factor analysis results are shown in [Table II](#).

The suitability of the dataset for exploratory factor analysis was established through the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($p < 0.001$) and Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (0.832) (KMO) which justified the use of exploratory factor analysis. One important decision in the factor analysis is the number of factors to be extracted. By Kaisers criterion six factors (Eigen value greater than 1) could be extracted. However, this criterion is accurate when there are less than 30 variables and communalities after extraction are greater than 0.7 or when the sample size exceeds 250 and the average communality is greater than 0.6. None of the communalities exceeded the value of 0.7 and the average of the communalities was found to be below 0.6. So, on both grounds Kaiser's rule was not found to be accurate. However, considering the sample size of 479, Scree plot was used for deciding the number of factors to be extracted. To determine the "break", horizontal line and a vertical line was drawn starting from each end of the curve. In Scree plot ([Figure 1](#)) the point of inflexion occurred at the fourth data point the curve begins to flatten between factor 4 and 5; therefore, four factors were extracted.

Furthermore, the items having a loading score lower than 0.40 were excluded from the analysis ([Ford et al., 1986](#)) which ranged from 0.416 to 0.795. After a series of eliminations, 1 item was removed from the scale, 18 items remained and a distinct four-factor structure emerged. Combined factor loadings accounted for 50.237 per cent of the total variance in the factor pattern. For something to be labelled as a factor it should have at least 3 variables, although this depends on the design of the study ([Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007](#)). Factor

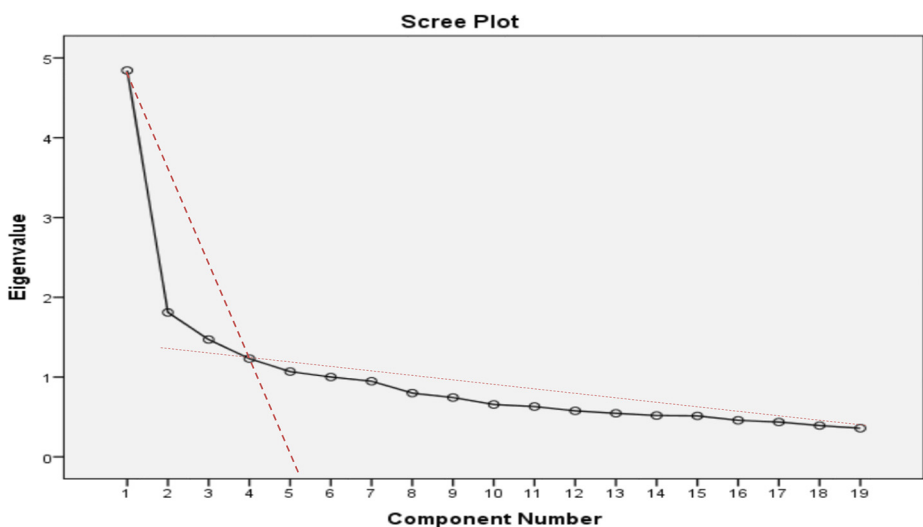
Factor items/statements	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Natural Scenic Beauty	0.705			
Beautiful Gardens , Parks and Meadows	0.666			
Flowing Water/Lakes	0.648			
Springs/Glaciers	0.617			
Pleasant Climate	0.561			
Wildlife *	0.365			
Snow Skiing		0.795		
Mountaineering/Trekking		0.683		
Water Rafting		0.655		
Golfing		0.622		
Pilgrimages			0.743	
Cultural and Historic Sites			0.734	
Variety of architectural styles			0.635	
Festivals/Events			0.537	
Local Cuisine (food and drink)				0.645
Convenient shopping				0.624
Good quality of products				0.528
Local Art and Craft				0.486
Wide variety of products				0.416
<i>Eigen value</i>	<i>2.896</i>	<i>2.501</i>	<i>1.983</i>	<i>1.974</i>
<i>Percentage of variation</i>	<i>15.249</i>	<i>13.161</i>	<i>10.439</i>	<i>10.389</i>
<i>Cumulative percentage</i>	<i>15.249</i>	<i>29.410</i>	<i>39.848</i>	<i>50.237</i>

Note: Factor loadings below the 0.40 (asterisk marked) were eventually excluded from further analysis

Source: Based on the primary data

Table II.
Components of image
variable as yielded
by factor analysis

Figure 1.
Scree plot for image
variable



names are based on the characteristics of its composing variables. The attributes that load high on factor 1 seem to all relate to nature, scenery and beauty; therefore, the factor was labelled as natural attractions. The attributes that load high on factor 2 seem to all relate to different aspects of outdoor activities and sports therefore, the factor was labelled as adventure and sports. The five questions that were found to load highly on factor 3 were related to the cultural and historical attractions and thus factor was labelled as cultural/historical attractions. Finally, the questions that load highly on factor 4 consisted of some component related to the food and shopping; therefore, this factor was labelled as culinary and shopping attractions. The resulting four factors are shown in [Table III](#).

4.2 Customer satisfaction

The 18-attribute statements of the satisfaction variable were also analysed using the principal axis factor analysis with varimax rotation. The factor analysis results and associated statistics are shown in [Table IV](#). Prior to the extraction of the factors, several tests were used to assess the suitability of the respondent data for factor analysis. These tests include KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The KMO for the customer satisfaction variables was found to be 0.789, which falls in the range of being great. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was also found highly significant ($p < 0.001$), and therefore factor analysis was appropriate. The Scree-Plot test ([Figure 2](#)) was used to decode the number of factors to be retained. This exercise resulted in the extraction of three factors.

Furthermore, the items having a loading score lower than 0.40 were excluded from the analysis ([Ford et al., 1986](#)) which ranged from 0.417 to 0.927. After a series of eliminations, 2 items were removed from the scale, 15 items remained and a distinct three-factor structure emerged. Combined factor loadings accounted for 54.913 per cent of the total variance in the factor pattern. The attributes that load high on factor 1 seem to all relate to security; therefore, the factor was labelled as safety. The attributes that load high on factor 2 seem to all relate to different aspects of service, ambience and mood therefore, the factor was labelled as service and atmosphere. The four questions that were found to load highly on factor 3

Table III.
Positioning
strategies for a
tourist destination

S.no.	Factor/strategy name	Statements
1	Natural Attractions	Natural scenic beauty ; Beautiful Gardens , Parks and Meadows; Flowing water and Lakes; Springs and Glaciers; and Pleasant climate
2	Adventures and Sports	Mountaineering and trekking ; Water rafting; Snow Skiing; and Golfing
3	Cultural Attractions	Cultural and historic sites ; Variety of architectural styles; Pilgrimages; and Festivals/Events
4	Shopping and Dining	Local Cuisine ; Local Art and craft Convenient shopping; and Good quality of products
5	Safety	Safety at a tourist spot, Personal Safety and Safety at a place of stay
6	Service and Atmosphere	Restful and relaxing atmosphere; Quiet and peaceful atmosphere; Fairness of cost at tourist spots; Value for money; Good quality hotels and restaurants; Fairness of cost at place of stay; and Attitude of staff at place of stay
7	Environment and Infrastructure	Clean/unspoiled environment; Local Infrastructure; Good local transportation system; Availability of travel information; and Easy access to the area

Factors items/ statements	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor3
Safety at the tourist spots	0.927		
Personal Safety	0.927		
Safety at the place of stay	0.533		
Friendly and helpful local people		0.678	
Restful and relaxing atmosphere		0.660	
Quiet and peaceful environment		0.566	
Fairness of cost at tourists spots		0.563	
Value for money		0.543	
Good quality hotels and restaurants		0.526	
Attitude of staff at place of stay		0.520	
Fairness of cost at place of stay		0.486	
Skills of tourist guides*		0.396	
Clean/unspoiled environment			0.637
Local Infrastructure			0.612
Good local transportation system			0.583
Availability of travel information			0.448
Easy access to the area			0.417
Other civic infrastructure*			0.390
<i>Eigen value</i>	<i>3.141</i>	<i>2.492</i>	<i>2.451</i>
<i>Percentage of variation</i>	<i>17.451</i>	<i>13.843</i>	<i>13.619</i>
<i>Cumulative percentage</i>	<i>17.451</i>	<i>34.294</i>	<i>54.913</i>

Table IV.
Components of
satisfaction variable
as yielded by factor
analysis

Note: Factor loadings below the 0.40 (asterisk marked) were eventually excluded from further analysis

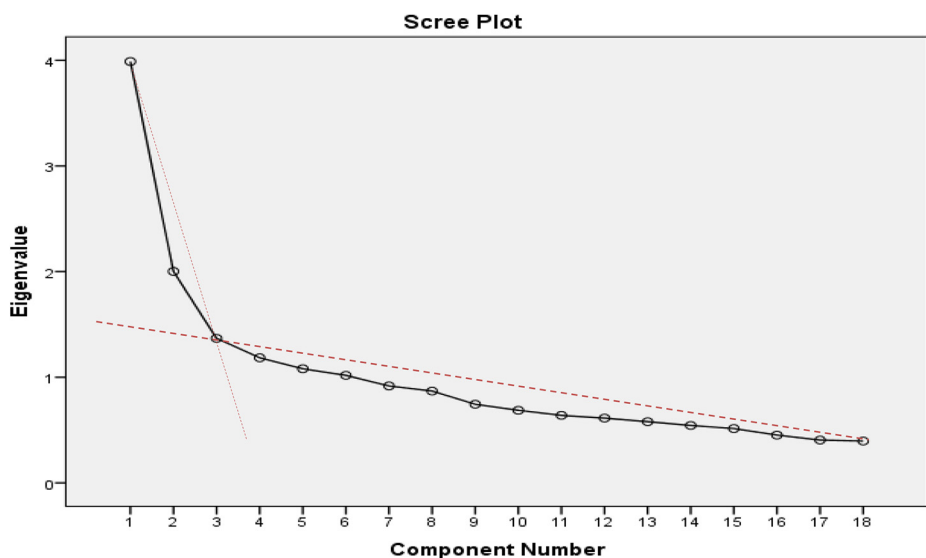
Source: Based on the primary data

were related to the environment, infrastructure and thus factor was labelled as environment and infrastructure. The resulting four factors are shown in [Table III](#).

4.3 Reliability and validity

4.3.1 Reliability. To establish the reliability of the positioning taxonomy two Cronbach's coefficient indices, i.e. the alpha value and item-to-total correlations, were utilised. This

Figure 2.
Scree plot for
satisfaction variables



study considered an alpha value of 0.6 or more as satisfactory. This bearing is supported by (Dekovic *et al.*, 1991; Diwan and Bodla, 2011; Holden *et al.*, 1991; Malhotra and Dash, 2009; Nhat and Hau, 2007; Tull and Hawkins, 1993) who confirmed that alpha value of 0.6 under each factor, indicated good internal consistency among items. The reliability of extracted factors ranged from 0.639 to 0.761 for image scale and 0.604 to 0.849 for satisfaction scale thus, they lie within the acceptable range, with strength ranging from good to excellent. The results of the reliability test of the scales used in the main survey are presented in Tables V and VI. The acceptable benchmark level of item-to-total correlation was set above 0.3 and all items contained item-to-total correlation above the benchmark value as a result none was removed.

4.3.2 Validity. In the present study, the validity of the research constructs/dimensions has been tested through content validity and nomological validity.

4.3.2.1 Content validity. Was strengthened through an extensive review of the literature and also before collecting data; one expert majoring in tourism management and two experts (both had industry experience in destination marketing organisations) were invited to assess the content and relevance of the 37 items. These three experts were invited to evaluate the appropriateness of the dimensions and items, as well as the wording of the item content. During face-to-face discussions, they revised certain items to achieve mutual consent. They also provided recommendations for correcting the wording of the item content and for whether items should be added or removed. The revisions made to the pre-test questionnaire in this study were based on these recommendations. Finally, 37 items were adopted for the formal survey.

4.3.2.2 Nomological validity. The importance of establishing nomological validity has also been well documented (Bagozzi *et al.*, 1991; Hair *et al.*, 2010; Netemeyer *et al.*, 2003). Given the congruence of existing positioning strategies the nomological validity of the scale was assured.

Factors	Corrected item-total correlation	Cronbach's Alpha Value
<i>Factor 1</i>		0.727
Natural Scenic Beauty	0.560	
Beautiful Gardens , Parks and Meadows	0.491	
Flowing Water/Lakes	0.537	
Springs/Glaciers	0.444	
Pleasant Climate	0.411	
Wildlife*		
<i>Factor 2</i>		0.761
Snow Skiing	0.558	
Mountaineering/Trekking	0.563	
Water Rafting	0.605	
Golfing	0.514	
<i>Factor 3</i>		0.639
Pilgrimages	0.539	
Cultural And Historic Sites	0.414	
Variety of Architectural Styles	0.348	
Festivals/Events	0.394	
<i>Factor 4</i>		0.696
Local Cuisine (Food And Drink)	0.502	
Convenient Shopping	0.383	
Good Quality of Products	0.375	
Local Art and Craft	0.339	
Wide Variety of Products*	0.415	

Note: * Item already eliminated due to low factor loading (Table II)

Source: Based on the primary data

Table V.
Reliability analysis
for image scale

5. Results of the study

5.1 Positioning strategies

The factor analysis resulted in seven factors which can be labelled as positioning strategies. Table IV gives a summary of the main extracted factors and their labelling. The description of each positioning strategy is given as follows.

5.1.1 Factor/strategy 1: natural attractions. Natural attraction (Factor 1) contained five attributes and explained 15.249 per cent of the variance in the data, with an eigenvalue of 2.896. The attributes associated with this factor dealt with the “Natural scenic beauty”, “Beautiful gardens, parks and meadows”, “Flowing Water and Lakes”, “Springs and Glaciers and “Pleasant Climate”. This factor measures the sensational pleasure of the sight. The consumers who scored high on these attributes/statements were nature loving. The highest loading (0.705) item was “Natural scenic beauty” highlighting the importance of “scenery” in the consumer perception of a tourist destination. Positioning on the basis of “natural attractions” emerged as a main strategy in this study.

5.1.2 Factor/strategy 2: adventure and sports. Adventure and sports (Factor 2) accounted for 13.161 per cent of the variance, with an eigenvalue of 2.501, the factor focuses on outdoor high adrenaline experience. This factor was loaded with four attributes that referred to “Mountaineering/Trekking”, “Snow Skiing”, “Water Rafting” and “Golfing”. Respondents who scored high on this factor were more concerned about getting adventure as they believe that holiday should be adventurous. The item “snow skiing” indicates the highest loading (0.795) in this factor reflecting the opportunity for winter tourism. Mountaineering/

Table VI.
Reliability analysis
for satisfaction scale

Factors	Corrected item-total correlation	Cronbach's alpha value
<i>Factor 1</i>		0.849
Safety at the tourist spots	0.879	
Personal Safety	0.879	
Safety at the place of stay	0.454	
<i>Factor 2</i>		0.740
Friendly and helpful local people	0.518	
Restful and relaxing atmosphere	0.500	
Quiet and peaceful environment	0.409	
Fairness of cost at tourists spots	0.339	
Value for money	0.432	
Good quality hotels and restaurants	0.493	
Attitude of staff at place of stay	0.449	
Fairness of cost at place of stay	0.347	
Skills of tourist guides*		
<i>Factor 3</i>		0.604
Clean/unspoiled environment	0.436	
Local Infrastructure	0.384	
Good local transportation system	0.343	
Availability of travel information	0.332	
Easy access to the area	0.303	
Other civic infrastructure*		

Note: * Item already eliminated due to low factor loading ([Table IV](#))
Source: Based on the primary data

trekking water rafting and golfing have also obtained relatively high factor loadings. This indicates that tourism stakeholders need to give importance to adventure tourism.

5.1.3 Factor/strategy 3: cultural attraction. Cultural attraction (Factor 3) contained four attributes that referred to cultural dimensions. This factor explained 10.439 per cent of the variance, with an eigenvalue of 1.983. The attributes were “Cultural and Historic Sites”, “Variety of Architectural Styles”, “Pilgrimages” and “Festivals/Events”. Among these features, the highest loading (0.743) is found in the case of “pilgrimages” which gives an evidence of the importance of the religious tourism. Thus, a marketer has large scope to position Kashmir on the basis of this strategy for the domestic tourist who likes to visit Kashmir.

5.1.4 Factor/strategy 4: shopping and dining. Shopping and dining (Factor 4) contained five attributes that referred to local cuisine and art and craft. This factor explained 10.389 per cent of the variance, with an eigenvalue of 1.974. These attributes were “Local cuisine”, “Convenient shopping”, “Local art and craft” and “Good quality of products”. The craze about the Kashmir cuisine is reflected in this factor. Cuisine attained the highest scoring (0.645) followed by shopping (0.624). Therefore, marketers should focus on culinary tourism.

5.1.5 Factor/strategy 5: safety. Safety (Factor 5) contained three attributes and explained 17.451 per cent of the variance in the data, with an eigenvalue of 3.141. These attributes were “Safety at a tourist spot”, “Personal safety” and “Safety at a place of stay”. Among all the 37 items considered in this survey, “safety at a tourist spot” (0.927) and personal safety (0.927) are two top scorers (i.e. highest factor loadings) which substantiate the importance of this factor. This indicates that there is an immediate need for positioning Kashmir as a safe destination.

5.1.6 Factor/strategy 6: service and atmosphere. Service and atmosphere (Factor 6) accounted for 13.843 per cent of the variance, with an eigenvalue of 2.492. The factor was

loaded with eight attributes that referred “Friendly and helpful local people”, “Restful and relaxing atmosphere”, “Quiet and peaceful atmosphere”, “Fairness of cost at tourist spots”, “Value for money”, “Good quality hotels and restaurants”, “Fairness of cost at place of stay” and “Attitude of staff at place of stay” Among various attributes comprised by the factor, the highest loading (0.678) was of “friendly and helpful local people” followed by restful and relaxing atmosphere (0.660). This indicates that there is a need for social group interactions or friendly people were high on their lists and the need to be in an environment conducive to relaxation was essential to tourists.

5.1.7 Factor/strategy 7: environment and infrastructure. Environment and Infrastructure (Factor 7) contained six attributes. This factor explained 13.619 per cent of the variance, with an eigenvalue of 2.451. These attributes were “Clean/unspoiled environment”, “Local infrastructure”, “Good local transportation system”, “Availability of travel information” and “Easy access to the area”. The respondents who scored high on this factor believed that Clean/unspoiled environment (0.637) and local Infrastructure (0.612) are more important considerations.

5.2 Niche markets

5.2.1 Nature-based tourism. The results of the study reveals that Kashmir is still considered as a “Paradise on Earth”, the high scores were gained for the items like Natural scenic beauty (0.705), Beautiful garden, parks and meadows (0.666), Flowing water and lakes (0.648), Springs and Glaciers (0.617). Thus, among seven identified Image Positioning Strategies, “Natural Attractions” emerged as the top positioning strategy for Kashmir. In support of this finding, several other studies have found that natural attractions as a potential “pull” factor for tourists. [Gearing et al. \(1974\)](#), while measuring the attractiveness of Turkey, found that “Natural Beauty” was ranked the highest. This was also supported by [Var et al. \(1977\)](#) by studying attractiveness of British Columbia. Their study showed that “Natural Beauty” and “Climate” are two major factors that contribute to the attractiveness of the region. [Ritchie and Zins \(1978\)](#) measured the attractiveness of a destination and also found that, of the eight attributes evaluated, natural beauty and climate were ranked the most important. In an attempt to identify tourist preferences for a specific category of attractions in Southern Africa, [Ferrario \(1979\)](#) found strong emphasis on “Scenery and Landscape”, “Wildlife”, and “Natural Vegetation”. [Elwin \(1989\)](#) found “Climate” to be one of the most significant components for the enjoyment of outdoor tourism activities. Also, [Meinung \(1989\)](#) pointed out that the landscape, its natural form, is the most important factor in attracting visitors to any tourist region. [Tang and Rochananond \(1990\)](#) also support this in their comparison the attractiveness of 32 tourist destinations. They found that all respondents considered natural beauty and climate important. Similarly, [Hu and Ritchie's \(1993\)](#) investigated destination attractiveness and found that Views, Scenery, and ‘Climate’ were evaluated the most attractive by the visitors [Weber \(1997\)](#) studied tourist satisfaction of the German travel market in Australia and found that variables such as “Spectacular Landscapes” and “Watching Unique Fauna” were rated highest. Moreover, according to [Vaughan and Edwards \(1999\)](#) study of tourists experiential perceptions of two winter sun destinations, Algarve and Cyprus, “Climate” was the most important factor in tourists selection of the destination. [Morachat \(2003\)](#) in his study found that the Natural Factors’ of Chiang Mai such as climate, water, and vegetation, as being highly attractive.

The region must exploit its own unique natural attributes that create a competitive advantage and assist in positioning its products more effectively in the tourism market. The results of the present study identified the functional unique imagery of the destination in customer’s mind as mountains, lakes, flowing waters and meadows. In addition, the unique

psychological attributes were identified as the relaxing environment and the friendly local people. Thus, the combination of the functional and psychological attributes would suggest a nature based tourism niche that can provide a competitive advantage, this niche can effectively be used in the destination's positioning strategy and promoted as a lucrative niche. To ensure that the customers' needs are met an ambience promoting rest and relaxation should be developed to support this niche.

5.2.2 Adventure tourism. Several authors have found that there is a growth in demand for adventure tourism (Williams and Soutar, 2009). The "outdoor activities" factor includes mountaineering and trekking water rafting, snow skiing and other family activities. These attributes can be classified as an adventure tourism niche. This niche can effectively be used in the destination's positioning strategy to assist in minimising the seasonality associated with the current mass tourism strategy by scheduling sports activities during low season to attract more tourists to the destination like snow skiing during winter season. In support of this finding, Kozak (2002) found that some tourists might visit a destination in the summer season just to relax, but others in the winter to seek adventure. According to Uysal and Jurowski (1994), Klenosky (2002) and Mohammad and Som (2010), adventure tourism is a "pull" factor for tourists. Also Ibrahim and Gill (2005) pointed out that adventurous atmosphere particularly water sports was a leading attribute that could be created for Barbados tourists.

To ensure that this niche is developed to its full potential, the services and environmental conditions that contribute to the satisfaction of the tourists should be promoted. The infrastructure and equipment for adventure sports combined with such with the socially accommodating nature of local people can support this niche.

5.2.3 Cultural tourism. Cultural tourism is a vital aspect which appeals tourists to visit as well as revisit to Kashmir. High scores were gained for this factor during the study. In support of this finding, several other studies have found that cultural uniqueness is a potential "pull" factor for tourists. Zeppel and Hall (1992) and Zhang and Lam (1999) found cultural attractions constitute the bases which appeals tourist. Ritchie and Zins (1978) found that attractiveness in terms of "Cultural Features" was ranked second to "Natural Attributes" in their destination study. Hu and Ritchie (1993) investigated that among educational vacation experience was the uniqueness of way of life of the local population, and historical attractions. Kim (1998) found that the seasonal and cultural attractiveness of Korea was rated the most attractive. Similarly, Ibrahim and Gill (2005) found that the cultural attractiveness of Barbados like interesting caves and cultural and historic sites were rated most attractive.

Rittichainuwat *et al.* (2001) found that of the thirty-one selected attributes, "Architecture and Buildings", "Interesting Customs and Culture" and "Numerous Cultural" and "Historical Attractions" were ranked the highest. Kozak (2002) also found "Cultural Motivations" the highest scores among German travellers in Mallorca. Similarly, the most important features of Chiang Mai Province in terms of their attractiveness to overseas visitors are "Cultural Features" (Morachat, 2003).

5.2.4 Culinary tourism. The distinctiveness of Kashmir food is an opportunity for Kashmir tourism sector to become a culinary tourism destination. High scores were gained for local cuisine; this suggests that Kashmir food can serve as an attraction for tourists. Thus, to enhance positive images and tourists satisfaction, it is essential for Kashmir to exert an effective positioning strategy to promote Kashmiri ethnic food worldwide. Kim *et al.* (2009) assert that the desire to travel and taste unique and authentic dishes is becoming one of the biggest paradigms in the tourism industry. Few years ago, food events were not considered a reason to travel, but with the popularity of the Food Network and the star chef phenomenon, such events are being recognised as attractions in and of themselves (Peers, 2006). According to Canizares and Canalejo (2015), local cuisine is an important tourist

attraction and an essential element in the way people experience a destination. It is also a non-seasonal activity that can help reactivate the economies of certain regions. [Sormaza et al. \(2016\)](#) are also of the view that Gastronomic/culinary tourism supports regional development by setting the link between food and beverages and tourism and strengthens local identity and culture as well as financial conditions [Hjalager and Richards \(2002\)](#) are of the opinion that destinations can capitalise on elements of culinary tourism unique to their community for destination image building. Culinary experiences can add value to tourism by providing the tourist with a link between local culture, landscape and food, and by creating an “atmosphere” so essential to a memorable travel experience. [Boyne et al. \(2003\)](#), [Hall and Mitchell \(2005\)](#), [Lin et al. \(2011\)](#), [Okumus et al. \(2013\)](#) and [Yurtseven and Kaya, \(2011\)](#) also supports that local food as a means of differentiating tourist destinations.

However, the successful promotion of these niches in the destination’s positioning strategy requires accommodating tourists in safe and secure environments. Safety is a major concern for tourists and people would not travel to a location believed to be unsafe ([Davidoff and Davidoff \(1994\)](#), [Ali et al. \(2018\)](#) concluded that physical security is an effective measure for improvement of the destination’s image.

The restful and relaxing atmosphere is also an influencing factor for tourists. The results of the present study indicate that there is a need to create an environment conducive to relaxation; this is also supported by study of [Mansfeld \(1992\)](#), [Ibrahim and Gill \(2005\)](#) and the friendly attitude of the residents was another factor that was prominent as a destination image in the customer’s mind, thus supporting the findings of [Echtner and Ritchie’s \(1993\)](#), [Hu and Ritchie \(1993\)](#), [Ibrahim and Gill \(2005\)](#), [Rittichainuwat et al. \(2001\)](#), [Vaughan and Edwards \(1999\)](#), [Yuksel and Yuksel \(2001\)](#).

In relation to fairness of price at tourist spots and place of stay which scored high in the tourist satisfaction in the current study is in consistent with the study conducted by [Gnoth and Paulin \(1995\)](#) that price of goods or services influences tourists’ patronage decisions.

Good Infrastructure is also an influencing factor for tourist visiting Kashmir; this finding is consistent with findings of [Masterson and Verhoven’s \(1995\)](#) wide range of accommodation facilities influence tourists satisfaction.

The results, in general, support what was proposed earlier in the literature that the assessment of customer’s perception and satisfaction can play a significant role in identifying attributes that can effectively contribute to the development of the destination’s positioning strategy.

6. Managerial implications

The results of present case study will provide academics, researchers and practitioners working in tourist destination with new insights towards the attributes of the destinations and their role in destination positioning. Since the results indicated that the most important factor that influenced tourists’ satisfaction was the safety, it is recommended that tourism managers should ensure the provision of safety accompany the selected niche markets. It will also help tourism marketers to better understand their customers and hence contribute significantly to the process of planning a destination’s positioning strategy, i.e. it will help the destination to position it differently from the competing destinations and gain a competitive edge.

This study is also important for tourism policy makers, practitioners, and academic researchers interested in tourism in North India. Moreover, the results of this study can provide tourism-marketing researchers, policymakers of the Kashmir region with an insight into the choice of appropriate niche markets based on the unique attributes of the destination, which can differentiate it in the tourist’s minds and also meet the customer’s demand. This example of the measurement of customers’ perceptions and satisfaction with the destination’s attributes

can serve as groundwork for future research into the more specific niche markets that satisfy the needs of the target tourists. Further research is also called for into the specific places and activities preferred by different market segments.

7. Limitations

A number of limitations should be acknowledged here to inform future research:

- The time frame of the study was five summer months in one year, which permitted only summer tourists to be surveyed. Thus, the respondents' views would only be those of a particular set of tourists and not representative of year round tourism.
- Measurement of image was limited to the tourists currently visiting the destination and excluded the potential tourists. Thus, the image measured in this study corresponds to the complex image as explained by [Fakeye and Crompton \(1991\)](#).
- The satisfaction of the tourist was based on the feelings after exposure to the destination attributes. However, evaluations of the quality of the services provided were not considered in the study.

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