



User-Generated Brand Image of National Parks: A Comparative Analysis of Visitor Reviews in France and Malaysia

Anna Onyshchenko *¹

¹Kedge Business School, Marseille, France.

KEYWORDS

*Destination brand
User-Generated Content
Perceived brand
Google Reviews*

ARTICLE HISTORY

*Received 8 August 2025
Received in revised form
2 June 2026
Accepted 16 June 2026
Available online
30 June 2026*

ABSTRACT

National parks like any tourism destination have unique brand images that are shaped by multiple stakeholders. It is crucial to understand the perceived brand image as it influences the visitation rate, customer satisfaction and long-term success. This study investigates the perceived brand image of 16 national parks in France and Malaysia by analyzing 160 Google Maps reviews. The reviews were manually collected and analyzed through a three-step approach grounded in Stimulus-Organism-Response framework - descriptive, content and thematic analysis to construct the image from reviews. The findings revealed that perceptions of national parks differ across cultures. French national parks are seen as untouched places of nature primarily for hiking, while Malaysian parks are perceived in combination of nature with experiences such as guided tours and boat rides, that changes the expectations and are influenced by the fee structure. This study proposes a new approach to identifying the perceived brand image through textual UGC. It addresses the gap in research of national parks in Malaysia and France adding to existing research on cross-cultural comparative analysis of brand image through UGC and provides practical implications to park managers.

© 2026 The Authors. Published by Penteract Technology.

This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA 4.0 license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

1. INTRODUCTION

National parks are a unique travel destination that present visitors with the possibility of experiencing preserved nature. As any travel destination all national parks have their own brand image, and the goal of this study is to analyze this brand image on the example of national parks from two different countries namely Malaysia and France.

The countries were chosen as they provide two culturally and geographically distinct contexts, with different governance systems. According to Hall (1976) Malaysia is a high-context culture, where communication is contextual and indirect, while France is a low-context culture with explicit and direct communication. This distinction is relevant to this study as it has impact on the way people in those cultures write reviews and share their experiences. Geographically, Malaysia represents a tropical Southeast Asian environment, while France is an example of a temperate European climate. On top of that, the countries have two distinct governance systems when it comes to national parks. In France the parks are

governed by the national government, whereas in Malaysia parks fall under the jurisdiction of local states and have many involved stakeholders. All this makes two countries a meaningful example of distinct context suitable for a cross-cultural study.

Brand image is a crucial aspect of any brand and has a strong influence on the popularity of the tourist locations as a strong brand image can attract visitors and vice versa the weak brand image can hold off the visitors.

The present study aims to enrich the current literature of perceived brand images of tourism locations by exploring the methods that can be used to extract brand image from visitor reviews in order to help stakeholders understand the perceived brand image with the goal of aligning the official brand image to it.

The following research question acts as the basis for the study:

*Corresponding author:

E-mail address: Anna Onyshchenko <annaonv@gmail.com>.

<https://doi.org/10.56532/mjbem.v5i1.167>

2948-4928/ © 2026 The Authors. Published by Penteract Technology.

This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA 4.0 license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>).

“How do visitors of national parks in Malaysia and France perceive and communicate their experiences through Google Maps reviews and what brand image associations can be identified?”

The primary source for assessing the brand image through user-generated content (UGC) was chosen to be Google Maps reviews. Google Maps was selected as a source since they allow for a wide range of opinions of people from different backgrounds and provide a sufficient dataset for cross-cultural research.

First an analysis of literature, particularly focused on the destination branding, UGC and national park branding will be presented along with the theoretical framework that will be the base of this research. Next a methodology section will explain the data collection and analysis process. Finally, a findings part will present the results of the three-step analysis: descriptive statistics, content and thematic analysis, following with a discussion of the results and the implications of this cross-cultural research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Destination Brand Image

Branding is a well-researched domain that spans across private and public brands. The main challenge that destination management organizations (DMOs) face in the curation of brand image is the multitude of stakeholders that are involved (Pike, 2005). This is also curated in other research by prominent scholars like Anholt (2007) who also argue that different stakeholders often create different brand images, which leads to a fragmented perception. For a brand it is very important to understand the perceived brand image of the customers, that is what the people think of a place and how they imagine it. This is crucial as to avoid a big gap between the projected (official) brand image and the perceived brand image and thus is a very important area of research. Both Anholt and Pike agree on the importance of understanding perceived brand notion, however they do not propose any actionable ways to identify such perceptions. A more contemporary approach focuses on this analysis, as for example, a study by Geyer et al. (2024) that uses UGC in the form of Instagram posts to understand the perceived brand image and compares it to the official posts from tourism agencies to see the similarities in the brand image and brand elements. This research supports previous studies by concluding on the importance of analyzing visitor experiences. In all, the studies on brand image highlight the importance in the differences between perceived and projected images.

2.2 Branding of National Parks

National parks are not only places of nature but organized and marketed places with storytelling, expectations and an image. They differ from branding of cities and destinations, because of the nature of their organization, since most national parks are government owned and managed. This on one hand lowers the number of stakeholders that are generally involved in place branding, although it doesn't eliminate all of them. On the other hand, it makes it more complicated since not always there are private stakeholders involved and all the strain falls on the public management.

The research on the branding of the national parks is rather limited with few emerging themes. Some research deals with

national parks being akin to territorial brands and the co-influence between parks and local products (Ferrari, 2020; Pizzichini, Temperini, & Gregori, 2020). They analyze the connection in the consumer's mind between the park brand and the brands of local products from the same geographical area, however such research limits the importance of the park brand itself, by tying it to other brands. Another set of research focuses on analyzing a single territory, park or country and analyzes the way that the branding could be improved. Some examples are but are not limited to nature branding in Montenegro (Jankovic et al., 2019), branding of Lake District Heritage Site in United Kingdom (Porter, 2020) and construction of brand strategies of the national Parks in Spain (Ruiz & Santamarina, 2023). Those researchers agree that attributes of the park, such as flora, fauna, and landscape should be used in branding of natural parks. Most of overall research focuses on the ways the branding strategies are or should be implemented by affected stakeholders. They are limited in a way that they create national park branding based on the attributes of the park rather than on the way visitors perceive their experiences in those parks, which is a prominent gap in research. Moreover, the studies are usually done within one location, which limits the results, rather than a cross-country analysis.

2.3 User-Generated Content

User-Generated Content (UGC) is described by Daugherty et al. (2008) as “*media content created or produced by the general public rather than by paid professionals and primarily distributed on the Internet.*”. UGC is now playing a crucial role, that goes beyond just being content that is posted on social media. Multiple recent studies confirmed that UGC in destination marketing increases visit intentions to places (Yamagishi et al., 2024; Khaled et al., 2025), signifying the growing role users play in shaping the industry.

There have been found multiple reasons why UGC increases visitor intentions to destinations. One of the emerging answers is that UGC is considered more reliable by the people and less biased than content created by destination brands (Yamagishi et al., 2024). Asyraf et al. (2024) use the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model to demonstrate how different dimensions of UGC influence tourist perceptions and behavioural intentions in the Malaysian context. The results of the study showed that information quality affects the cognitive image while contextual information shapes the affective image. This research highlights the importance of analyzing both the thematic aspects and the emotional undertones as they both play a direct role in impacting the tourist's intentions and behaviours. However, it is limited in the way that it is applied to one country context, and there is a lack of comparative analysis.

The sum of the research of UGC highlights the importance of such content in shaping visitor perceptions and the way it can impact the behaviours, however there is a gap in the lack of a replicable framework that can help identify the brand image of place through textual UGC. As of now there is no literature that would delve into the potential UGC has on branding and how the DMOs can categorize and utilize branding elements that come from public visitor review. Additionally, currently no literature compares the perceptions of visitors in two very distinct cultural contexts – Malaysia and France.

Overall, research on destination branding lacks concrete tools that would help in identifying the perceived brand image, national park branding ignores visitor perception as part of the branding and UGC provides a potential to act as a tool used to understand the perceived brand image. Therefore, this study sits at the crossroads of three main bodies of literature.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

To examine how visitors perceive and communicate their experiences and what associations can be identified, the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) was used. It explains the way external cues that act as input (Stimulus), affect individual's cognitive and affective state (Organism), that results in the changes of the way that individual behaves (Response). This framework has already been applied to the tourism industry and user's behaviour by Asyraff et al. (2024). This study seeks to expand the research by using SOR framework and applying it to user-generated reviews as Stimulus, in the way it affects individual's perceptions (Organism) and finally how it shapes the perceived brand image of national parks (Response) in Malaysian and French contexts and is presented in Figure 1.

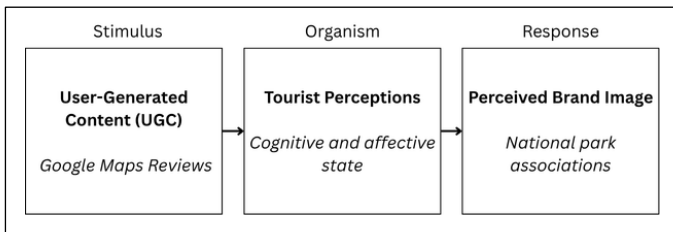


Fig. 1. SOR derived framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) applied across Malaysian and French national park contexts.

By applying UGC in the SOR framework, this study aims to provide a way in which park management can examine visitor perceptions that in turn can be used to adjust the projected brand image to reduce the tension between the two.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using a qualitative exploratory research design in order to analyze how visitors perceive and communicate about their experiences in the national parks in Malaysia and France. Since the goal of the research was to explore the ways visitors perceive national parks in general, quantitative methods were not appropriate. The source of the reviews was selected to be Google Maps since it is a publicly available UGC that has even coverage across the two study contexts Malaysia and France, unlike other review platforms like TripAdvisor, that do not provide enough data in Malaysia. The analysis was built on the basis of the literature on destination branding with an emphasis on thematic components of the brand perception.

3.1 Data Collection

Google Reviews were collected from Google Maps places correlating to the national parks. For this research 8 French national parks were selected. They were chosen since there are officially 11 parks with a status of a national park in France, eight located in mainland France and 3 located in the overseas territories, namely in Guadeloupe, Guyane and Reunion. However, those three parks were not selected for the study as

they are outside the scope of Metropolitan France and would require their own research. Malaysia does not have such a defined number of national parks as a federal country where parks and natural areas are protected by the state authorities, therefore 8 parks were selected based on the biggest quantity of reviews. All data taken was publicly available and anonymized. To ensure data consistency same criteria were applied across all 16 parks, in the same order and using the same process and logic. Figure 2 presents the selection process of the data collection. 100 reviews from each park were taken for analysis. The reviews selected were checked to be related to the national park and were taken regardless of the original language of the review as they were translated automatically by Google. Reviews exclusion criteria were set as:

- Reviews without text
- Only star rating reviews
- Reviews off-topic
- Reviews below the minimum word count of 2 such as "Good"
- Emoji only reviews

They were excluded as they would not enrich the research. In order to get the recent data only reviews from 2024 and 2025 were taken into account. Upon the exclusion, it was determined that the minimum available number of reviews in the parks was 10. Using the thematic saturation logic of Braun and Clarke (2006) for qualitative research, the sufficiency was checked by determining whether the thematic saturation could be reached within the number. Repeated readings of the dataset revealed recurring themes across reviews with no new themes emerging after seven reviews, suggesting thematic saturation was reached and dataset was methodologically sufficient.

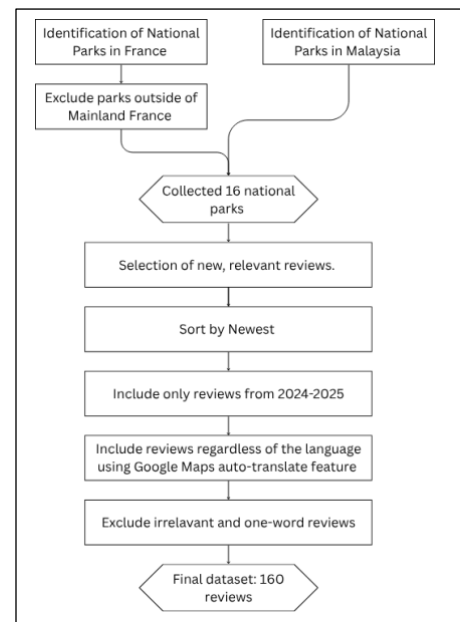


Fig. 2. Review collection process

It is acknowledged that machine translation is a limitation particularly for thematic analysis and there is a chance that some cues have not been taken into account.

3.2 Data Analysis

Collected data was analyzed through descriptive, content and thematic analysis. Firstly, a descriptive statistics analysis was used in order to gather a general overview of the reviews. For this, two main criteria were checked: length of the reviews and star rating. This provided an insight into the way people write reviews and rate national parks.

Next, content analysis was conducted in order to understand what is being said about each park, in other words how do people communicate their experiences. The main focus of the content analysis was on the cognitive attributes of the national parks, meaning the features that people mention. The analysis was done by manually identifying main keywords that emerged from the initial readings of all reviews, such as “nature”, “facilities” and “guides” and then using Excel they were counted across all the parks in both countries.

After the content analysis, a thematic analysis was implemented with the aim of deepening the understanding of the perceptions of visitors beyond “what” is being said into “how” it is said and “what feelings” do the people convey in their reviews. Since the coding was done by a solo researcher, Braun and Clarke’s (2006) reflexive thematic analysis process was adopted. For this, all the reviews were read and re-read several times with the repeating themes through verbatim underlined resulting in inductive thematic generation that were rechecked multiple times throughout the process. However, intercoder reliability was not established, and future research should be done using multiple coders or peer debriefing. Afterwards, the main themes were selected and described among the parks in two countries.

The dual approach of both content and thematic analysis ensured that both recurring keywords and underlying themes were looked into to create a full analysis of the perceptions of the visitors on the brand image of the national parks.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The analysis of a total of 160 reviews (80 from Metropolitan France and 80 from Malaysia) revealed the following tendencies described in Table 1. Length of a review was calculated based on the number of words, where emojis were counted as separate words too. Data revealed that on average reviews for Malaysian parks (Mean=61.275) were longer than reviews for French parks (Mean=41.15). However, there were notable anomalies in the form of overly long reviews for both parks, that can be seen by looking at the maximum length of 439 words for France and 373 for Malaysia, therefore the average is tainted and median was used for a more clear analysis. The median showed that reviews for Malaysian parks were still longer than those for French, however the difference became smaller (Median= 24 vs 36). This suggests that reviewers in the Malaysian context tended to write more elaborately or descriptively about their experiences, which ties to Hall’s (1976) High-context vs Low-context context communication theory. People from countries with high-context cultures, such as Malaysia, tend to write more indirectly, include background information. Oppositely, people from low-context cultures, like France, express themselves more concisely and directly, going straight to the point, without adding on extra information. The results correlate to Hall’s

research by showing that the length of the reviews depends on the culture’s communication style.

Additional analysis was done of the star rating that people put under their reviews and Table 1 shows that the average star review was very similar in Malaysia and France (Mean=4.6375 vs 4.2125) with a slightly higher average rating for the French parks. Additionally, the standard deviation revealed a more consistent rating in French park reviews and more polarized opinions of Malaysian parks (Sd=0.917 vs 1.239). This is insightful because it points at a potential difference in the expression of views as it could be that Malaysian visitors feel more free to express polarizing opinions, whereas French visitors tend to be more average in their reviews, however this needs further research.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

	French National Parks	Malaysian National Parks
<i>Star Rating</i>		
Minimum rating	1	1
Maximum rating	5	5
Mean	4.64	4.21
Standard Deviation	0.92	1.24
<i>Reviews (words)</i>		
Minimum length	3	2
Maximum length	439	373
Mean	41.15	61.28
Standard Deviation	65.89	73.41
Median	24	36

4.2 Content Analysis

Several keywords emerged from the content analysis that signify the cognitive attributes of the visitors of the parks in both countries (see Table 2).

The keywords were also grouped in four main themes: activities, scenery, facilities and emotions. Common across both contexts were terms like “hike”, “nature”, “trail”, “mountain”, “peace” and “quiet” indicating a shared focus on physical activity, natural scenery and emotional connection. For the purposes of this analysis, common were considered keywords, where the percentage difference between them was two or less percent.

Several differences also emerged. Most notably, almost all keywords in the theme Facilities, except for “road”, appeared predominantly, and in some cases exclusively in the reviews for Malaysian parks. This is an important finding that could have several reasons behind it. It could signify that Malaysian visitors have different expectation from the national parks, potentially due to fees or that the quality of infrastructure is inherently different. The keyword “dirty” that appears nine times in Malaysian reviews like “*Unfortunately, the toilets there are very dirty*” and not once in French does not necessarily point at the factual dirtiness of the parks, as the keyword “clean” also appears more often in Malaysian reviews (3 vs 9 times), but rather at the importance of cleanliness for the Malaysian visitors.

Table 2. Keywords from content analysis

Keyword	Count France	Percentage of all reviews	Count Malaysia	Percentage of all reviews
Activities				
Hike	25	31.25%	23	28.75%
Trail	9	11.25%	10	12.5%
Climb	6	7.5%	8	10%
Boat	2	2.5%	10	12.5%
Night	4	5%	11	13.75%
Scenery				
Nature	12	15%	12	15%
View	15	18.75%	11	13.75%
Landscape	17	21.25%	2	2.5%
Water	12	15%	9	11.25%
Mountain	7	8.75%	6	7.5%
Jungle	0	0%	11	13.75%
Beach	1	1.25%	9	11.25%
Facilities				
Fee	2	2.5%	8	10%
Dirty	0	0%	9	11.25%
Clean	3	3.75%	9	11.25%
Toilet	0	0%	9	11.25%
Road	7	8.75%	4	5%
Guide	0	0%	6	7.5%
Emotions				
Peace	3	3.75%	3	3.75%
Wild	6	7.5%	8	10%
Love	8	10%	7	8.75%
Quiet	2	2.5%	4	5%

Another difference lies in the type of activities people mention. Mentions of “climb”, “boat”, and “night” were significantly more prevalent in Malaysian park reviews. This indicates the differences in the experience people have in the Malaysian parks over those in the French parks as Malaysian parks offer experiences like boat tours and guided night tours, unlike a more self-exploratory concept of French natural parks.

In contrast, scenery is different in two contexts. In the reviews from French parks prominent keywords like “view” and “landscape” appear more often, hinting at the appreciation of the broad views and viewpoints as well as overall landscape. Whereas the dominant keywords in Malaysia were “jungle” and “beach”. This is to be expected given the geographical location of Malaysia as a tropical country surrounded by water. Those reviews reflect the natural wonders that the country has to offer for the visitors.

In the last theme Emotions, the common keywords for Malaysian and French were identified as “love” and “peace”, while “wild” and “quiet” tends to be more Malaysia-focused, but still present in French context. This finding shows that emotionally visitors in both countries perceive nature similarly.

Overall, the content analysis links directly to the cognitive dimension of the SOR theoretical framework as it highlights the specific attributes that visitors assign to the parks and that can

be further explained as brand associations and the significance in differences between the cognitive associations across two contexts.

4.3 Thematic Analysis

A thorough thematic analysis has produced four themes that emerged from the reviews under parks both in France and in Malaysia and forms part of the affective states of the SOR framework.

Theme 1: Escaping the City

Visitors in both Malaysia and France described national parks as an escape from the bustling and crowded cities. The language used in the reviews for French parks tended to be more nature focused implying that connecting with nature is a way to escape with quotes like “*a getaway surrounded by nature*” and “*place to completely disconnect and enjoy nature*”. In the Malaysian context the visitors also experienced the disconnection with the outside world, but less nature focused and more focused on peace and quiet: “*perfect for anyone who wants to get away from the noise of the city*” and “*if you want to be quiet and peaceful*”.

This theme reveals how national parks are seen as more than just destinations and become for people a way to find inner peace and connect with nature. It also reveals a slight difference in the experiences and intentions of visitors. Whereas in the French parks the visitors refresh by being surrounded by nature, in Malaysian parks the peace and quiet, which refers to absence of manmade sounds, is at the core of the visitors’ perception. This difference also contributes to the brand image of the parks, where French parks are seen as serene immersion in nature and Malaysian parks are more in line with a peaceful place for mental refresh.

Theme 2: Protecting Nature

National parks exist to protect nature and keep it safe from human activities and this is reflected heavily in the reviews under national parks in both countries. This theme reveals that visitors of French parks frequently emphasize the “*intense preserved nature*”. Moreover they also view the park itself as a “*Protected natural area for public enjoyment and environmental preservation*”. There is also a strong tendency to encourage people to protect nature in the parks with messages like “*let’s preserve our mother earth with love*”, “*Remember to follow the rules to preserve this unique place!*” and “*Nature is so beautiful. Let’s protect it.*” This theme also appears in the reviews for Malaysian parks but with some differences. For instance, there are mentions of the park being a place of unspoiled nature with people saying “*Well preserved ecosystems*” and “*Having the experience of the primeval tropical rainforest is truly amazing*”, however they are much rarer than in the reviews of French parks. In addition, something that appears only in the Malaysian context is a frustration about environment harming activities in and around the park. Reviewers express concern that “*even in the surroundings of the park there are oil palm plantations and the villagers continue to cut down the forest to plant more*” and “*the river (in the park) has been polluted by the ECRL project*”.

Protecting nature is at the core of any national park and this theme outlines that visitors notice the efforts of the preservation and want to see more of the untouched wilderness. It is clear that for both countries people expect to see a clean environment in the national park. In the French national parks people tend to

praise the untouched nature more often and more vibrantly. This may be explained by the relative scarcity of untouched nature in France, where densely populated regions and urban landscapes are more common. In contrast, parts of Malaysia, particularly Borneo, have a more wild nature with less human presence. Therefore visitors in French parks might be more surprised as they view untouched nature as something more rare. This also links to the first theme *Escaping the city* where in the French context the look of nature and the feeling of being surrounded by it was important in visitor perception, potentially due to its rarity. The reviews also include calls to protect that nature, something which was unique to the French context. This implies that people hold each other accountable for the spoils that they leave behind. In contrast, the frustrations in Malaysian context generally don't fall on individuals but on the companies or practices, like villagers cutting down trees.

This theme highlights the important aspect of brand image of the parks which lies within their main objective - protecting nature. It is clear that in both countries people care about untouched wilderness and express frustrations when the national parks are perceived as ineffective in their conservation efforts. Such frustrations could lead people to lose trust in the effectiveness of parks as conservation agents, and could potentially damage their brand image as a destination.

Theme 3: Memorable Activities

National Parks are places of many wonders and activities that people come to explore. This theme reveals that there is a difference in approaches to what people come to do in the national parks between France and Malaysia. In French national parks the main core activity is hiking. It can be seen from a large number of reviews that talk about it: *"The best for hiking"*, *"Multiple hikes for all levels"* and *"Magnificent natural park for hikes or walks!"* The general feeling that links all the reviews together is that people like to come to French parks to hike solo or in a small company along multiple routes. There are also mentions of other activities in the parks like *"climbing, swimming in the sea, trail running"* and *"all sports practices"*, however they are seen as an addition to hiking.

On the other end, in Malaysian parks the experiences and expectations vary. There are generally much more activities to do that oftentimes include the hike but also *"A very beautiful river excursion in small canoes"* and swimming - *"On the way back we swam in Tahan River"*. This also leads to expectations and frustrations if the park doesn't offer anything *"once we've done some trails, there's not much else to do"*.

One of the main differences lies in the way people hike, as unlike in France where as mentioned before hiking is usually solo or with a company, in Malaysian parks people hike with tour guides and do various excursions. Having a guide or some type of organized hike is never mentioned in French parks. In Malaysia, people share that *"Our guide was amazing"*, *"All the excursions are fun"* and *"The mountain guides were extremely professional"*. Some even share that *"I originally wanted to go in and hike on my own, but I was still a little afraid that something might happen, so I didn't go"*. This highlights the different experiences in different parks as hiking in Malaysia is structured and guided, while in France it is informal and self-directed.

Such a different approach to national park activities could be attributed to the price and organization factor. All national parks in France are free to enter and generally do not have a set

organizational structure in place. For example Park National de Calanques in the South of France, has dozens of entry points scattered in and outside the city with hundreds of trails that do not follow any pattern and visitors are free to choose where to enter and where to leave. Therefore it is logical that there are few activities people expect to do other than hiking, since there isn't a centralized place for these activities and people do not pay anything for a hike. This changes slightly for national parks like Park Nationale de Vanoise located in the Alpes where people can enjoy winter activities like skiing, however hiking still prevails as the go to activity.

National parks in Malaysia are predominantly paid with prices going as high as 50RM (around 12 USD). This adds transactional value and changes expectations in visitors. Namely, some reviewers express concern that the entry fee does not correspond to the variety or duration of activities offered - *"so you pretty much pay 50RM just for one 1.5hr trail"*. Therefore it is also to be expected that people want to see more provided for the price. In contrast to French parks, most Malaysian parks are also much more centralized and linear with one access point where people pay the fee and trails that all come out and go back to the same point. This structure creates centralized visitor hubs where all people pass and it is easier to create activities in those parts such as *"Canopy walk"* in Taman Negara National Park.

Overall, this theme shines an important distinction in brand image of national parks in two countries as well as visitor behaviour. French parks are known for safe solo hiking in the undisturbed nature and more of a recreation place. Most Malaysian parks are more of a destination for entertainment where visitors pay to see nature and hike, but also expect more like guided tours, excursions and various additional activities. It also affects the way brand image is built since private companies that provide tours are also stakeholders in the brand creation unlike in French parks where there is little private involvement. This makes brand creation in Malaysian parks much more fragmented with more stakeholders that can hinder the creation of a unified brand. This greatly affects the way the image of a park is built in the mind of a consumer and the parks that do not provide enough value lose their image.

Theme 4: Park Management

This theme revolves about opinions people have on park management and includes both positive and negative sides. The key difference that makes this theme stand out among the rest is that it is exclusive to the Malaysian context and does not appear in any form in the French context. There seem to be very polarized opinions particularly regarding the cleanliness of the parks with many reviews praising the cleanliness *"Cleanliness is maintained"* and *"very well-maintained"*. However there are also frustrations about the lack of maintenance *"lack of maintenance and whether or not there is a cleaning contractor"* and *"Bathrooms old and dirty, hikes nice but not well maintained."* This also links to discussions of amenities and their state. Similarly there are two types of reviews - praising the amenities as *"There are even trash cans"* and *"Facilities: 10/10"*, as well as the ones angry at the lack or state of them sharing that *"Paths ... could definitely use some maintenance"* and *"there is nowhere to buy food at the beach"*.

This theme and its exclusivity to Malaysia context could be explained by the fact that the parks in Malaysia are paid, connecting it to the similar case in Theme 3: *Memorable*

Activities. Since in French parks people do not pay anything for a visit the expectations are lower than in Malaysia where the parks are a paid experience. It elicits important conclusions about the brand image of the parks in Malaysia and even in France.

In Malaysia it is clear that experiences are tied to the national park admission fee and in consequence it is tied to the brand image of the park. The clean or on the opposite the dirty amenities have a significant impact on customer satisfaction and in turn they affect the overall image of the park. In France absence of the fee also impacts the experiences as people have lower expectations and thus a different brand image.

Overall, the thematic analysis and the four emerging themes map onto the SOR framework shown in Figure 1 in the affective state, signalling the perceptions of visitors on an emotional level.

5. DISCUSSIONS

5.1 Interpretation of Findings

The results of the thematic analysis showed both the similarities and differences in brand image perceptions across national parks in Malaysia and France. The findings also reveal the answer to the research question: "How do visitors of national parks in Malaysia and France perceive and communicate their experiences through Google Maps reviews and what brand image associations can be identified?" It was determined that both the perceptions and the communication of experiences vary in the two contexts. French parks seemed to have a brand image of a serene, preserved nature where hiking is considered the main activity. Malaysian national parks similarly share the preserved nature as the big part of their brand image but the activities usually provided by third-party stakeholders are more varied and the experience is not built by nature alone.

One of the core differences was the implications of the free vs paid structure in the natural parks, that highlighted differences in perceptions, expectations and experiences of visitors. Malaysian parks for the most part come with a fee and provide visitors with extra activities that are sometimes included in the park fee and sometimes come separately. Because of it, people have higher expectations of park management and the state of facilities. Thus, Malaysian parks share a brand image of a destination place as well as an entertainment place and that comes with its own set of responsibilities that supports both Anholt and Pike's research on the importance of understanding visitors' perceptions especially in such a multi-stakeholder environment like Malaysian parks, where private entities like hotels, tours and guides play a role in shaping the brand image.

In contrast, the perceptions of visitors of French parks, stem from the fee-free structure and the notion of untouched wilderness. The parks are solely natural sites, where facilities do not exist or do not play such a significant role in shaping the experience, rather it is the nature that is the main value driver.

Additionally, the way experiences were communicated revealed the connection to research of Hall (1976) that high vs low context cultures do not share their opinions in the same manner. Malaysia as a high context country had on average

longer reviews, while France as a low-context culture prioritized short and straight-forward reviews.

Together these findings suggest that the perceptions of natural parks and the way the experiences are communicated emerge from natural environments, park governance models and the cultural background of visitors, therefore needing a culture-specific approach, since what works in one place like a free national park in France, will likely not work in a fee-based parks like in Malaysia.

5.2 Methodological Contribution

The main methodological contribution of this paper is a three-step framework of combining descriptive statistics, content and thematic analysis with the purpose of extracting brand image from textual UGC. This process built on the SOR framework provides context, cognitive attributes and affective state forming a perceived brand image.

Secondly, the use of reviews from Google Maps proved to be suitable for this type of study as it eliminated limitations, such as conformity and social desirability bias of interviews or surveys and in the multi-country context, allowed for a sufficient volume of reviews. The framework and the data source create a low-cost approach to monitoring brand image especially useful for multi-country studies or management organizations with limited budget for big-scale studies.

5.3 Managerial Implications

This study concludes with some managerial implications that could be useful to park management organizations. Firstly, the importance of monitoring perceived brand image is identified to correctly promote the park, avoiding a gap between projected and perceived images. Managers of national parks can use Google Maps reviews and the proposed framework to monitor the perceived brand image systematically and on budget.

Secondly, the experiences within the park depend on the governance model and the involvement of third-party stakeholders such as tour agencies. When such stakeholders are present, the management of the park needs to coordinate brand messaging with them as they shape the experience too. This is particularly important for Malaysian national parks and practically does not apply for French parks.

Thirdly, managers should not compare their performance with the performance of parks in other countries, since the systems are inherently not the same and thus visitor experiences cannot be compared.

Overall, the findings suggest that managers of national parks have a possibility to use Google Maps reviews and the proposed framework to improve their brand image alignment with expectations.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study was not done without limitations. As a result of the use of auto-translated reviews in the data sourcing, some of the emotional undertones could have been lost. The sample size of 10 reviews per park even though had resulted in the thematic saturation, could be enlarged in the future studies. On top of that, all reviews were collected from one platform and could include platform bias. Lastly, the work was done by the solo-researcher reflexive thematic analysis without peer-debriefing.

When it comes to future research, there is a potential to use Google Maps reviews to analyze the origins and types of visitors in the parks. This was out of scope of this study, but could be explored further to create a visitor profile and thus to create the brand image segmentation based on the profile of visitors, such as exploring the difference between local and foreign visitors, solo versus family visits, beginner versus expert hikers as well as the different perceived brand image based on the length of stay in the national park. There is also a potential to use the methods from this study in the context different to national parks, such as sightseeing locations and private businesses. Finally, research could be done on incorporating the projected brand image in the analysis to see the gap between the perceived and projected brand image.

7. CONCLUSION

To conclude, this study set out to explore how the perceived brand image of the national parks in Malaysia and France is experienced and communicated through the Google Maps reviews. It aimed to fill the research gap on the identification of the perceived brand image through UGC in destination branding across multi-cultural national parks context and found that Malaysian parks are perceived through the lens of multi-stakeholder fee-based natural activities, while French parks are perceived as untouched solitude hiking experiences. Through this study a methodology based on the SOR framework was created that consists of review collection and analysis on three levels: descriptive, content and thematic. Using the methodology the study was able to formulate the brand images for national parks in Malaysia and France, to find the points of similarities and differences as well as to identify the distinct features of the perceived brand images and how the communication differs across contexts.

The results of this study can be useful to DMOs, tourist agencies and all stakeholders involved in destination brand management. Furthermore, the methodology can be applied to private destinations in order to create an efficient way to analyze the perceived brand image of their brand. What makes this methodology unique is the relative cost and time efficiency since it does not involve the need for extensive interviews and on-site data collection, while still providing brand perception.

REFERENCES

- Aboalganam, K. M., AlFraihat, S. F., & Tarabieh, S. (2025). The impact of user-generated content on tourist visit intentions: The mediating role of destination imagery. *Administrative Sciences*, 15(4), 117. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci15040117>
- Anholt, S. (2006). *Competitive identity: The new brand management for nations, cities and regions*. Palgrave Macmillan. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230627727>
- Asyraf, M. A., Hanafiah, M. H., Md Zain, N. A., & Patwary, A. K. (2024). Understanding Malaysia's perceived destination image formation through online user-generated content information qualities. *Global Knowledge, Memory and Communication*. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/GKMC-03-2024-0148>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Daugherty, T., Eastin, M. S., & Bright, L. (2008). Exploring consumer motivations for creating user-generated content. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 8(2), 16–25. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2008.10722139>
- Ferrari, S. (2020). National parks, territorial brands and co-branding initiatives: An exploratory study. In D. J. Mariani & A. Vastola (Eds.), *Global opportunities and challenges for rural and mountain tourism* (pp. 121–141). IGI Global. doi: <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-1302-6.ch006>
- Geyer, C., Zimmermann, L., & Wyss, M. (2024). Projected and perceived destination image of the Lake Lucerne Region. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 33, Article 100921. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2024.100921>
- Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond culture*. Anchor Press/Doubleday.
- Jankovic, M., Jakšić Stojanović, A., Vukilić, B., Šerić, N., & Ibrahim, A. (2019). Branding of protected areas and national parks: A case study of Montenegro. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 8(2). url: https://www.ajhtl.com/uploads/7/1/6/3/7163688/article_33_vol_8_2_2019.pdf
- Mehrabian, A., & Russell, J. A. (1974). *An approach to environmental psychology*. The MIT Press.
- Pike, S. (2005). Tourism destination branding complexity. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 14(4), 258–259. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/10610420510609267>
- Pizzichini, L., Temperini, V., & Gregori, G. L. (2020). Place branding and local food souvenirs: The ethical attributes of national parks' brands. *Journal of Place Management and Development*, 13(2), 149–166. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/jpmd-06-2019-0043>
- Porter, N. (2020). Strategic planning and place branding in a World Heritage cultural landscape: A case study of the English Lake District, UK. *European Planning Studies*, 28(7), 1291–1314. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2019.1701297>
- Ruiz, M. A., & Santamarina, B. (2023). Producing nature: Brand marketing of nature parks in Spain. *Journal of Political Ecology*, 30(1). doi: <https://doi.org/10.2458/jpe.5084>
- Yamagishi, K., Canayong, D., Domingo, M., Maneja, K. N., Montolo, A., & Siton, A. (2024). User-generated content on Gen Z tourist visit intention: A stimulus-organism-response approach. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights*, 7(4), 1949–1973. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/JHTI-02-2023-0091>