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Hijacked Destination Images? Autonomous Representations of Dubai and Abu Dhabi in *The Amazing Race*, U.S.A

Dunn's (2006) discursive axes are used as a foundation for an explanatory structure that reveals the latent focus of destination images. Examined images are of Abu Dhabi and Dubai and created by *The Amazing Race* (TAR) television program. Dubai is one of the top tourist destinations in the world and Abu Dhabi is one of the fastest growing. Analysing manifest pull-factors, and latent images within TAR episodes and DMO promotional videos it becomes clear that TAR is hijacking the image of Dubai to a greater extent than Abu Dhabi. The emirates are, however, being presented uniquely on TAR. The implications of TAR-DMO inconsistencies are discussed. This means for the analysis of latent meaning within destination image presentations is shown valuable for understanding core differences and similarities. Practical uses of this analytical structure and findings are also offered.

Key words: Destination Image, Autonomous Agents, Reality TV, Amazing Race, UAE

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Introduction

An appropriate and engaging image is precious for a tourist destination. People will make their decision to visit based on that image. But not everyone involved in communicating an image works in concert with the intended message of the Destination Marketing Organization (DMO). There are autonomous sources of destination image that are not obligated to follow the desired script, verbally or visually and they can have high levels of credibility with large audiences.

The paper will examine the destination images of Abu Dhabi and Dubai as shaped by *The Amazing Race* (TAR) television program from the United States. This reality competition show has had an average audience of around 8 million in the U.S. across its 15-year history. The racers have visited the United Arab Emirates four times in those 15 years and the question is whether producers hijacked the image of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, emirates within the UAE, or reinforced the desired image created by the DMOs.

Gartner (1993) identified five independent information sources in the process of image building. One of those sources is overt-induced agents. These are traditional advertising and promotion with a clear use of time or space to communicate an image. These messages come from the DMO. The overt-induced image of Abu Dhabi in 2013 put the most emphasis on heritage, with the natural environment, built environment, amusement, luxury and family and friends being clustered in second. The overt-induced image of Dubai in 2016 gave the most time to the built environment with the natural environment, heritage, family and friends clustered in second. Autonomous agents are another source of destination image and include programs like *The Amazing Race*, as well as film productions, documentaries, news reports, and travel shows. Autonomous agents are thought to have a great deal of influence in the image formation of a potential visitor because they have higher credibility than other agents and access to larger audiences (Gartner, 1993; Gartner & Shen, 1992; Hanefors & Mossberg,

2002). Autonomous agents are not subject to the control of the DMO (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). The probability of an autonomous agent altering an image is amplified when produced far from the destination itself (Gartner & Shen, 1992).

The United Arab Emirates, Abu Dhabi, and Dubai

The UAE is a federation of seven Sheikhdoms on the Arabian Sea bordered by Saudi Arabia and Oman. Abu Dhabi and Dubai are the two largest emirates in the union. Each emirate maintains some independence within the union, including the development, coordination, and marketing of tourism. Sharpley (2002) contends that this leads an emirate to effectively compete with other emirates for a share of similar markets.

Sutton (2016) called Abu Dhabi, the capital of the UAE, the “political, industrial and cultural centre” of the emirates and Dubai, “the innovative and futuristic global city and the regional business and entrepreneurial centre” (p. 353). Abu Dhabi has the most oil per hectare in the world (Sharpley, 2002). The Abu Dhabi government is, however, investing in non-oil sectors to expand the economy, including sustainable energy and tourism. Pereira (2017) reports there were 4.4 million hotel guest arrivals in Abu Dhabi in 2016 and 3.14 million of those were international (Hedrick-Wong & Choong, 2017). Camble (1999) called Abu Dhabi a “sleeping giant on the verge of awakening to tourism.” The alarm has sounded and Abu Dhabi is fully committed to developing a destination image that will attract ever-increasing numbers of visitors. International overnight visitors in Abu Dhabi in 2016 grew by 19.8% over the previous year, the fastest growth rate in the region (Hedrick-Wong & Choong, 2017). Eighty percent of those visitors came for leisure and 20% for business. The emirate sees itself as a unique global destination and is promoted in Europe and North America as well as China, India, and Russia (Henderson, 2014).

Hashim (2012) reports that as Abu Dhabi built its brand identity, the “first and foremost concern” was to make sure that it was “starkly different from that of Dubai” (p. 77). Abu Dhabi wants to be more than the national capital near Dubai. It needs an image that is connected with its heritage, environment, and people (Hashim, 2012). Differentiation through a clear, unique and consistent image is the to enjoy success (Balakrishnan, 2009).

Dubai was dependent on oil in the past. The declining reserves in the emirate forced economic diversification much earlier than Abu Dhabi. The emirate has been a pioneer in tourism development and marketing (Sharpley, 2008). It is the emirate of superlatives and the focus is on the city of Dubai. In 2016 there were 14.9 million international arrivals in Dubai (Dubai DTCM, 2017) which makes it fourth in the world in international overnight visitors (Hedrick-Wong & Choong, 2017). Eighty percent of the visitors in 2016 came to Dubai for leisure and 20% for business (Hedrick-Wong & Choong, 2017).

Tourism is the fastest growing sector in the Dubai economy and 11.6% of the emirate’s GDP is from tourism, enabling Dubai to be described as a world-class, luxury tourist destination (Sutton, 2016). Dubai has already seen the opening of a second airport, Maktoum International, which is reported to be the largest airport in the world (Jauncey & Nadkarni, 2014). It is located on the south side of the city which is home to four new amusement parks and where the emirate will host Expo 2020 which will result in an estimated 80% increase in available hotel rooms (Jauncey & Nadkarni, 2014). The top ten individual source markets for Dubai are India, Saudi Arabia, Great Britain, Oman, Pakistan, the United States, China, Iran, Germany, and Kuwait. The top three regions for tourists to Dubai are the G.C.C. (Gulf Cooperation Council), Western Europe and South Asia (Dubai DTCM, 2017).

Literature Review

A destination image is the sum of beliefs and impressions that people have about a

place (Kotler & Gertner, 2002; Ryan & Ninov, 2011). It is a simplification of the range of mental associations that a person has with a place. It is imperative for a destination to shape these associations and their simplifications. It is through an image that a destination maintains market position and competitiveness (Tasci & Kozak, 2006). The increase in the competitive nature of tourism has made strong destination image a must to attract visitors (Pan & Li, 2011).

Gartner (1993) identified five image forming agents: overt induced, covert induced, autonomous, organic and engagement. Autonomous agents are the most credible media-based source of destination image. Unlike other marketed goods, services and experiences, destinations “do not own vertical or horizontal components of their product delivery” (Balakrishnan, 2009, p. 619), and this makes it difficult to control their unique offer and have a clear and consistent image across media and sources.

The role of an autonomous agent becomes more important when the audience member and potential visitor has a limited understanding of the place and its culture (Pan & Li, 2011). Television is a source of imagery that people use to imagine their future, the places they will go and things they will see (Crouch, Jackson & Thompson, 2006). It is also a medium where many different places can be observed, compared and revisited (Urry, 2002). Mansson (2009) stated that the consumption of media content and tourism are “inextricably linked” (p. 233).

Connell (2005) experimented and found that tourism content in film and television shows are perceived as more credible than tourism content in advertising and promotions. Zeng, Chiu, Lee, Kang, & Park (2015) stated that the destination image in autonomous content is thought to be more accurate and less exaggerated. Kim et al. (2008) found that people are influenced by what they see and hear in the media, particularly in terms of what is attractive, sensational or trendy.

In tourism research, the experiencing of fictional films and television shows has been

shown to develop or reinforce a destination image (Crockett & Wood, 2002; Zeng et al., 2015). Fernandez-Young and Young (2008) reported evidence that a high proportion of potential tourists are making decisions under the influence of screen products. Sonmez and Sirakay (2002) found that key tourism stakeholders in Turkey believe that the 1978 film, *Midnight Express*, still harms the perception of hospitality in the country. Chinese and Japanese citizens were found to have a more positive attitude toward South Korea, including visiting and buying Korean products, when they watched South Korean dramas on their local television (Yoo, Jo & Jung, 2014). People in Hong Kong who consumed more South Korean pop culture had a more positive view of the country and a higher interest in travelling there (Kim et al., 2008). Chinese tourists visiting South Korea had a more positive image of South Korea when they had been exposed to South Korean stories in film and television before their visit (Zeng et al., 2015).

Reality television is an autonomous agent that delivers content that can be a mix of fiction and non-fiction. It is also seen as a mix of authentic and inauthentic that the audience is willing to accept (Rose & Wood, 2005). MacCannell (1976) felt that the search for authenticity is a part of tourism, even though Boorstin (1961) wrote that inauthentic *tourism* had replaced authentic *travel*. “The question of authenticity has exercised the minds of many in the tourism field” (Ryan & Ninov, 2011, p. 754). The same can be said of reality television.

It is the sense of reality and authenticity that gives reality-based shows an advantage in influencing a person’s image of a place (Tessitore, Pandelaere & Van Kerckhove, 2014). Audience members are thought to be aware that what they are seeing is not *real* but they are willing to suspend their disbelief because the people in the program are real (Hall, 2009). Kim and Richardson (2003) concluded that viewers are more connected to place-related activities and character feelings when watching reality television than other program genres.

This engagement leads to high levels of focused attention and in turn leads to long-term memory effects (Riley & Van Doren, 1992). Fu, Ye and Xiang (2016) found that audience involvement in a reality show was positively related to intentions to visit the destination and pointed out that there has been very little sustained research on reality-show viewing and tourism.

Kim, Park, Santos and Shiness (2017) stated that “entertainment reality programs provide viewers with armchair tourism experiences in which they encounter the paradoxical nature of authenticity” (p. 3). They studied a reality program that immersed Korean celebrities into exotic and “uncivilized” travel locations but the show faced controversy when it was revealed that the celebrities were not very immersed in the local culture and environment of the location. Kim et al. (2017) found that viewers were seeking authentic experiences in the program but were not overly disturbed by the revelations about the celebrities. Viewers seemed to understand that this was a television show focusing on fun and entertainment which would inevitably lead to manipulation and inauthentic presentations of the specific location. They were not bothered by staged images of this reality.

Tessitore et al. (2014) specifically studied the impact of an international variation of *The Amazing Race* on destination image. They studied *India Celebrity Express*, a Dutch reality-game show where players only travelled to India to compete. The intention was not to promote India. The country was the backdrop and context in which the game was played. The researchers found that respondent images of India changed, attitudes toward India became more positive and intention to travel to India was higher after exposure to the program. They concluded that a reality-based game show could be a learning platform about a destination for a potential tourist (Tessitore et al., 2014). Williams-Burnett, Skinner and Fallon (2016) studied the image of Kavos, Greece in four British reality TV programs. They found that the programs emphasized the drinking and licentious behavior of a limited number of the visitors

to Kavos, “leading to a skewed image of the destination that is not only portrayed unfavourably, but that is very much at odds with the reality of the place” (Williams-Burnett et al., 2016, p. 10). The image of Kavos had clearly been hijacked by the chosen content of the four reality shows.

An autonomous agent in the form of a reality TV show can, therefore, have an impact on the image of a destination for viewers. The importance of destination image and the desire to create an image that is unique, distinctive, and not open to substitution means that it is important to understand the image being portrayed autonomously and whether it is consistent with the image created by the destination marketing organization.

The Amazing Race

The Amazing Race is a reality-game show that has been on CBS television since September 2001. Twenty-eight races have been aired. Each race pits teams of two people against one another in a race around the world. The prize is a US\$ 1million for the winning team. TAR involves regular people put into unusual circumstances and competing for an unbelievable prize. World travel is the backdrop for the show. The core appeal is the drama within and between the teams as they compete. The travel creates tension as people cope with unfamiliar environments, foreign cultures, and people who speak no English.

Each episode is structured so that all teams are in the same country or city at the same time. TAR stays in a place for one or two episodes and then moves on to a new destination. There are generally 12 episodes in a season. Each episode involves visits to important sites within the location and contextually relevant challenges. There are *Detours* where teams choose between one of two given tasks and *Roadblocks* where one team member must complete a task with no help. The rest of the time is taken up with wayfinding in a location, either alone or with the aid of taxis or public transport.

Muspratt and Steves (2012) analyzed TAR's visit to Ghana and found it to be a source of positive portrayals of the place and the people. Contestants participated in culturally-connected tasks and told "stories beyond poverty, war, and disease; an Africa whose landscape is specific and populated with Africans; an Africa where Africans exhibit agency over their lives" (p. 534). Destination images on TAR can be positive but are they consistent with DMO images.

The Amazing Race has visited the UAE four times. There have been three visits to Dubai and one to Abu Dhabi. This is the most episodes for any country in the Middle East and Africa. The first visit to Dubai was in 2005 when the Burj Al Arab was the only major building completed and Dinars were still the currency. The episodes that season averaged an audience of 10.73 million people in the U.S. (Futon Critic, 2004). The second visit to Dubai was two episodes in 2009. Emirates Mall and Ski Dubai were completed, Burj Khalifa was nearing completion, and Aquaventure was the water park at the Atlantis hotel on the Palm. The episodes in series 15 had an average viewership of 11.14 million people in the U.S. (TV By The Numbers, 2010). The first visit to Abu Dhabi came in 2013. There was an audience of 9.12 million for both episodes (TV Series Finale, 2013). Dubai was visited again for one episode in series 28 in 2016. The audience for this single episode was 5.47 million (TV Series Finale, 2016). The visit to Abu Dhabi in 2013 and Dubai in 2016 will be the focus of this content analysis. In both cases, the TAR episodes were seen by more people in the U.S. than the number of people who come to Dubai and Abu Dhabi from the U.S. (Dubai DTCM, 2017; Hedrick-Wong & Choong, 2017)

The Research Questions

The establishment of a distinct destination image is important in the tourism industry. It is also clear that autonomous sources can have an impact on the image of a destination as

well as a person's desire to travel to that destination. What is not clear is how do the products of autonomous agents of destination image differ from the products of overt-induced agents. This can only be understood by analyzing the content of communication products generated by these two agents. This leads to three research questions.

RQ1: *What are the differences between the overt-induced portrayal of the Abu Dhabi image and the autonomous portrayal of the Abu Dhabi image?*

RQ2: *What are the similarities and differences between the overt-induced portrayal of the Dubai image and the autonomous portrayal of the Dubai image?*

RQ3: *Is the autonomous portrayal of the Abu Dhabi image the same as the autonomous portrayal of the Dubai image?*

Methodology

The three questions will be answered using content analysis. The first step in the content analysis is to identify the activities and settings found in TAR episodes and record the duration of each. The second step is to identify the activities, settings and sequence durations found in two promotional videos from the Dubai and Abu Dhabi DMOs. Two promos are from the Tourism and Culture Authority in Abu Dhabi: *And You Think You Have Done It All* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jnr1yNg3GGEs>) with more than 430,000 views and *And You Think You Have Seen It All* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Wr7aPZGWIA>) with more than 310,000 views. Two come from the Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, *Spirit of Dubai 2015* with more than 27 million views (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WfTJL_h0XfY) and *Spirit of Dubai 2016* with nearly six million views (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FN8s2m6OvLM>). These official

videos were uploaded near the time when the TAR episodes aired in the U.S. and reflect the established destination image at that point in time. They are the core of the officially-created video image of each emirate at the time when producers were deciding what should be done in the episodes. There are other videos directed at specific audiences from that time on the YouTube channel but these additional videos are built on the content and position found in the English-language videos used in this study.

Segment durations were calculated as percentages of the total program and promotional time. Identified elements were grouped into categories first on the basis of manifest pull-factors. Segments that shared latent meaning were then grouped together. Comparing content percentages was used to compensate for the differences in total duration of TAR episodes and official promo videos. Absolute differences in the percentage of total time given to a particular element are compared. Relative proportions are then calculated to highlight the substance of the absolute differences between percentages. Relative proportions demonstrate the differences in percentages with the percentages themselves as the baseline.

Portrayed Manifest Pull-Factors of the Destination

After identifying the content segments within TAR episodes it was possible to create categories for the activities and locations portrayed. During the first episode in Abu Dhabi racers visited the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque. They traveled in a taxi on two occasions. They had the choice to organize dates on a fruit platter or mend a fishing net. They all rode on a yacht from Al Bandar Marina to Yas Marina, and one team member rappelled from the Yas Viceroy Hotel to the Yas Marina Circuit below and performed a memory task while taking a hot lap on the race course. In the second episode, racers drove themselves from Yas Island to Al Ain. They drove in a dune buggy in the desert in search of a clue. They watched a man climb a date palm at the Al Ain Oasis and then drove themselves to the Al Jahili Fort.

There they had the choice to prep the ingredients for a wedding-sized pot of Chicken Biryani or prep a camel for a beauty contest judged by three Emirati Bedouins. They drove themselves across Al Ain to the next destination, navigated a man-made level-four rapid at Wadi Adventure and then drove themselves to the hotel at the top of Jebel Hafeet. The 2016 episode in Dubai saw racers drive themselves out to the desert from the airport to meet Bedouins in a traditional tent. They drove themselves to their next location on the edge of the city where they had the choice to race against camels for two kilometers on a bicycle or walk two camels across the desert for one kilometer and then milk one of them. They drove themselves back into town where they walked in a tank full of sharks at Aquaventure Water Park, solved a water-themed puzzle, and rode the most vertical slide in the park. Finally, they drove themselves to Dubai Creek to find and ride an abra across the creek for the finish.

These activities from both emirates fit into six categories of destination pull-factors: Natural Environment, Built Environment, Heritage, Amusement, Adventure, and Luxury. There were four additional destination pull-factors identified in the promotional videos that were not in the TAR episodes: Family-Friends, Sun-Sea-Sand, Nightlife, and Shopping. The comparisons that will be made of manifest content will be on the basis of the six categories shared between the episodes and the promos.

Portrayed Latent Attributes of the Destination

Analysis of the latent attributes is on the basis of the Discursive Axes created by Dunn (2006). These were created to analyze the presentation of destinations on television travel programs. Modifications have been made to the original axes and the result is a three-part picture of underlying meanings within the content: the visitor dyad, the culture triad, and the attribute triad. The visitor axes in the dyad are tourist-traveler and interactor-isolate. These axes are binary oppositions and are either one or the other. The culture axes in the triad are

pop culture, folk culture, and high culture. These axes are independent and indicate the proportion of the culture type in the content from 0 to 1. The attribute axes for the triad are existing-fabricated, liminal-stable, and foreign-familiar. These are also binary oppositions (Dunn, 2006).

The tourist-traveler axis is a question of involvement in the environment and activity. The tourist is a passive observer of what can be seen and is engaged in what is often derisively labeled as “sightseeing” or “tourism” (Boorstin, 1961). The traveler is fully engaged in every aspect of the place as a participant. The traveler does much more than cast a “gaze” upon the views on offer (Urry, 1990). The nature of TAR means that players will be participants, it is what creates drama and tension within the competition.

The interactor-isolate axis represents the level at which the visitor engages with the residents of the destination. When an interactor the visitor engages directly and significantly with residents of the destination. When an isolate the visitor does not engage with residents directly. This is the measure of human contact. It is the interaction with destination residents that often generates drama in *The Amazing Race*.

A great deal of the visual content can be categorized into one or more culture categories: Pop Culture, Folk Culture, and High Culture. Dubai is generally known less for its folk and high culture while Abu Dhabi is holding on to the folk culture of the past and rapidly developing high culture attractions (Henderson, 2014). Dunn (2006) sees the consumption of high and folk culture as the preference of the traveller while pop culture is the interest of the tourist. These cultural elements have been broken out of his binary categories to more accurately reflect the diversity of culture found in the portrayal of a destination image.

High Culture is internationally understood and revered forms of expression that have respect and aesthetically valued components beyond their specific cultural location and connection. Modern and classical visual art, paintings, sculpture, literature, music, and

architecture can be examples of high culture. Authorship is known and aesthetics is the key component. There is an element of elite identity in the appreciation of the products of high culture.

Folk, or Traditional, Culture includes forms of localized expression that are connected directly and historically with the place where they are found. Folk Culture includes arts, crafts, music, modes of dress, social interaction and religion. It is the historical essence of a group's identity. Authorship is largely anonymous and a historical-contextual connection to the destination is the key component.

Pop, or Popular, Culture includes media products, activities, and objects that relate to great masses of modern people. Artifacts of pop culture appeal to almost everyone and can be understood and consumed as a matter of preference rather than taste. Authorship can be explicit but is less important than the act of consumption or experience. Pop Culture includes media content, digital media, visual arts, celebrity, sports, industrial design, work practices and anything else connected to the masses and everyday living. Pop culture can sometimes be found in museums but is found more often as a part of living in the modern world.

The authentic-fabricated axis is derived from Dunn's (2006) authentic-inauthentic axis. Something that is authentic exists with or without the presence of tourists. Something that is fabricated was made to attract and engage the international and domestic visitor. For Dunn (2006) the authentic can be called the backstage of a destination while the fabricated is on the stage for all to see. Experiencing the authentic gives the participant and viewer the sense of being an insider with access to the everyday lives of people at a destination (MacCannell, 1976).

The liminal axis is a point of departure from Dunn (2006). He imagined it as a point of change for the visitor or viewer that can progress to the point of "transgression and licence" (p. 161). In this work, liminality represents a point of social, structural and cultural change

for a destination. It is the point of the new replacing the old. Liminality is not a question of transgression, it is a question of development or evolution. Portrayals of points of departure for the future within a destination are considered liminal. Unchanging activities, settings, and experiences, the everyday and ordinary, are at the opposite end of the spectrum and considered stable.

The question of familiar or foreign is from the perspective of the participant or character in the video as well as anticipated audience members. For TAR the audience member is a person who lives in the United States and they are represented by the racers in the show. For the promotional videos, the audience is English-speaking people with an interest in places and travel outside of their home country. Familiar is something that would be normal for these people. It is something they would be able to experience at home and it is completely comfortable for them. Foreign is something that is not normal, it is different from home, and it could potentially make one feel uncomfortable.

These manifest and latent aspects of the videos are compared on the basis of the research questions. The percentages of each are reported and the difference in percentages presented. The relative proportion of the two levels of portrayal are also shown. For the purposes of this study, any relative proportion above 25% is considered a substantial difference and reported as such.

Data analysis, results and discussion

Research Question 1: *What are the differences between the overt-induced portrayal of the Abu Dhabi image and the autonomous portrayal of the Abu Dhabi image?*

Manifest Pull Factors

Manifest Pull Factors	natural environment	built environment	heritage	amusement	sport	luxury
Abu Dhabi Amazing Race 2013	0.06	0.43	0.48	0.50	0.34	0.18
Abu Dhabi Promo Video 2012	0.33	0.29	0.45	0.26	0.11	0.23
Absolute Difference	0.27	0.14	0.03	0.24	0.23	0.05
Relative Proportion	0.82	0.33	0.06	0.48	0.68	0.22

Table 1: Manifest Pull Factor Comparison: Abu Dhabi-Race and Promos

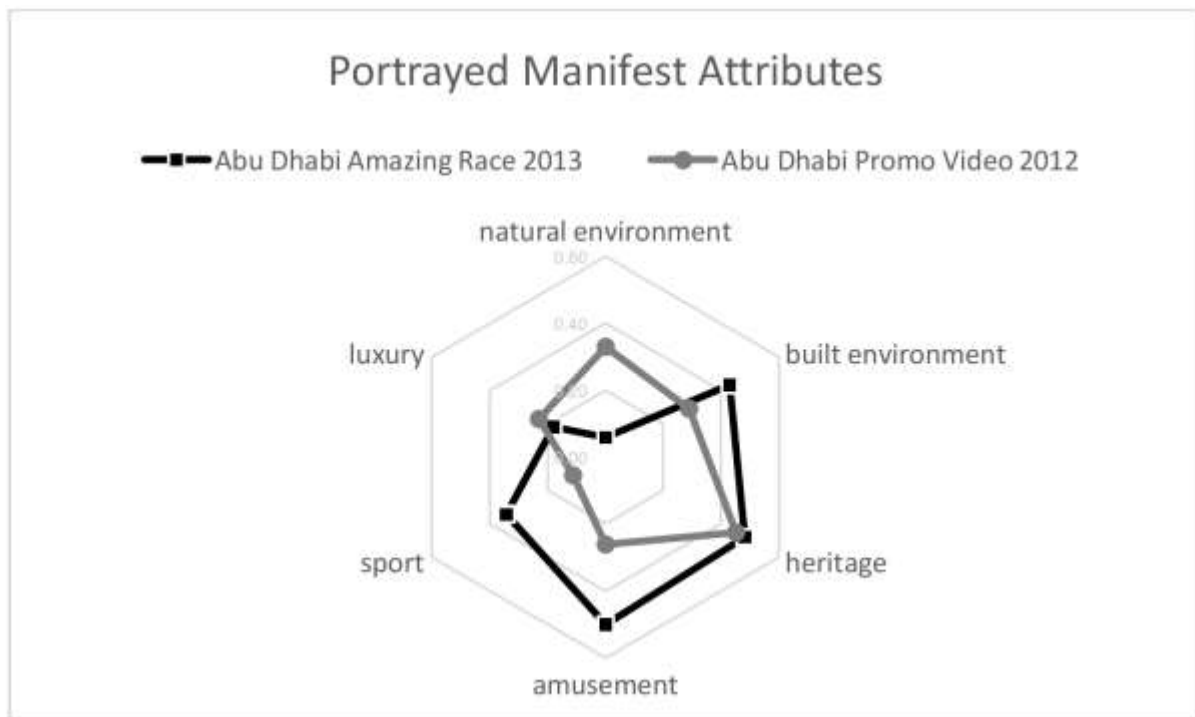


Figure 1: Manifest Pull Factor Comparison: Abu Dhabi-Race and Promos

The manifest pull-factors of these sources of Abu Dhabi image indicate that they are different. The two share near the same percentage of content related to luxury and heritage. But, the official promos have a higher percentage of the natural environment (33% to 6%). The television episodes have a higher percentage of the built environment (43% to 29%), sport (50% to 26%) and adventure (34% to 11%). The unshared pull-factors from the promo videos also demonstrate a manifest difference between the video promos and TAR.

Latent Visitor Dyad

Latent Visitor Dyad		
	traveler	interactor
Abu Dhabi Amazing Race 2013	0.89	0.80
Abu Dhabi Promo Video 2012	0.18	0.24
Absolute Difference	0.71	0.56
Relative Proportion	0.80	0.70

Table 2: Latent Visitor Dyad Comparison: Abu Dhabi-Race and Promos

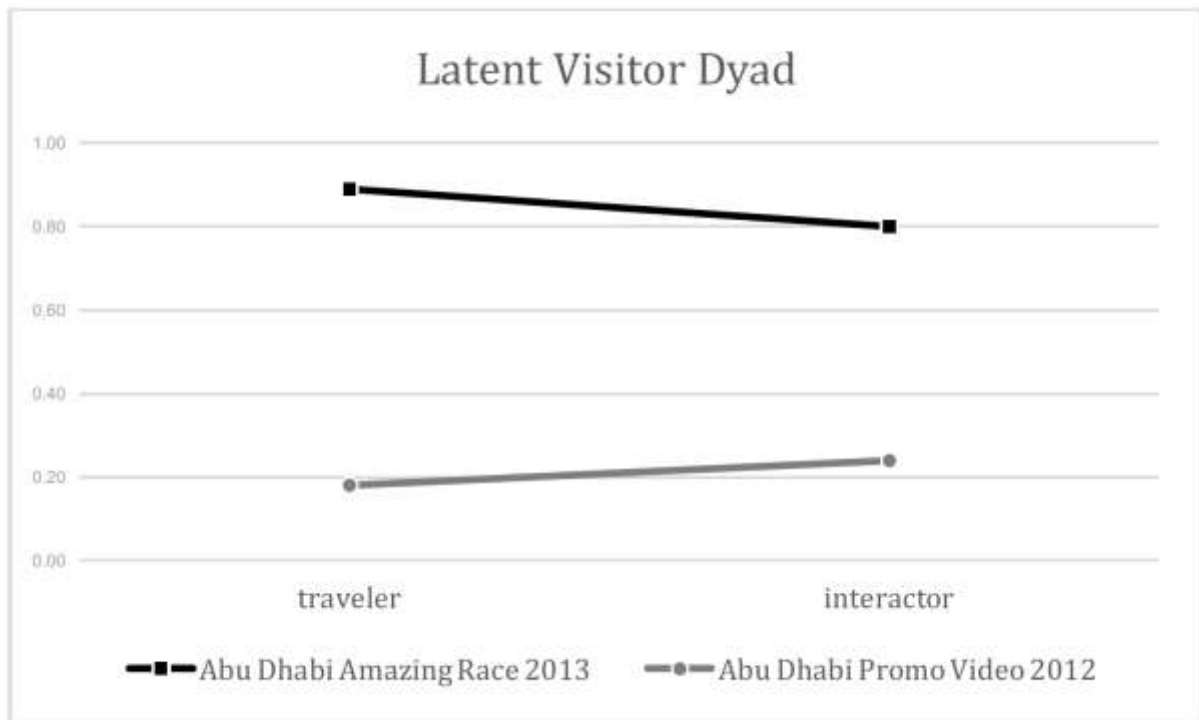


Figure 2: Latent Visitor Dyad Comparison: Abu Dhabi-Race and Promos

The differences on traveller and interactor are large and expected. TAR puts participants into competitive situations and therefore the percentage of travellers (89% to 18%) and interactors (80% to 24%) is expected to be higher. It is the nature of the program that leads to this part of the differentiated image.

Latent Culture Triad

Latent Culture Triad			
	pop culture	folk culture	high culture
Abu Dhabi Amazing Race 2013	0.32	0.34	0.22
Abu Dhabi Promo Video 2012	0.24	0.58	0.26
Absolute Difference	0.08	0.24	0.04
Relative Proportion	0.25	0.41	0.15

Table 3: Latent Culture Triad Comparison: Abu Dhabi-Race and Promos



Figure 3: Latent Culture Triad Comparison: Abu Dhabi-Race and Promos

The latent culture triad shows that TAR is missing something that is found in the promos. The most substantial difference is in the higher amount of folk culture in the promo videos (58% to 34%). *The Amazing Race* episodes are fairly balanced in the expression of these three types of culture with a de-emphasis of high culture. The promo videos have a balance of high culture and pop culture but have a completely unbalanced emphasis on folk culture.

Latent Attribute Triad

Latent Attribute Triad			
	authentic	liminal	foreign
Abu Dhabi Amazing Race 2013	0.61	0.48	0.95
Abu Dhabi Promo Video 2012	0.60	0.49	0.66
Absolute Difference	0.01	0.01	0.29
Relative Proportion	0.02	0.02	0.31

Table 4: Latent Attribute Triad Comparison: Abu Dhabi-Race and Promos



Figure 4: Latent Attribute Triad Comparison: Abu Dhabi-Race and Promos

The latent attribute triad demonstrates similarity in content but still expresses a significant difference. There is a substantially higher amount of content that can be counted as foreign to the audience in TAR episodes (95% to 66%) while the authentic and liminal are nearly equal for both types of media content. Emphasizing the foreign is another means to a dramatic end for TAR and it results in a different expression of the destination image.

Research Question 2: *What are the similarities and differences between the overt-induced portrayal of the Dubai image and the autonomous portrayal of the Dubai image?*

Manifest Pull Factors

Manifest Pull Factors	natural environment	built environment	heritage	amusement	sport	luxury
Dubai Amazing Race 2016	0.19	0.34	0.51	0.53	0.20	0.34
Dubai Promo Video 2016	0.33	0.43	0.28	0.13	0.19	0.18
Absolute Difference	0.14	0.09	0.23	0.40	0.01	0.16
Relative Proportion	0.42	0.21	0.45	0.75	0.05	0.47

Table 5: Manifest Pull Factor Comparison: Dubai-Race and Promos

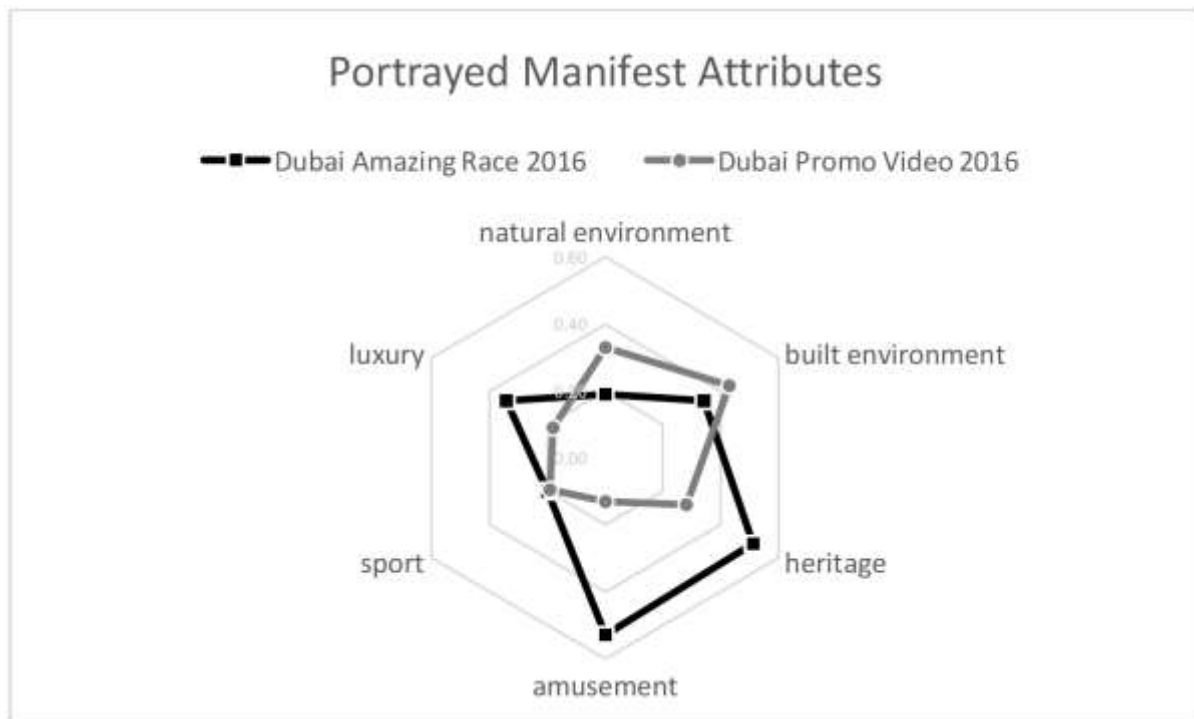


Figure 5: Manifest Pull Factor Comparison: Dubai-Race and Promos

At the manifest level, these pieces of content are providing different images of Dubai. Sport and built environment are reasonably close to one another across the content. However, TAR shows far more amusement (53% to 13%), heritage (51% to 28%) and luxury (34% to 18%) while showing less natural environment (19% to 33%). The manifest pull-factors of the Dubai image only found in the promo videos are family-friends (30%), sun-sea-sand (18%), night-life (11%) and shopping (3%).

Latent Visitor Dyad

Latent Visitor Dyad		
	traveler	interactor
Dubai Amazing Race 2016	1.00	0.42
Dubai Promo Video 2016	0.20	0.18
Absolute Difference	0.80	0.24
Relative Proportion	0.80	0.57

Table 6: Latent Visitor Dyad Comparison: Dubai-Race and Promos

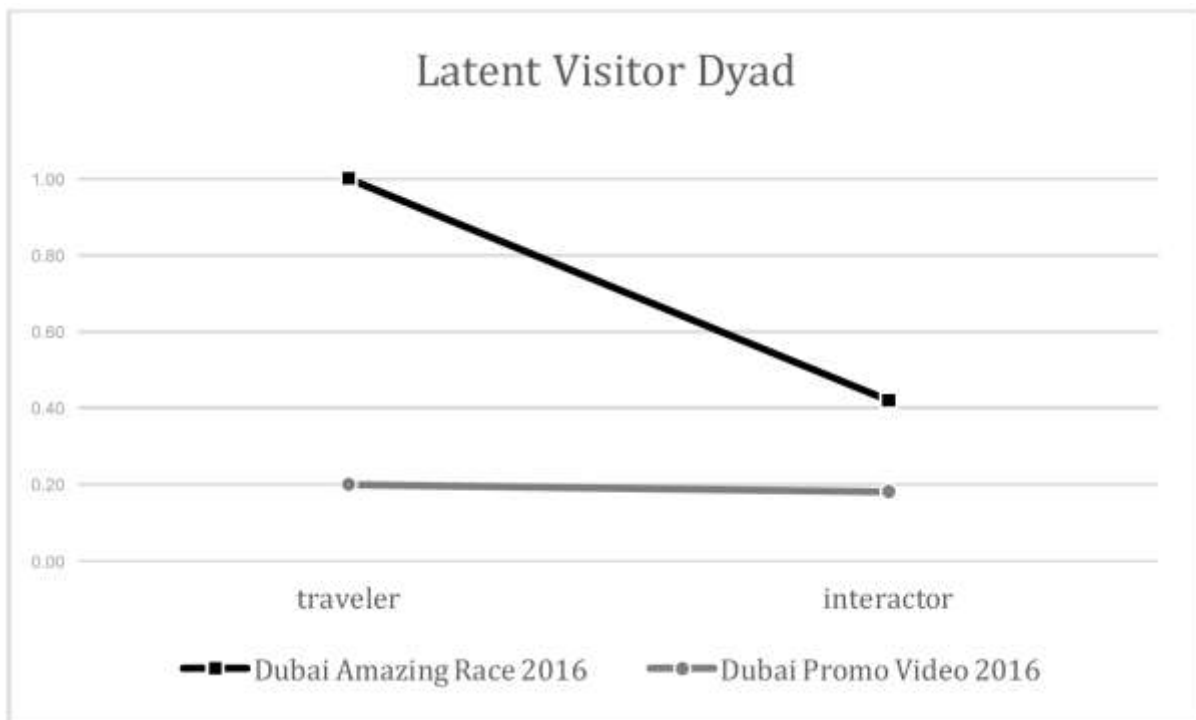


Figure 6: Latent Visitor Dyad Comparison: Dubai-Race and Promos

Based on the nature of the program, TAR offers up segments that all have players and audience as participants (100%). The traveller (20%) and interactor (18%) levels are balanced in the promo videos but well below TAR levels. The interactor (42%) percentage for TAR is higher than for the promos but far lower than the traveller level at 100%. This is a function of the reality-competition genre and a possible stress point for the racers.

Latent Culture Triad

Latent Culture Triad	pop culture	folk culture	high culture
Dubai Amazing Race 2016	0.38	0.46	0.00
Dubai Promo Video 2016	0.56	0.25	0.30
Absolute Difference	0.18	0.21	0.30
Relative Proportion	0.32	0.46	1.00

Table 7: Culture Triad Comparison: Dubai-Race and Promos



Figure 7: Culture Triad Comparison: Dubai-Race and Promos

TAR had no high culture elements at all (0%) for Dubai while the promos had 30% of their time associated with high culture. The Race had nearly twice as much folk culture as the promos (46% to 25%). The latent culture triad of these two types of video content indicates that they are presenting different destination images.

Latent Attribute Triad

Latent Attribute Triad	authentic	liminal	foreign
Dubai Amazing Race 2016	0.66	0.34	0.66
Dubai Promo Video 2016	0.35	0.67	0.78
Absolute Difference	0.31	0.33	0.12
Relative Proportion	0.47	0.49	0.15

Table 8: Latent Attribute Triad Comparison: Dubai-Race and Promos



Figure 8: Latent Attribute Triad Comparison: Dubai-Race and Promos

The latent attribute triads for these two sources of the video also demonstrate that they are different. The promos have a very high level of time given to content that is foreign for the audience but so does TAR (78% to 66%). TAR had a higher percentage of authentic content (66% to 35%) while the official promo videos had a higher percentage of liminal segments (67% to 34%).

Research Question 3: *Is the autonomous portrayal of the Abu Dhabi image the same as the autonomous portrayal of the Dubai image?*

Manifest Attributes

Manifest Pull Factors	natural environment	built environment	heritage	amusement	sport	luxury
Dubai Amazing Race 2016	0.19	0.34	0.51	0.53	0.20	0.34
Abu Dhabi Amazing Race 2013	0.06	0.43	0.48	0.50	0.34	0.18
Absolute Difference	0.13	0.09	0.03	0.03	0.14	0.16
Relative Proportion	0.68	0.21	0.06	0.06	0.41	0.47

Table 9: Manifest Attribute Comparison: Dubai Race and Abu Dhabi Race



Figure 9: Manifest Attribute Comparison: Dubai Race and Abu Dhabi Race

Considering these manifest attributes of the presentations, it appears TAR is giving their audience destination images that differentiate these two emirates. The portrayed images are nearly equal on the built environment, heritage and amusement. But, Dubai has a more natural environment (19% to 6%) and luxury (34% to 18%) and Abu Dhabi has more sport (34% to 20%).

Latent Visitor Dyad

Latent Visitor Dyad		
	traveler	interactor
Dubai Amazing Race 2016	1.00	0.42
Abu Dhabi Amazing Race 2013	0.89	0.80
Absolute Difference	0.11	0.38
Relative Proportion	0.11	0.48

Table 10: Latent Visitor Dyad Comparison: Dubai Race and Abu Dhabi Race

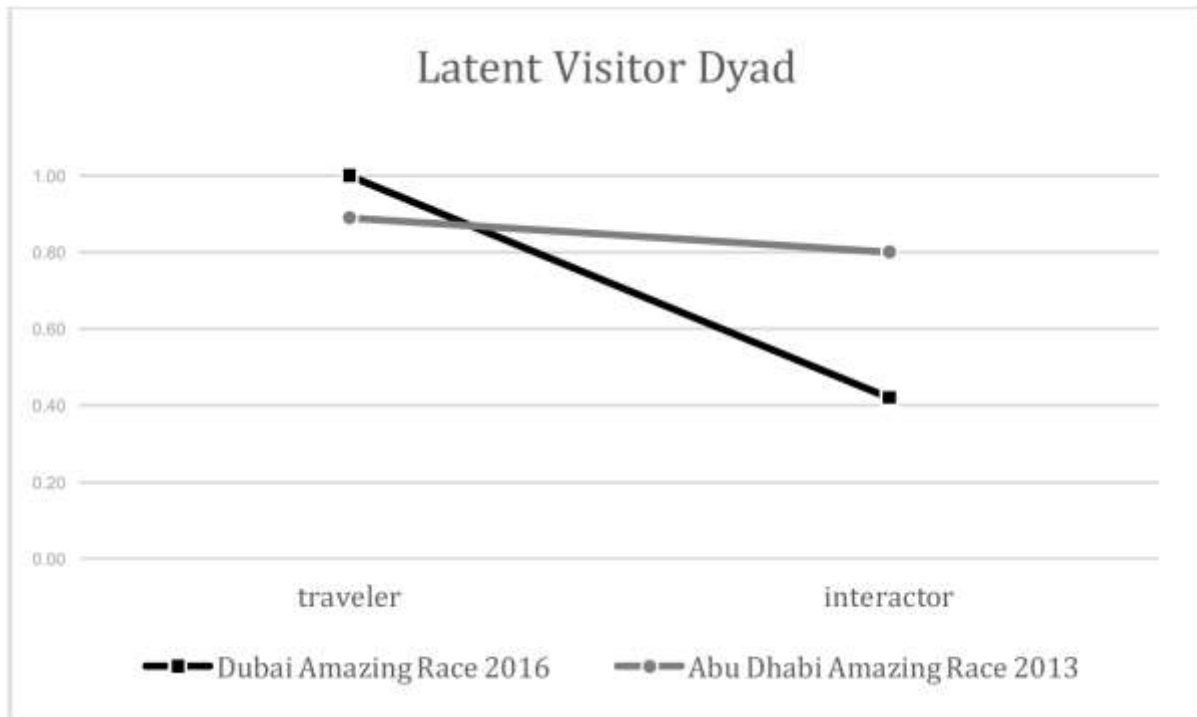


Figure 10: Latent Visitor Dyad Comparison: Dubai Race and Abu Dhabi Race

The idea of a traveller in these two emirates is virtually the same in these two Amazing Race presentations. Being an interactor is substantially different. The interactor percentage in Abu Dhabi (80%) is much higher than Dubai (42%). A show that thrives on travellers interacting with residents in a place portrays a difference in the case of these two emirates. It shows that they are equally equipped for travellers but that Abu Dhabi provides almost twice as much opportunity for interaction with residents.

Latent Culture Triad

Latent Cultural Triad			
	pop culture	folk culture	high culture
Dubai Amazing Race 2016	0.38	0.46	0.00
Abu Dhabi Amazing Race 2013	0.32	0.34	0.22
Absolute Difference	0.06	0.12	0.22
Relative Proportion	0.16	0.26	1.00

Table 11: Latent Culture Triad Comparison: Dubai Race and Abu Dhabi Race



Figure 11: Latent Culture Triad Comparison: Dubai Race and Abu Dhabi Race

The latent culture triad also demonstrates differences in the images of these two destinations on TAR. Dubai is shown with no high culture (0%) while Abu Dhabi is portrayed with 22% of time connected to high culture. TAR’s Dubai has more folk culture than Abu Dhabi (46% to 34%) while the two are not substantially different on pop culture with Abu Dhabi at 32% and Dubai at 38%.

Latent Attribute Triad

Latent Attribute Triad			
	authentic	liminal	foreign
Dubai Amazing Race 2016	0.66	0.34	0.66
Abu Dhabi Amazing Race 2013	0.61	0.48	0.95
Absolute Difference	0.05	0.14	0.29
Relative Proportion	0.08	0.29	0.31

Table 12: Latent Attribute Triad Comparison: Dubai Race and Abu Dhabi Race



Figure 12: Latent Attribute Triad Comparison: Dubai Race and Abu Dhabi Race

The latent attribute triad for these portrayals shows a similarity and two differences between the two emirates on TAR. They are nearly the same on the authentic percentage of time with Dubai at 66% and Abu Dhabi at 61%. Abu Dhabi (48%) has more time given to the liminal than Dubai (34%) and what appears to be a lot more time given to images that are foreign for the audience (95% to 66%). The relative proportional difference for both is hovering at around 30%.

Discussion

The destination image of Abu Dhabi from the autonomous source of *The Amazing Race* television series is not consistent with the overt-induced image of the official promotional videos published by the Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority. The manifest pull-factors are showing that the portrayals are different in the extreme while differences in latent factors are more limited. The latent portrayal factors show differences beyond the ones expected to exist in the visitor dyad. TAR is missing the folk culture emphasis of the promos and is creating an image that is filled with more foreign elements than the promos. On the other four latent measures, this autonomous portrayal is an extension of the image the DMO is trying to communicate. The latent elements demonstrate that the image has not been completely hijacked while the manifest elements would indicate otherwise.

TAR presents a manifest and latent Abu Dhabi image that is different from Dubai. The viewers of *The Amazing Race* in the United States see an Abu Dhabi that has as much emphasis on built environment, heritage, and amusement as Dubai but is more sporty, more urban and less luxurious. Abu Dhabi is, however, shown to be particularly different from Dubai in terms of more opportunities for interaction, more high culture, more experiences on the cusp of change, more that is foreign to the visitor from the U.S., and less that is reflective of traditional culture. These are differences that are interesting because Stephenson and Ali-Knight (2010) point to the fact that heritage is a more important part of the overt destination product in Abu Dhabi. Dubai has experienced criticism for not giving more emphasis to folk culture and heritage. Places and images change with time and looking at the TAR image of Dubai may indicate the emirate has grasped the importance of heritage tourism for the Arab world (Steiner, 2010). It needs to be remembered that this is the image presented by *The Amazing Race* and not the Dubai DMO. The images are different but neither one may be the

image preferred by the respective tourism authority. It can, however, be argued that the Abu Dhabi image is closer to its intended design.

The Amazing Race appears to have completely hijacked the image of Dubai. The autonomous destination image is not the same as the overt-induced image of the Dubai DMO. This is clearly not at the level found by Williams-Burnett et al. (2016) for Kavos, Greece or involve the level of damage done to the image of Turkey by the film, *Midnight Express* (Sonmez & Sirakay, 2002). It does not involve the type of staged deception and undermining of authenticity found by Kim et al. (2017). Yet, at the manifest level, the DMO image of Dubai has less amusement, heritage, and luxury, but more natural environment than TAR. Additionally, friends-family, sun-sea-sand, night-life, and shopping play a role in the promo videos while having no presence in TAR. These differences continue at the latent levels. TAR's Dubai has no high culture, twice as much folk culture, more authentic elements and less liminality than the official image. It can be argued that this is far different than the Dubai that Dubai wants the world to see. The actual Dubai attracted over 14 million overseas visitors in 2016 (Dubai DTCM, 2017) so these differences in presentation are important.

It is important to remember that the producers of *The Amazing Race* are consumers of a destination image as well as creators of an image for that same destination. They can view the overt-induced messages to help make a production plan, but that plan will change when they are engaged with the destination. Repeated engagement could alter their point of view even further. The producers of *The Amazing Race* had experiences in the UAE which could have had an impact on the image they created. Coming to Dubai in 2016 they had already experienced the emirate in different phases of its development in 2005 and 2009. They also had their 2013 experiences in Abu Dhabi that could have had an impact on their perception and presentation of a Dubai image. The Dubai TAR episodes from 2009 and 2016 present a very similar image of the emirate in spite of the passing of seven years. The one aspect that is

dramatically different between these two images is heritage as a manifest pull-factor (19% in 2009 and 51% in 2016) and the latent level of folk culture included (13% in 2009 and 46% in 2016). In between those episodes is the Abu Dhabi episodes which also have strong similarities to Dubai 2009 on authentic, liminal and foreign but show similarly large differences in heritage and folk culture. The Abu Dhabi episodes appear to have had an impact on the 2016 Dubai episode. In the attempt to present Dubai in a fresh way for its audience the producers abandoned some of the conventional Dubai image tropes to present a different and ostensibly more traditional destination.

This study also demonstrates that Dunn's (2006) structure provides a strong foundation for analyzing media content from various sources. It goes beyond the apparently straightforward image provided by manifest pull-factors to get closer to the core of the destination image. The latent structure reduces the number of factors being considered particularly when the number of manifest pull-factors is very high. This enables the comparison of image elements that might not be manifestly shared in different forms of media content. The eight latent attributes in their three groups provide a means for comparing media content from different sources and different times. They demonstrate how a destination image is hijacked by autonomous agents at the core and to what extent it can change a potential visitor's point of view.

Practical Implications

The analysis and comparison of official and autonomous destination images can be valuable to stakeholders. Knowing how someone has altered the image can inspire policy to control the opportunities for alteration or lead to relationships that will make the changes less likely. More importantly, knowing at a deep level how a message has been altered also tells stakeholders how the image has been received. It can point to whether the intended image has been received and perhaps whether it can be received by a particular audience. Knowing what

autonomous sources are saying and how they have altered an official image might also demonstrate an approach and image that will be more readily received by the intended audience. Autonomous sources without malicious intent could provide an alternative view on a place and offer that is too well known by the people involved in marketing the destination. It is imperative for DMOs to exercise control over their mediated image, particularly when it is in a program that is thought to portray a reality that is more trustworthy than the image they communicate. The first step is analyzing the content of these alternative message sources at the core as well as the surface.

It is possible that the Dubai image is too complex to be fully grasped. This is another important factor for DMOs need to understand. The official Dubai promos gave the audience ten different pull factors to attract them and Abu Dhabi gave the audience nine. Balakrishnan (2009) advises a focus on three to seven “tangible and functional destination attributes” (p. 619) rather than trying to be all things to all people. *The Amazing Race* episodes focused on six pull factors across the two destinations and gave viewers different views of the destinations. These may not be the desired foci of the two emirates but the more limited message across more minutes of airtime might be more effective and better understood. TAR producers have 28 seasons of experience with the audience in the United States and may have a better understanding of their audience. A clearer image could also be more difficult to hijack because it is easier to comprehend in the first instance.

This framework can give decision-makers the information they need to continue down a set path or make a change. Starting with manifest pull-factors it might be concluded that two destinations are making different offers, but when the latent factors are examined it can become clear whether the offer and the image are the same or different at the core. The highly competitive nature of tourism mandates decisions that are based on a wide array of inputs and information. Using this method adds to the available pool of information.

Limitations

The clear limitation of this study is that it only looks at two destinations and their images on one television show. This hampers generalizability but gives a depth of information that can be expanded to the study of destination images across regions and the world, regardless of the source of those images. Dubai is a clear tourism success story and Abu Dhabi is becoming one at an impressive rate. The lessons learned there can provide insight for other established and emerging destinations.

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