Peace Agreement Influencing the Risk Perception and the Travel Intention

Tourism Industry is considered as one of the world's most important economic activities due to its fastest growing elements in the global trade. For some countries and travel destinations, tourism is an important economic sector where economic growth and survival are dependent on, as it contributes an important portion of the country's gross domestic product. Destination marketers, the tourism sector, and, the government should work together in order to promote destinations which will create strategies that aim to make touristic spots attractive, thus instilling in them the intention to travel to these specific destinations.

This study examined the impact of tourism information, destination image, and government strategy on tourists' intention to visit Colombia as a tourist destination. 43 questionnaires were collected as the pilot test; respondents were international tourists from different continents. The pilot test was analyzed using descriptive statistics. It was found that the source of information more often used is specialized tourism website. Respondents were motivated with the signing of the peace agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC Guerrilla, as a strategy developed by the government. The main characteristic that the tourists recognized had of the Colombian Image is the natural scenic beauty and different landscapes.

The main finding in this research is that majority of the respondents feels motivated towards the intention and make plans to visit Colombia after the peace agreement.

Key Words: Peace agreement, Risk Perception, Intention to visit, Colombia.

INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is considered as one of the world's most important economic activities due to its fastest growing elements in the global trade (Kim, Chen and Jan, 2006; Balaguer and Cantavella, 2002; Parrilla, Font and Nadal, 2007; Ishikawa and Fukushige, 2007; Dritsakis, 2004). It is an important economic sector from which some countries and travel destinations draw their economic growth and means of survival from. Moreover, this industry contributes a significant portion of the country's GDP and offers a big number of employment opportunities (Brida, Monterubbianesi, and Zapata-Aguirre, 2011; Cole & Morgan, 2010). Therefore, managing and mitigating crisis and disasters are core competency for tourism destination managers (Ritchie, 2004), they should create helpful strategies in order to stop or limit the impact on a growing and important sector.

Since 1964, the year in which the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia or FARC*) and National Liberation Army (*Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional or ELN*) were formed; Colombia's internal armed conflict and political instability have been increasing since then (Ortiz, 2002). Consequently, for many years Colombian tourism (international and local tourists' arrivals) has been seriously affected due to the country's internal guerrilla conflict and terrorist attacks. The tourism industry suffered a serious decline as tourists avoided Colombia as a travel destination because they perceived the country as risky and unsafe, and even Colombians considered it risky to travel to other regions due to kidnappings in the roads by guerrilla organizations (Fernandez, 2002).

In efforts to alleviate this situation, Presidents of Colombia have been developed different strategies to solve the internal conflict with guerrillas trying through peace agreements (Sossai,

2005). Government also developed special programs and policies to prevent terrorist attacks against coal, electric, oil ports and airports, and telecommunications infrastructures, and offering incentives such as access to the healthy and education system, even providing a monthly monetary aid for a period of two years to disarmers (Jimenez & Santos, 2016).

With the proper implementation of the mentioned strategies and policies by thr government, Colombia's perception about security and its general safety conditions changed when the first presidential period of Alvaro Uribe ended by 2006. People felt safer and thus started to travel again.

According to Blanke and Chiesa (2009) Colombia was ranked as number 133/133 in terms of the business cost of terrorism. It was not seen any change according to Travel & Tourism competitiveness report (World Economic Forum, 2017) were Colombia ranked as number 136/136 in terms of safe and security, therefore it can be seen that the country image has not change yet for international organizations. Evidently, this issue carries serious implications about the country's image and reputation. Destination Image is a key factor in tourist's travel destination decision due to tourism services are intangible; according to Santana (2003), there is a "strong correlation between positive perception of a destination and a positive purchase decision" (p. 300). Therefore, a negative image of a tourist destination will negatively affect the number of tourists' arrivals in a country.

The country image can change positively thanks to the effort to end of the internal conflict that the country had for a period of 50 years with the Guerrilla. On October 7th 2016, the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the Nobel Peace Prize to Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos for his resolute efforts to bring the country's more than 50-year-long civil war to an end. In addition, on November 24th 2016 the peace agreement between Colombia and was signed.

The importance of this study is to develop a body of research that focuses on the impact of peace agreement, tourism information, destination image, and government strategy on Colombia tourism industry when tourists are comparing different options of vacation spots and taking their final decision.

FRAMEWORK

Tourism Information

Information is one of the most important factors influencing and determining consumer behavior (Assael, 1998). Consumer awareness, selection and choice of tourism destination depends on the information available to and used by the tourist (Fodness & Murray, 1997). Tourists look for information when they are choosing a tourist destination with the aim of enhancing the quality of their trip by decreasing the level of associated uncertainty trought information search (Maser & Weiermair, 1998).

As tourist can be involved in different kinds of risk in their trips, they search for information in order to reduce risk and improve decision making (Maser & Weiermair, 1998). In addition, the higher the perceived risk the more information tourists search for and the more rational the decision process becomes.

Information sources influence the forming of perceptions and evaluations (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Gartner, 1993; Molina, Gomez & Martin-Consuegra, 2010). Tourists are exposed to different information sources. The primary source of information includes

people's personal experience on visiting a specific destination and electronic word of mouth (Jalilvand, Samiei, Dini & Manzari, 2012; Phelps, 1986). The secondary sources of information play a relevant and essential role in forming images of the alternative destinations to be considered in the decision-making process (Gartner, 1993; Jacobsen & Munar; 2012; Lepp, Gibson & Lane; 2011).

Destination Image

According to Beerli and Matin (2004), destination image is a concept formed by the consumer's reasoned and emotional interpretation as the result of two closely interrelated factors: perceptive/cognitive evaluations referring to the individual's own knowledge and beliefs about the affective evaluations relating to an individual's feelings towards the object (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Gartner, 1989; Maher & Carter, 2011; Medina, Rey & Rufin, 2010; Walmsley & Jenkins, 1993). The mixture of these two components produce an overall image that can be positive or negative, evaluating a tourist destination (Stern & Krakover, 1993).

Negative media coverage can impact attitude formation quite easily. Because of the intangible nature of the travel experience, tourism depends greatly on positive images. Destination image affects the individual's perspective perception, and it has been identified as a crucial factor in travel choice and tourism marketing, (Bramwell & Rawding, 1996; Chon, 1990; Dann, 1996; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; C. Echtner & J. Ritchie, 1993; Ehemann, 1977; Gallarza, Saura, & Garcia, 2002; Telisman-Kosuta, 1994)

Hunt (1975) was the first who demonstrated the importance destination image has on increasing the number of tourists visiting destinations. Nowadays, different authors have shown the significance of the role played by image in the process of decision making, and, by extension, choice (Alvarez & Campo. 2014; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Chen & Kerstetter, 1999; Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1996; C. Echtner & J. Ritchie, 1993; Gallarza et al., 2002; Gartner, 1993; Goodrich, 1978; Milman & Pizam, 1995; Woodside & Lysonski, 1989).

Government Strategy

Political instability, terrorist attacks, and violent acts can significantly reduce tourist patterns to other parts of the world, thus it can be said that the tourism industry is significantly vulnerable to external factors and pressures in the operating environment (Ritchie, 2004).

Terrorism has effects on international traveler attitudes and decisions and it has a much greater negative effect on the tourism industry rather than any other human cause (Norton, 1994). Many travelers face a risk of being caught up in terrorist attacks, therefore, the number of international travelers appears to decrease subsequently to a dramatic terrorist attack (Kelly & Cook, 1994).

Risk perception plays an important role in tourist's destination choice, as this involves uncertainty about outcomes and consequences. Perceived risk can be characterized as a function of uncertainty, making touristic destination less desirable for tourists (Korstanje, 2011; Maser & Weiermair, 1998; Quintal, Lee & Soutar; 2010). According to Reisinger and Mavondo (2006, p. 14), related to the tourism industry, risk has been defined as "what is

perceived and experienced by the tourist during the process of purchasing and consuming travel services".

Previous research found that tourists tend to avoid vacations spots when they perceived risk associated with terrorism, crime and violent acts (Alvarez & Campo. 2014; Araña & León, 2008; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Cheron & Ritchie, 1982; Dowling & Staelin, 1994; Drakos & Kutan, 2003; Feichtinger, Hartl, Kort, & Novak, 2001; Hall, 2010; Henderson, 2003; Kelly & Cook, 1994; Lepp & Gibson, 2003; Ness, 2005; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2006; Richter, 2003; Richter & Waugh, 1986; Sönmez, 1998; Sonmez et al., 1999).

In efforts to alleviate this situation, the government of Colombia developed and implemented strategies focused on improve the internal situation that may cause terrorist attacks and political instability, to improve the country image and therefore to increase the number of international arrivals. Colombian Government signed the peace agreement with the FARC, on November 2016 with the aim to improve national security and finish the armed conflict which lasted around 50 years. The Colombia government is also negotiating a new peace agreement with ELN.

Intention to visit

Tourists are rational consumers, who move through the decision process by weighting benefits against costs. When tourists plan to take a vacation, they will compare different alternatives according to perceived benefits and cost and they will evaluate prices, touristic attractions, health services, historic places, cleanliness, beaches (Pizam, Tarlow, & Bloom, 1997). The cost involved in this decision refers to risk associated with sickness, accidents, crime, terrorism, language barrier (Enders & Sandler, 1991; Enders, Sandler, & Parise, 1992). Terrorism at a specific destination will cause it to be perceived more costly than a safer destination (Alvarez & Campo, 2014).

International tourism is an expensive purchase, therefore, tourist are able to change their plans immediately after a terrorist occurrence. Tourists' objective on selecting a vacation spot is to enjoy a leisure experience, so for this reason, when dark elements disturb their original plans, the experience is stripped of any joy to be replaced by apprehension (Sönmez, 1998).

With this research we will study if the last strategies developed by the Colombian government towards peace agreements has a positive influence on traveler's intention to choose Colombia as a touristic destination.

Hypothesis

H1: Trustworthy and reliable tourism information has a positive influence on tourist destination image.
H2: Destination Image has a positive impact in tourists' intention to visit Colombia as a touristic destination.
H3: Government strategy has a positive impact in intention to visit Colombia as a touristic destination
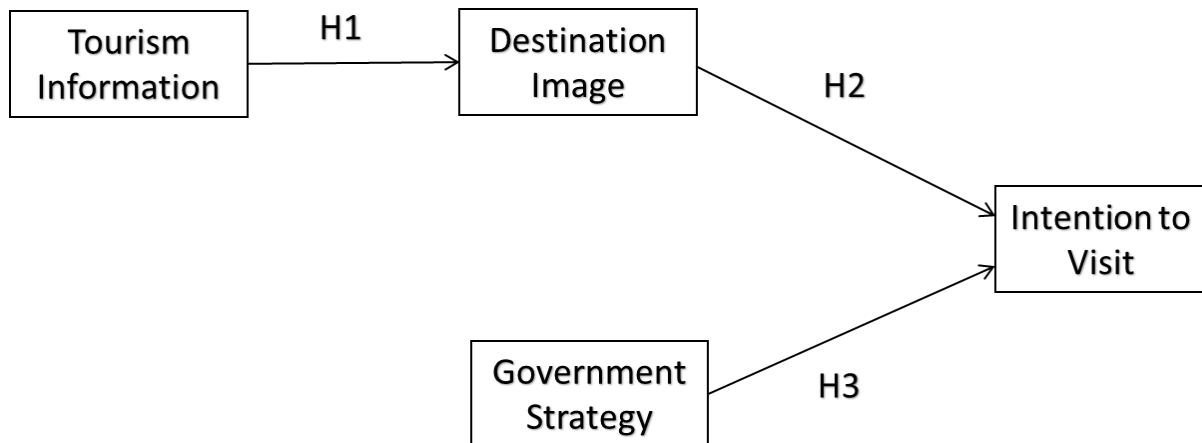
METHODOLOGY

Figure 1. Research Model

Tourism Information

To find what are the information sources that tourists consult with more frequency, the questionnaire will be composed of items and scales validated by prior researchers and construct definitions will be modified into questionnaire format (Assael, 1998; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Fodness & Murray, 1997; Gartner, 1989; Hunt, 1975; Manfredo, 1989; Maser & Weiermair, 1998; Pearce, 1982; Um John, 1990; Woodside & Lysonski, 1989). Seven point Likert scales from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7) will be used to determine the more consulted information sources.

Destination Image

This construct is divided into two factors, which are cognitive and affective images. The questionnaire items for this construct were developed based on a two-step process of combining unstructured and structured by Chen and Kerstetter (1999); Echtner and Ritchie (1993). The previous studies from Beerli and Martin (2004) and Tapachai and Waryzak (2000) were also reviewed to develop a comprehensive list of cognitive image attributes from which this list was modified. It was used seven-point Likert scale in the range of (1) care the least to (7) strongly care. There are five items included to measure the affective image of the destination. This part of the questionnaire was adopted from Walmsley and Young (1998). Seven-point likert scale is used for rating this construct.

Government Strategies

This part focuses on measuring the importance of the policies and strategies adopted by the current Colombian government in the fight against illegal groups. Respondents were required to rate their responses according to a seven-point Likert scale in the range of (1) care the least to (7) strongly care.

Intention to Visit

This part of the questionnaire has 18 items. The questions are measured by using a Seven-point Likert scales ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. This construct will be the result that shows the effect of all constructs on tourist's intention to visit.

Questionnaire Development and Sampling Plan

Pilot test was applied to international travelers to understand the perception of the country image, government strategies and the intention to visit Colombia as a touristic destination. The questionnaire was delivered to the respondents through internet, via online questionnaire and also the frame of this sample is taken by asking the tourists who have visited or will visit Colombia to fill the questionnaire. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

FINDINGS

It was collected 43 surveys for the pilot test, 58.14% of the respondents were female and 41.89% were male. About the marital status the 62.79% of the respondents are single, 58.14% are between 26 and 35 years Old, 81.40% of the respondents went to graduate school, 44.19% were birth in Asia (See table 1).

Table 1. Demographics

	Item	Answers #	Percentage
Gender	Male	18	41,89%
	Female	25	58,14%
Marital Status	Single	27	62,79%
	Married	15	34,88%
	Others	1	2,33%
Age	Less Than 25	6	13,95%
	26-35	25	58,14%
	36 – 45	9	20,93%
	46-55	2	4,65%
	Over 56	1	2,33%
Education	Senior High School	1	2,33%
	Undergraduate School	7	16,28%
	graduate School	35	81,40%
Place of birth	North America	9	20,93%
	Latin America	6	13,95%
	Asia	19	44,19%
	Europe	9	20,93%

Tourism Information

Analyzing the source of information consulted by the respondents, it was found that specialized tourism web sites with a 6.24 on average are the most used by travelers, followed by specialized television and tourism channels or programs with a 4.42 on average. In contrast the source of information less used are newspapers with 2.33 on average (see figure 2).
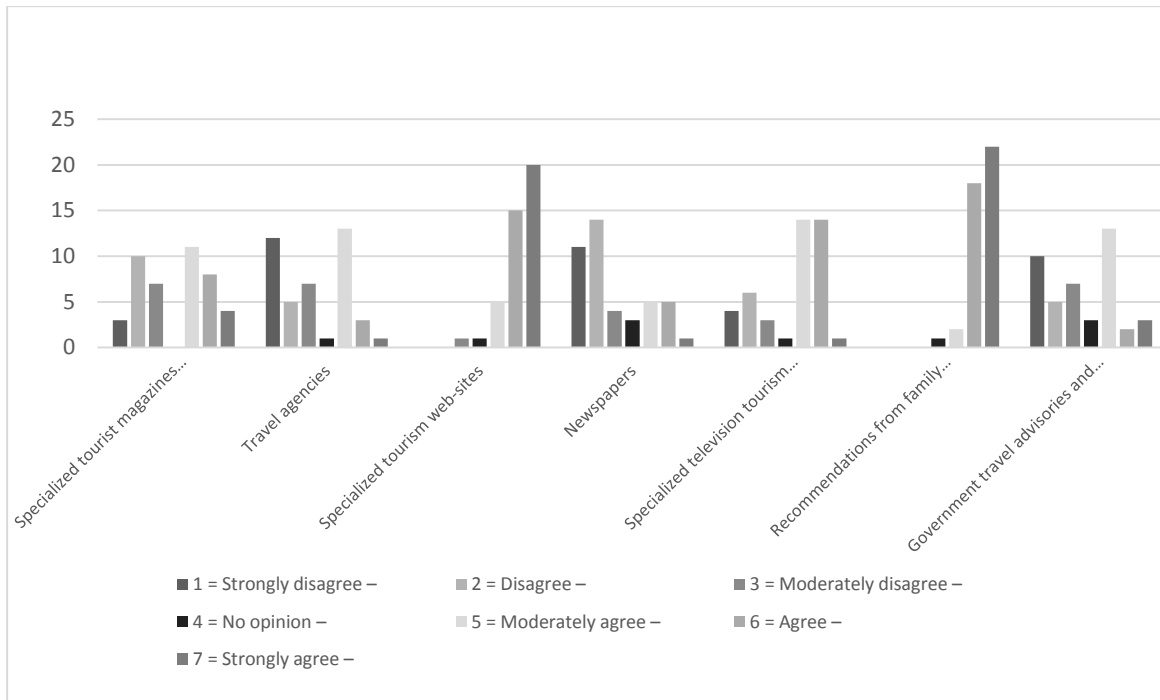
Figure 2. Tourism Information

Government Strategies

When asking respondents what they agreed or disagreed the most related to government strategies to improve the internal situation of the country. It was found that they agree with the peace agreement with a score of 5.63 on average, followed by the demobilization of rebels with a score of 5.26 on average, and increase of military forces and recover of territory control both with a score of 5.05. In contrast the strategy that respondents were more disagree with was related to militarized roads with a score 4.74 on average (see figure 3).
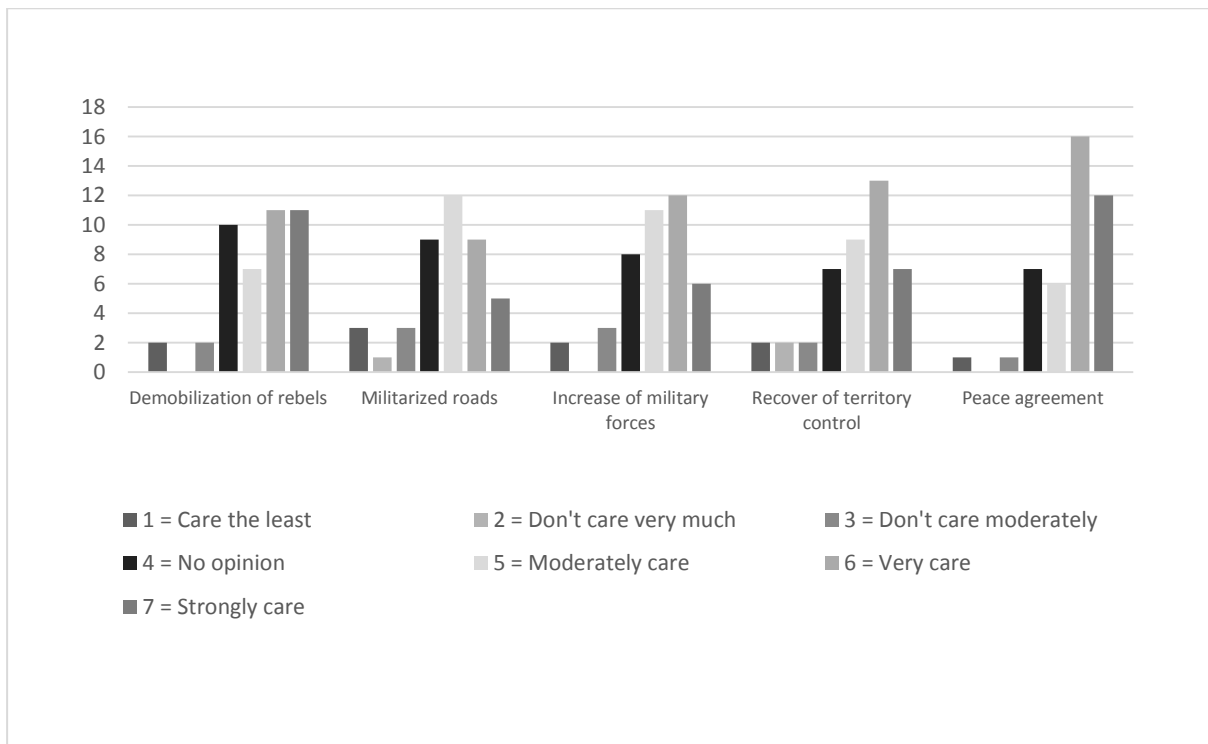
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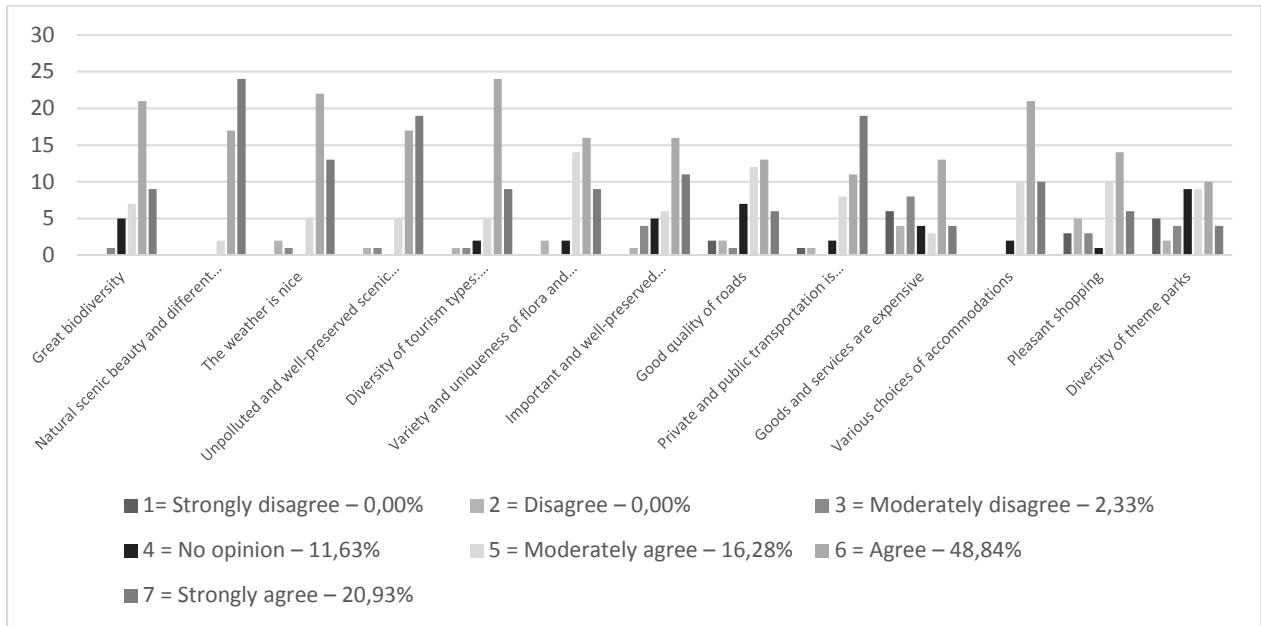
Destination Image

Figure 4. Destination Image – Cognitive Image

When the cognitive destination image was analyzed, it was found that for the respondents the most important element when choosing a touristic destination is the natural scenic beauty and different landscapes with a score of 6.51 on average, followed by unpolluted and well-preserve scenic areas with a score of 6.16 on average, private and public transportation convenience and cost effective with an score of 5.95, the characteristic that is less important for tourists when choosing a tourist destination is goods and service are expensive with a score of 4.17 (See figure 4)

When analyzing the affective image – destination image, for tourists the most important characteristic when choosing a touristic destination is the beauty of the place with a score 5.84 on average, followed by how exciting is the destination with a score of 5.77 on average. In contrast the characteristic that tourists care the less is that the place be relaxing scoring 4.86 on average (see figure 5).
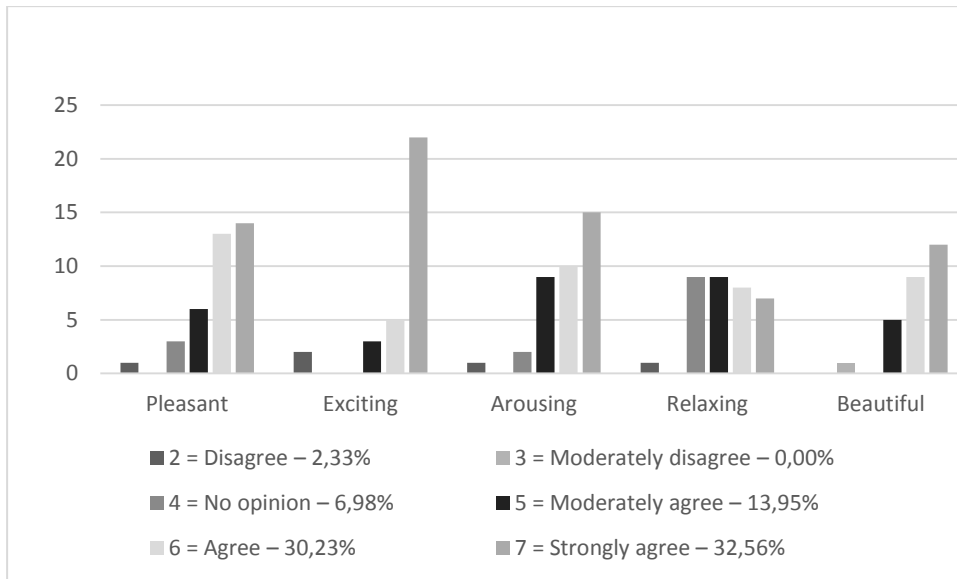
Figure 5. Destination Image – Affective Image

Intention to visit

This part of the questionnaire focused on the tourist opinion after reaching the peace agreement. When analyzing the plans to visit Colombia. 62.79% of the respondent strongly agree and agree about their plans to visit Colombia, 18.60% of the respondents moderately agree when planning to visit Colombia. In contrast, 11.63% of the respondents do not have any plan to visit Colombia.

The other question asked if with the implementation of the strategies by the government towards peace agreement, tourist intend to visit Colombia. 51.16% of the respondents were strongly agreed and agreed, 25.58% moderately agreed. In contrast 13.96% of the respondents disagreed with the intention to visit Colombia.
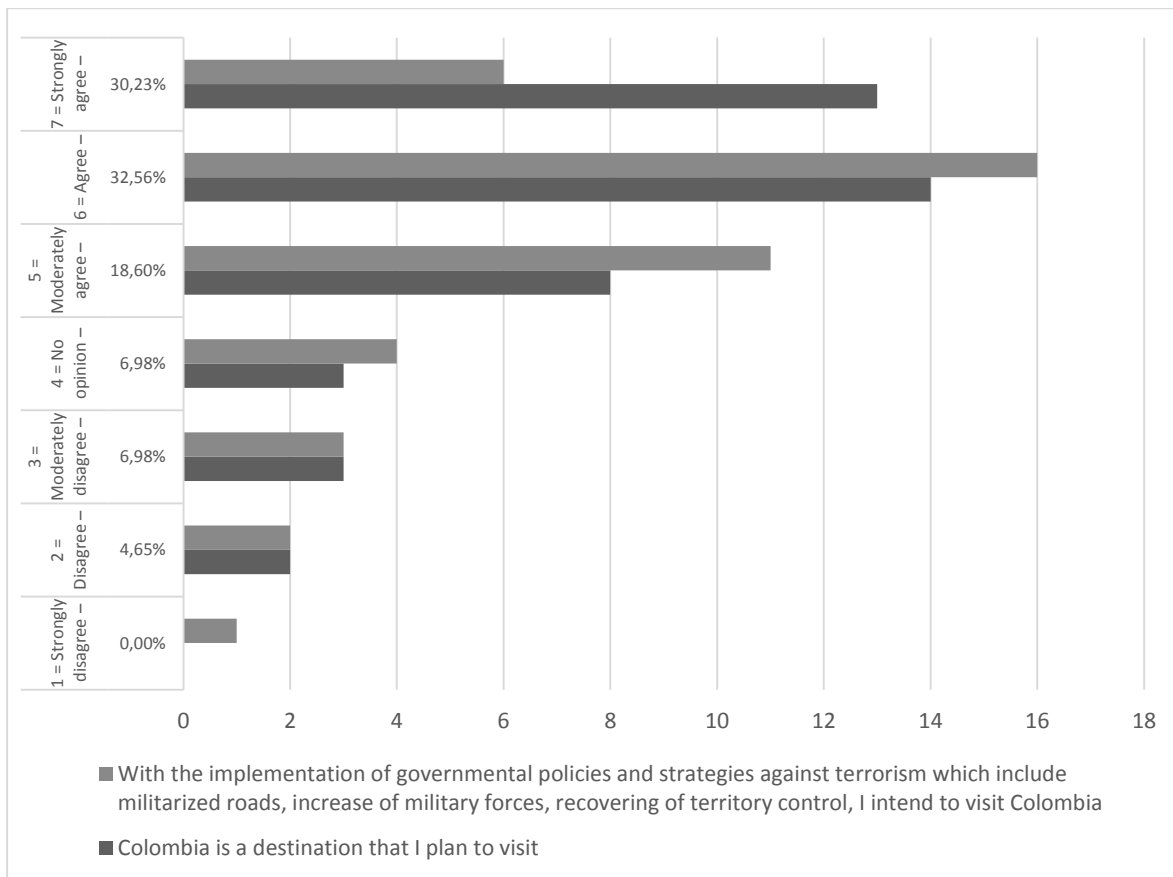
Figure 6. Intention to visit

DISCUSSION

The tourism Industry is considered as one of the world's most important economic activities due to its fastest growing elements in the global trade. Moreover, every day different governments and parties involved in the tourism industry have been developing strategies, policies, and marketing campaigns in order for different places to be considered as touristic destinations around the world.

When applying the pilot test, it was found that the source of information more used are specialized tourism web sites followed by specialized television channels or programs. Regarding to the government strategy respondents agree with the signing of the peace agreement was the main strategy that influence the image destination, followed by demobilization of rebels. The characteristics that tourists agree with the most about cognitive image were natural scenic beauty and different landscapes, unpolluted and well-preserve scenic areas, and if private and public transportation is convenient and cheap, respectively. Regarding the affective Image the principal characteristics that travelers have are the about of the destination, that the place is excited and that the please is relax and arouse.

When asking tourists about their plans to visit Colombia after the signing of the peace agreement 62.79% strongly agree and agree with their plans, while just 11.63% of the respondents reply they do not have plans to visit Colombia. It was also asked about their intention to visit Colombia 51.16% strongly agree and agree about the intention to visit Colombia, In contrast 13.96% have not the intention to visit the country.

CONCLUSIONS

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It was surprising to find that the perception of security of international organizations after the peace agreement have not change, when contrasting the level of safety and security Colombia has been ranked in the last place according to the report made by the Economic World Forum in the travel and tourism competitiveness report on 2009 and 2017.

The questionnaire was answered by people from different continents, therefore the results represents perceptions from people belonging to different religions, cultures, socioeconomic level and languages, who have a different life styles and conception of life.

As a general conclusion researchers found that the peace agreement has a positive effect on the image destination, perception and the travel intention to visit Colombia of international tourists when choosing a touristic destination. In contrast, the pilot test showed a small percentage of respondents who were afraid to visit the country.

Colombia is recognized as a country characterized by the beauty of natural scenic and landscapes, places and scenic areas that are unpolluted and well-preserve, low cost and convenient public and private transportation.

Researchers will continue developing this study trough the data collection and the analysis using advice statics methodologies. Future research can be done about Post-conflict after the implementation of the peace agreement and the influence on the perception and intention to visit the country when choosing a touristic destination.

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