

**Cigars, Castro and Communism: Country Concept  
as a factor in Cuban tourism advertising effectiveness**

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**Abstract**

A study conducted prior to the historic announcement about resumption of diplomatic relations between Cuba and the United States measured US adults' attitudes toward Cuba as well as their interest in visiting the island nation. Within the framework of the Model of Country Concept, this paper presents U.S. respondent attitudes toward Cuba as well as whether those attitudes moderate the effectiveness of a Cuban tourism television commercial. The study is the first to couple a scale of Country Reputation and a measure of Country Image in an effort to arrive at Country Concept and its potential to moderate advertising effects.

**Introduction**

The United States and Cuba have had an uncomfortable and often contentious relationship since Fidel Castro assumed power in the Revolution of 1959. A new era in diplomatic relations began in earnest in December 2014 when presidents of both countries announced a mutual desire to improve relations while simultaneously releasing prisoners who had been held as spies (DeYoung, 2014; Federal Register, 2014). At the time of this writing, both countries had established or re-opened their respective embassies, a limited number of primarily business travel restrictions had been eased, and talks continued about future loosening of sanctions and restrictions (Ahmed & Davis, 2015).

The timing of this study, in July 2014, afforded a look at Americans' views of Cuba before the announcements of cooperation and exchange. This paper considers those attitudes within the framework of Fullerton's (2015) Model of Country Concept, and uses a two-pronged measure of country concept that makes use of 1) an existing scale of country reputation (Yang, Shin, Lee, & Wrigley, 2008; Passow, Fehlmann, & Grahlow, 2005) as well as the valences of verbatim descriptions of Cuba as a measure of country image.

**U.S. and Cuban relations**

Suddath (2009) described Cubans and Americans as having more or less cooperated until 1959 when the Revolution changed the course of history, installing a communist regime in the Cuban government, melding the public and private sectors and imposing heavy taxes on US imports. The relationship since the late 1950s has been rife with restriction, conflict and, at times, white-knuckled exchange, including the Bay of

Pigs in 1961 and the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, as well as more recent incidents such as Elian Gonzalez, a 6-year-old Cuban boy who in 2000 was seized by U.S. federal agents and returned to Cuba from Miami-based relatives after his mother drowned while trying to escape to the United States (Barringer, 2000). It was the ideologies and practices of Fidel Castro's new Cuba and these violent actions carried out by both sides – coinciding with a new and booming mass media industry capable of disseminating information at an ever-faster rate – that led the United States to sever diplomatic ties and established a permanent embargo (Suddath, 2009). That embargo, for more than 50 years, has been “the linchpin of the U.S.-Cuba relationship” (Whitefield, 2014).

As a result of the embargo, travel restrictions have prevented both Cuban and U.S. citizens from crossing the 90-mile Strait of Florida. Cuba restricts travel by requiring an exit visa (*tarjeta blanca*), and the U.S. embargo restricts both trade and travel, which prevents almost all US citizens from traveling there and spending money (Whitefield, 2014).

Over the decades, American sentiment toward Cuba has been less than positive, but recent in years, a thaw in relations seemed to be apparent (Whitefield, 2014). According to a 2014 survey by the Atlantic Council, an international think tank based in Washington, DC, more recently Americans “favor normalizing relations or engaging more directly with the Cuban government” (Gladstone, 2014). The survey also showed one reason for this shift is the cost associated with maintaining the trade embargo and the subsequent cost to an already damaged American economy. So perhaps it was no great surprise to some, when on December 17, 2014, simultaneous announcements were made by US President Barack Obama and Cuban President Raul Castro that marked the beginning of a new era for the two countries (DeYoung, 2015). The release of prisoners held as spies since the 1990s was announced, as well as the easing of restrictions on business and family travel to Cuba (Ahmed & Davis, 2015). The current study took place before the announcements, in July 2014.

### **U.S. media coverage of Cuba**

As decades of hostility toward Cuba appear to be giving way to a more liberal and cooperative sentiment, it's important to take inventory of how Cuba has been represented in the media. Pérez (2008) recounts the notion that through practices such as political cartoons and official statements, Cuba has appeared first as the neighbor, then as the distressed, foreign land, and later as the helpless child guarded by the United States.

The representation of Cuba in American media is complicated by the coverage of Cuba's political struggles in print publications, where Cuban leaders have been depicted in ways that fit specific formulaic frames. According to Palmer's (2011) textual analysis of articles about Cuba in major American print media, Cuban leaders are repeatedly depicted as “hyper-masculine ... as insufficient leaders due to their emphasis on violence and force” (p. 13). Although that study focuses on the politics of gender, it's important to consider how such a viewpoint might affect the casual media consumer's opinion of Cuba, especially if these frames are used repeatedly within mass media.

## **Tourism advertising**

Researchers have long studied the effectiveness of advertising on consumers from many different perspectives, including psychological effects, purchasing power and decision-making. Multiple studies have analyzed the efficacy of tourism advertising with the travel consumer. Bendixen (1993), Bojanic (1991) and Weilbacher (2003) found that exposure to advertising and the likelihood of visiting a destination were strongly correlated, as evidenced by ad awareness, information requests and top-of-mind awareness. If the Theory of Reasoned Action (see, for example, Shimp and Kavas, 1984) were applied to tourism advertising, marketers would hope that their destination would earn a positive image through advertising messages, and the positive image or attitude would result in intentions to visit and ultimately a visit to that destination.

The United States in recent years has focused on increasing travel through strategic advertising and even modifying the legal protocols required to travel internationally (Fullerton, Kendrick & Kerr, 2009). Tourism advertising is an important component of stimulating destination travel, as it can reach audiences around the world with informative and persuasive messages (Fullerton, Kendrick & Wallis, 2008). Travel also has a significant, quantifiable impact on a country's trade balance and associated economy (U.S. Travel Association, 2014); therefore, the analysis of the advertising that encourages tourism should continue to be a staple in social science research.

## **Cuban tourism and tourism advertising**

In 2009 Carty (2009) wrote that Cuba had evolved from a highly isolated country to a contender for Caribbean travel. She cited Cuba's comparative advantage over competitors: "It has endless beaches, numerous national parks and eco-attractions, unique historic sites and architectural landscapes, and a distinctive cultural tradition" (p.165). Carty also suggests that Cuba's isolation from the United States allowed the country to develop a distinctive profile as a destination, allowing the country to market itself as "forbidden fruit" (p. 168) to the Canadian and European markets. This strategy met with commercial success. More than half of visitors to Cuba were Canadian, followed by Italians, Germans, French and Spanish (Miller, Henthorne & George, 2008).

The Cuban Ministry of Tourism, known as MINTUR, was formed in 1994, though in the beginning it played a minor role in tourism development and planning (Miller, et al., 2008). In an attempt to target Canada's long-term tourists – the "snowbirds" who typically spend much of their winters in Florida – Cuba developed campaigns that used television, magazines and billboards to offer inexpensive package tours and charter flights (Kirkpatrick, 2003). Carty (2009) attributed Cuba's tourism success since the 1990s to its ability to embark on strategic capitalist efforts to re-insert itself into the international travel market and the global economy while still maintaining its socialist economic orientation.

As part of the marketing of island and beach destinations, Waade (2010) suggests that a "paradise" image can be created around visuals that simulate the consumer's imagination. This could be especially applicable to Cuban tourism advertising, where the inherent tropical climate and natural elements of the country can be used to emphasize

the country's appeal. Waade (2010) states, "The beach has also become an icon of modern tourism, in which sunbathing, swimming and surfing have become popular tourist activities that take place at the beach, and at the same time beaches have become popular tourist destinations in a global experience economy" (p. 18).

Waade (2010) goes on to describe the image of the beach as one capable of encouraging the imagination to consider "transportation (to an exotic place) and transformations (of everyday life/social position)" (p. 28). Based on this interpretation, images in advertising have a significant influence on decision making as well as transforming preconceived notions. In addition to the power of scenery such as natural beauty, Olsen et al. (1986) reported research that showed that pictures that included people in them gave travelers feelings of less isolation and more stimulation. Given the history of conflict between the United States and Cuba, images used in Cuba tourism advertisements could have influential power when it comes to the U.S. consumer.

Already a popular Caribbean destination among many non-US travelers, the resumption of diplomatic relations between Cuba and the United States might well pave the way for more leisure travel to Cuba by Americans. U.S. consumer evaluation of Cuba's current tourism advertising to other countries could offer a preview of how Cuban travel might be viewed in the future should travel and trade embargoes be lifted. Elements of the most recent Cuban tourism campaign designed to run outside the United States are described in the Method section below under the Stimulus heading.

### **Country Concept**

In an effort to reconcile competing paradigms regarding national images and reputations, Fullerton (2015) introduced the Model of Country Concept as an attempt at a comprehensive depiction of integrants that affect how citizens of Country A form opinions about Country B. Her efforts to find common ground between scholars and professionals stemmed from two often disparate areas of research and writing: the role of integrated public diplomacy, as espoused by Guy Golan (2013) in his Model of Integrated Public Diplomacy, and the notion of a nation brand, an idea made popular by communications consultant Simon Anholt (2004).

Fullerton's Model of Country Concept acknowledges that some of the model's integrants, or factors, are beyond the control of a person or entity (agent) that would attempt to influence a country's image. These would include natural and man-made disasters, economic conditions, the foreign press, foreign government propaganda, international politics and past histories between nations. Among the elements of the model over which agents might exert control are public diplomacy, cultural exports, branded products for export, corporate diplomacy, citizen diplomacy, and tourism promotion.

The result of this convergence of news, information, direct experience, entertainment media, and global economic and political circumstances is the formation of a country concept by a citizen of Country A regarding Country B. Fullerton suggests that country concept is a hybrid creation that consists of a country's longstanding reputation as well as the potentially more malleable country image it occupies in the mind of a global citizen.

Both country reputation and country image have discipline-specific meanings. Marketing scholars Kotler and Gertner (2002), defined place (or country) image as “the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that people have of that place” (p. 5). This definition is akin to the definition of brand image, as Kotler and Gertner were drawing similarities between the two concepts. Similarly, public relations researchers prefer the term country reputation because of its association with corporate reputation (Passow, Fehlmann, & Grahlow, 2005).

### **Country Reputation**

In an effort to compare the reputation of a country with its competitor countries, Passow, Fehlmann and Grahlow (2005) developed an instrument based in part on studies of corporate reputations. Wang (2006) refers to country reputation as “the presence or absence of international legitimacy accrued to a certain nation” and likens it to “soft power” (p. 92). Researchers have reported that country reputation is a stable construct with multiple dimensions (Yang, Shin, Lee, & Wrigley, 2008; Passow, Fehlmann, & Grahlow, 2005; Fullerton & Holtzhausen, 2012).

For many countries, tourism serves as a pillar of country reputation, as foreign visitors are exposed to tourism promotion as well as the experience of their visit. Anholt (2011) noted that in some instances tourism may be the “loudest voice” in forging country images (p. 23). Fullerton and Kendrick (2011, 2013) found that exposure to tourism television commercials may have a positive effect on attitudes toward a nation, even if the viewer has no intention of visiting the destination. The authors found that both tourism intentions and this Bleedover Effect of tourism advertising on overall attitudes toward a country was moderated by US Country Reputation among Australian citizens (Fullerton and Kendrick, 2014).

### **Country Image**

In much the same way that country reputation is an outgrowth of corporate reputation, country image can be thought of as a nation's brand image. A brand image is the impression in the consumer's mind of a brand's “total personality (real and imaginary qualities and shortcomings)” (BusinessDictionary.com).

Advertising can have a direct on impact through consistent campaigns over time (Mela, Gupta, & Lehmann, 1997). In addition, the consumer's experience influences the perception of a brand. Those experiences, direct or indirect, create mental shortcuts — known in psychology as “heuristics” — that help in solving problems or making decisions.

Kotler and Gertner (2002) asked the question, “Can a country be a brand?” (p. 250). That is, just as a brand name differentiates products (e.g., Coke v. Pepsi or Chevrolet v. Mercedes), can a country name influence decisions made by consumers? In essence, the country name — its brand — becomes a heuristic to help tourists make decisions on where to visit and how to spend their tourist dollars.

Although the terms country image and country reputation are considered

synonymous by some researchers and marketing practitioner/agents, Fullerton and Kendrick (2015) position country reputation as a more stable, long-term assessment likely to be rooted in history and politics and country image as potentially less stable and therefore subject to influences of cultural exports such as movies or more current events. Taken together, the more short-term heuristic of country image and the more enduring country reputation combine to form Fullerton's Country Concept.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study extends the work of Fullerton and Kendrick (2011, 2013, 2014) and applies it to an under-studied emerging nation that has historically strained relations with the United States. By surveying a large national representative sample of Americans, this study aimed to understand the country concept of Cuba among Americans and to understand how this view might influence attitudes toward travel to the country. The research was conducted about six months prior to official announcements about the easing of diplomatic relations.

The effect of Cuba's *Auténtica* tourism commercial on tourism interest was measured in a pre/post quasi-experimental test among a national sample of US adults and reported previously (Fullerton, Kendrick & Broyles, 2015). Results indicated that the main effect of the commercial was successful in improving interest in traveling to Cuba. Participants reported greater travel interest as measured by scaled items after viewing the commercial (4.09 v. 4.82 on a 7-point scale). Extending that work, this study seeks to understand if the pre-existing country concept of Cuba among Americans moderates the effectiveness of Cuba's tourism advertising.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the Country Concept of Cuba among US adults?
2. Does Country Concept vary according to demographic or other variables?
3. Does Country Concept moderate the effectiveness of the tourism commercial?

### **Method**

Prior to viewing a television commercial for Cuba tourism, US participants were measured on their Country Concept (Fullerton & Kendrick, 2015) of Cuba by completing an existing scale of Country Reputation as well as providing the first three words that came to mind when they thought about Cuba, as a measure of Country Image. Additionally they were measured before and after viewing the commercial on tourism interest for Cuba as well as specific attitudes toward the Cuban people and government.

Via online survey a national sample of US adults was shown a 30-second *Auténtica Cuba* television commercial for Cuban tourism. Because no such commercials were available in the United States, the decision was made to use a commercial that had aired in Canada and in other countries (Rod, 2011; Potts, 2013).

The commercial featured Spanish-language lyrics and no other dialogue except

for the cognate “Authentica” at the end. It is likely that if the US market had been targeted by the Cuban MINTUR, Americans would have been exposed to a similar commercial.

### **Stimulus: *Auténtica Cuba***

The *Auténtica Cuba* multi-media campaign featuring television commercials, print and outdoor executions and social media was crafted by Toronto-based agency Brandworks in 2008 for the Canadian Cuba Tourist Board. The 30-second television commercial used in the current study displays quick-cuts of a variety of scenes including pristine beaches, water sports, music, dancing, baseball and architecture. The original music features an upbeat, percussion-driven Spanish-language song (Kauremszky, 2010), whose lyrics were repeated twice.

*Like the water of its beach(es)*  
*Like the sun of its mountains*  
*Like the face of its people*  
*Who smile differently*  
*That's how my Cuba is my brother*  
*Auténticaaaaaaa!*  
*Voice over: Cuba is authentic!*

At the close of the commercial an announcer voices over “Cuba es auténtica” [Cuba is authentic]. The commercial is available at <http://vimeo.com/26323429>.

### **Participant Profile**

The 321 US adults ranged in age from 25 to 80 with a median age of 48. Slightly more than half were female (51%). Most reported annual household income between \$35,000 and \$99,000 with a median income of \$61,750, which is somewhat higher than the US average. Four out of five had attended college and 45% held at least a bachelor's degree. Half (51.4%) said they owned a valid US passport. Nine individuals (2.8%) had traveled to Cuba and 19.6% said they had Cuban friends or acquaintances.

### **Questionnaire and Procedure**

The survey began by asking participants questions about their interest in travel in general and their attitudes toward the Cuban government, Cuban people and the first words that came to mind when they thought of Cuba. Before they viewed the *Auténtica Cuba* ad or answered specific questions about their interest in traveling to Cuba — they were instructed to imagine or assume that the travel embargo between Cuba and the United States had been lifted.

*Instructions: Currently there is a ban on most travel from the U.S. to Cuba. However, citizens of other countries are allowed to visit Cuba. For the purpose of*

*this study, we would like for you to assume or imagine that it WOULD BE possible for Americans to travel to Cuba.*

*Since most respondents to this survey will not have traveled to Cuba, we ask that you answer the opinion questions based on what you may already know about Cuba. Please do not use any reference sources while you are completing this survey. We are only interested in your opinions based on what you already know or believe.*

*Q6. Did you read and understand the Instructions above?*

*Yes – Please continue*

*No – Please read the Introduction carefully.*

Participants then responded to items about Cuba, including five 7-point Likert-scale items that measured interest in traveling to Cuba, and two items adapted from the Pew Global Attitudes surveys (Pew, 2014) for attitudes toward the Cuban government and people. After viewing the *Auténtica Cuba* television commercial, participants completed a diagnostic copy test to measure specific reactions to the commercial. Lastly, the tourism interest items and adapted Pew items were repeated.

#### *Factor Analysis*

In effort to measure one aspect of country concept, the Country Reputation scale ( $\alpha = .95$ ) was subjected to a principal components factor analysis (with Varimax rotation) to identify the underlying dimensions of the constructs (Passow et al., 2005). Factor analysis was deemed appropriate because the respondent ( $n=321$ ) to item ratio exceeded 10:1 (Stacks, 2002). Three criteria for factor extraction were followed: (a) three or more questionnaire items had to load on a factor; (b) items had to have loadings of at least .60 on a factor but not have loadings greater than .40 on any other factor; and (c) factors had to have eigenvalues of greater than 1.00 (Cattell, 1966).

From the Country Reputation data, two factors were extracted – *Leadership* and *Culture*. Together they explained 65.32% of the variance. One item, *Cuba has charismatic leaders* was retained on Factor One despite loading below .60 because it was related conceptually to the other items on the factor. Six items were not retained. For item loadings see Table 1.

Factor One, *Leadership*, captured the perceptions of government and global citizenship of Cuba. Items such as *Cuba is a responsible member of the global community* and *Cuban leaders communicate an appealing vision of the country* loaded on this factor. Factor One explained 53.604% of the total variance and had an eigenvalue of 12.329. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .94, which indicated excellent internal consistency for the *Leadership* factor.

Factor Two, *Culture*, reflected perceptions of Cuban culture and history. Items such as *Cuba has an appealing culture* and *Cuba is a beautiful place* loaded on this factor. Factor Two produced an eigenvalue of 2.696 and accounted for 11.724 of the common variance, with an acceptably strong alpha reliability coefficient of .88.

### **1. What is the Country Concept of Cuba among US adults?**

According to the Country Reputation scale, Americans expressed a slightly negative evaluation of Cuba's *Leadership* (Mean = 3.04 on a 7-point scale), and a

somewhat more positive view of Cuban *Culture* (Mean = 4.80).

As a measure of Country Image, respondents generated three words that came to mind when they thought of Cuba. The terms were analyzed by two independent coders (intercoder reliability = .94), and the resulting 786 mentions were placed into 44 theme categories. Categories with the most mentions were Castro (90 mentions), Cigars (85 mentions) and Communism (81 mentions). Categories were assigned a positive (3), neutral (2) or negative (1) valence. Only 13.5% of the words were coded as positive while more than half (52.8%) were negative. The mean valence for all words was 1.67, which reflected an overall negative sentiment on this 3-point scale.

The most positive term most often mentioned was “beautiful” (including pretty), which garnered 26 (3.3%) of the mentions. Other than Castro and Communism, the most frequently mentioned categories coded as negative were poverty, control and dangerous.

## **2. Does Country Concept vary according to demographic or other variables?**

Country Reputation was analyzed to discover sub-group differences. Age was found to be negatively related to *Leadership* ( $r = -.288$ ;  $p = .001$ ), indicating that older people held less positive views of Cuba's leaders than younger Americans, but age had no effect on perceptions of *Culture*. No differences were found for gender, education or income on either Country Reputation dimension.

About half of the sample (51.4%) reported having a valid passport; however, very few had traveled to Cuba (2.8%). Passport holders were significantly more positive about Cuban *Culture* than non-passport holders (Passport $M = 4.97$ ; NonPassport $M = 4.62$ ;  $t = 2.57$ ;  $p = .011$ ), but no difference was found in terms of *Leadership*. Likewise, those who had traveled to Cuba were significantly more positive on both Country Reputation factors (*Leadership*: Traveled $M = 4.60$ ; NonTraveled $M = 2.99$ ;  $t = 4.00$ ;  $p = .001$ ; *Culture*: Traveled $M = 6.44$ ; NonTraveled $M = 4.75$ ;  $t = 4.09$ ;  $p = .001$ ).

Country Image terms were assigned a valence positive (3), neutral (2) and negative (1). Because respondents had the opportunity to provide three terms, a valence score was obtained by calculating the mean valence for the three terms. T-tests and correlations revealed that country image did not differ between men and women, according to income, age or education. However, passport holders were significantly more positive about Cuba's image based on the terms they supplied versus non-passport holders (Passport $M = 1.80$ ; NonPassport $M = 1.51$ ;  $t = -3.841$ ;  $p = .0001$ ). Likewise, those ( $n=5$ ) who had traveled to Cuba had a significantly more positive image of Cuba compared to those who had never traveled there (Traveled $M = 2.54$ ; NonTraveled $M = 1.65$ ;  $t = -3.392(222)$ ;  $p = .001$ ).

## **3. Does country concept moderate the effectiveness of the tourism commercial to improve attitudes toward potentially visiting Cuba?**

Both Country Reputation dimensions were divided into a high and low group using a median split (*Leadership*Median = 3.14; *Culture*Median = 4.80). The data file was segmented according to the high/low variable and a paired samples t-test was conducted to measure effectiveness of the commercial. Following the Elaboration Model (Babbie, 2001), the outcome of the t-test for the split file was compared with the findings of the sample as a whole as reported in Fullerton, Kendrick and Broyles (2015), which

revealed that the commercial significantly increased interest in travel to Cuba for the sample-as-a-whole.

The dimensions of *Leadership* and *Culture* did not moderate the effectiveness of the commercial. For both dimensions, the significant increases in travel to Cuba were maintained when the data were split into high and low groups. However, respondents in the high groups on both of the Country Reputation variables were significantly more positive about traveling to Cuba before and after seeing the commercial.

For Country Image, terms that respondents supplied when asked “When thinking of Cuba, what three words come to mind first” were divided into high and low groups based on the valence of the term (ValencMedian = 1.67). Following the same procedure above, the file was split and paired samples t-tests were conducted and compared to the sample-as-a-whole. The outcome of the t-tests were unchanged, therefore country image did not moderate the effectiveness of the tourism commercial. However, those respondents who supplied more positive terms were significantly more interested in traveling to Cuba before and after seeing the ad.

### Discussion

The current study of US adults' attitudes toward Cuba and Cuban travel took place during a unique aperture in mid-2014, just months before the two countries agreed to resume relations after more than five decades of tension and conflict. Results present a picture of Americans' somewhat conflicted feelings about Cuba, including mixed but primarily negative attitudes about the country, yet a desire to visit the forbidden destination, especially after exposure to a beautiful and upbeat tourism commercial. The Model of Country Concept provides a useful framework for highlighting the probable sources of information, opinion and entertainment that contributed to their evaluations.

The modified scale of country reputation used for this study resulted in only two dimensions that together accounted for almost two-thirds of the variance among responses. The dimension of *Culture*, for which Americans rated Cuba and Cubans as above average on beauty, distinctiveness, rich historical past and “culture”, received a 4.8 aggregated score on a 7-point scale. Those who possessed a US passport and those very few who had previously traveled to Cuba rated the country significantly higher than those who did not have passports or had not previously traveled there. This finding suggests what the literature demonstrates with respect to exchange programs and other types of travel as well – that people-to-people encounters and experiences remain the gold standard of ingratiating respect and good will (Fullerton & Kendrick, 2015).

The dimension of *Leadership* accrued lower evaluations than did *Culture*. Older Americans rated Cuba's leadership significantly more negatively than their younger counterparts, presumably because they may have been born during or soon after the several contentious incidents in the early 1960s between Cuba and the U.S. Younger respondents, for whom aspects of the integrants on the Model of Country Concept were quite different from those of the previous generation and who have not clung to negative attitudes about the Castro government, nonetheless had slightly negative evaluations of Cuban leadership. Those who had traveled to Cuba previously had more positive, yet still negative, attitudes toward the country's leadership. Again, a visit to Cuba may have somewhat softened attitudes of those who experienced the country first-hand.

“Castro, cigars and communism” sums up the most frequently mentioned terms that respondents produced when first thinking about Cuba. For the current study, the three words generated formed the basis for a measure of Country Image based on valence. Assigning positive, neutral and negative values to these first word descriptions indicated that almost four times as many words were negative than those that were positive. And the average respondent received a combined three-word valence of 1.67, where 3 was positive and 1 was negative. It is apparent that many respondents experience a sort of dissonance when it comes to thinking about Cuba, and both in the aggregate and within responses from each individual, the bad thoughts more often outweigh the good. Cuba's natural beauty and distinctive and friendly culture, so often the subject of positive comments, were secondary to an overall negative assessment of the Castro leadership, the form of government and government propaganda, and the turbulent historical relationship with the United States. Again, those familiar with Cuba because they had visited, and those holding a passport, were more positive.

Neither the *Leadership* dimension nor the *Culture* dimension nor the first-words valence was found to moderate the effectiveness of the Cuban television commercial. For all of these measures, the significant increases in travel to Cuba were maintained when the data were split into high and low groups. Though initial interest in travel among those who were more favorable in their evaluations of Cuba was higher than those more unfavorably disposed, exposure to the tourism commercial resulted in significantly higher evaluations by both groups. This phenomenon indicates power of the commercial in terms of persuasion, a finding that may be encouraging to the Cuban MINTUR if American vacation travel is re-instated and travel marketing efforts are initiated in the United States once again.

It will be interesting to see how Americans will deal with this apparent dissonance if vacation travel to Cuba, which is still not allowed for US citizens, becomes reality. Will the lure of a forbidden destination overcome misgivings about past governments and concerns about safety? What role might tourism advertising play in this process? What might the Cuban travel website and collateral materials inoculate against in terms of Americans' travel concerns? This study indicates that many Americans desire to travel to Cuba, and therefore it is important to understand the mindset and motivation of that segment of prospective travelers.

### **Limitations and Suggestions**

There are potential limitations of the current study, as well as opportunities for future inquiry in this area. Though it is fairly well accepted as a means of obtaining feedback to commercials and other forms of advertising, the online survey may be less than ideal in situations where respondents are not as attentive as they would be in a laboratory environment, and where variances in a respondent's personal technology might result in an inferior situation for viewing or hearing the commercial stimulus. Attempts were made to control for this by asking if the commercial was seen and heard, as well as by asking a specific question about commercial content to insure that the commercial was watched.

The use of country image indicators in the form of “three words” that came to mind when a respondent thought about Cuba yielded interesting and varied results, but it is possible that the assignment of a valence to each word is not appropriate or is

inaccurate. Indeed, words such as communism, believed widely in the United States as an undesirable form of government, could actually have been thought of as positive by some. Further, future research should include other strategies to gauge country image other than the open-ended verbatim approach reported here. Alternatively respondents could indicate the valence of their term as part of the questionnaire.

One of the obvious next steps in terms of measuring Americans' attitudes toward Cuba would be to replicate the current study now that relations have continued to thaw between the United States and Cuba. Future research could assess changes in attitudes of US citizens toward Cuba and Cuban travel as further changes are made to sanctions and embargoes. Such studies could also attempt to ascertain the integrants of Country Concept that contribute to the formulation of those attitudes.

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**Table 1:** Results of Factor Analysis (Varimax Rotation) For Country Reputation

Retained Factors and Items	Factors			
	1	2	Mean*	SD
<b>Factor 1: Leadership</b> (alpha =.947)			<b>3.04</b>	<b>1.214</b>
Cuba is a safe place in which to invest	<b>.692</b>	.389	3.07	1.401
Cuba is a democratic country	<b>.722</b>	-.097	2.30	1.549
I trust Cuba as a country	<b>.802</b>	.291	2.75	1.45
Cuba has a good infrastructure	<b>.790</b>	.206	2.95	1.365
Cuba is well managed	<b>.881</b>	.164	2.78	1.452
Cuba maintains a stable economic environment	<b>.821</b>	.225	3.26	1.523
Cuban leaders communicate an appealing vision of the country	<b>.730</b>	.119	2.92	1.576
Cuba supports good causes	<b>.786</b>	.270	3.20	1.466
Cuba is a responsible member of the global community	<b>.851</b>	.250	3.13	1.492
Cuba supports responsible environmental policies	<b>.800</b>	.315	3.29	1.426
Cuba has charismatic leaders	<b>.595</b>	.256	3.29	1.779
Cuba upholds international laws	<b>.815</b>	.168	3.08	1.502
I respect Cuba	<b>.719</b>	.398	3.50	1.647
<b>Factor 2: Culture</b> (alpha = .885)			<b>4.80</b>	<b>1.248</b>
Cuba is a beautiful place	.136	<b>.824</b>	5.00	1.423
Cuba has an appealing culture	.218	<b>.846</b>	4.44	1.636
Cuba offers enjoyable entertainment activities	.422	<b>.717</b>	4.09	1.557
Cuba has a distinct culture	.021	<b>.773</b>	5.37	1.310
Cuba has a rich historical past	.086	<b>.803</b>	5.09	1.593

\* Measured on a 7-point scale from Strongly Agree (7) to Strongly Disagree (1).

<b>Items Not Retained</b>	1	2
Cuba has well educated residents	.513	.604
Cuba has a well-developed industrial sector	.681	.401
I like Cuba as a country	.471	.627
Cuba is an inviting place to do business	.682	.415
Cuba is culturally and socially diverse	.409	.561