



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE AND MANAGEMENT

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RELEVANCE OF BRAND PERSONALITY TO TOURISM DESTINATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Destination personality has become a viable metaphor for building destination brands and in providing a unique identity for tourism places. It is about combining all things associated with the 'place' (i.e., its products and services from various industries -- agriculture; tourism; sports; arts; investment; technology; education, etc.) that collaborate under one brand. This paper aims to understand and explain the areas of caution when competing in an international market in tourism and the role played by brand personality in selection of a destination place. The concepts of tourism destination were being analyzed by reviewing of literature on destination, place, product/brand and destination branding. There is a strong fit with the conceptual model suggesting that destinations can use this as a basis for continuity in strategy of tourism branding. Based on the literature review, a concept for destination branding strategy was recommended. Since this study is based on the existing literature, it was found that brand personality has great relevance to destination personality and it has positive impact on perceived destination image and the behavioral intentions of the tourists. This paper reveals the concept of relevance of brand personality to tourism destination and depicts steps essential for creating a successful branding strategy which can be applied in a real world context to maximize returns for the destination. At the conceptual level, although the importance of destination personality has been acknowledged, to the best of our knowledge, very less empirical research has yet identified its dimensions. This conceptual analysis would further help the managers and researchers in the world of marketing to probe into the concept of association between the brand personality and destination branding on a major level in order to build a better tourism destination.

KEYWORDS

Destination personality, destination branding, branding, brand personality.

INTRODUCTION

In today's increasingly competitive tourism market, destination branding can be an affective technique for building successful site images and marketing programs. Although the historical roots of branding can be traced back to the late 19th century with the development of branded consumer products such as Gillette and Quaker Oats (Low and Fullerton 1994), researchers have only recently considered branding as a "hot topic" of today with many contemporary books discussing this concept (D. Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000; D. Aaker 1996; Bedbury and Fenichell 2002; Carpenter, Glazer, and Nakamoto 1994; Kania 2001; Kapferer 1997; Upshaw 1995).

In the world of generic marketing literature, branding of goods and services is well documented, but the application of branding techniques to places, in particular to tourism destinations, is still in its infancy (Gnoth, 1998; Pritchard and Morgan, 1998). In 1998, tourism destination branding started to gain visibility with destination branding the focal topic at that year's Travel and Tourism Research Association's Annual Conference. Since then, this concept of tourism branding has been further explored in the aptly titled book, *Destination Branding* (Morgan, Pritchard, and Pride 2002). In this study, branding theories are being applied to tourism destinations, and it very well examines the relationship between destination image and destination personality.

Maria, C.; Esteveao, S. and Ferreira, J., Joao (2009) presented a figure of tourism cluster based on the existing studies on tourism. As per the authors elaboration, we can verify that there are no substantial differences between the cluster's definition in a general scope, and the cluster's concept when applied to the tourism industry. The tourism cluster, as are clusters in general, is defined as a geographical concentration in a region of companies and institutions inter-related. The figure 1 is shown below.

FIGURE 1: REPRESENTATION OF A TOURISM CLUSTER



Source: Maria, C.; Esteveao, S. and Ferreira, J., Joao (2009)

It can be accepted that tourism reveals itself as one of the activities with the greatest potential in the world. For its growth potential and as a product that can be only consumed locally, this sector has a prominent role as a local development strategy. This research aimed to reveal various concepts of competitiveness of a tourism for the development of the nation. The study is based on existing literatures which rely on secondary data that can be easily obtained. The theoretical

aspects covered here can help in understanding the basic concepts and the competitiveness of tourism. It may help to identify gaps and the potential for competitive development, which will assist the competent entities in its management.

Also the study reveals that very limited research has been devoted to tourism brands and brand constructs in promoting tourist attractions. Hence, aim of this research is to provide an approach to build an effective destination brand. It is backed by some of the research objectives as:

1. To understand the concept of tourism destinations,
2. To understand the tourism branding,
3. To analyse that whether tourism destinations perceived to possess personalities, &
4. To understand the various underlying dimensions of destination personality

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

BRANDING DEFINED

Place branding (also known as destination branding, place marketing or place promotion) is a relatively new umbrella term encompassing nation branding, region branding and city branding. In simple terms, brand represents the connection that is made between a buyer and a brand (Schultz and Barnes 1999). Today's consumers have more product choice but less decision making time than ever before. Consequently, a brand that can help simplify decisions, reduce purchase risk, create and deliver expectations is invaluable (Keller 2003).

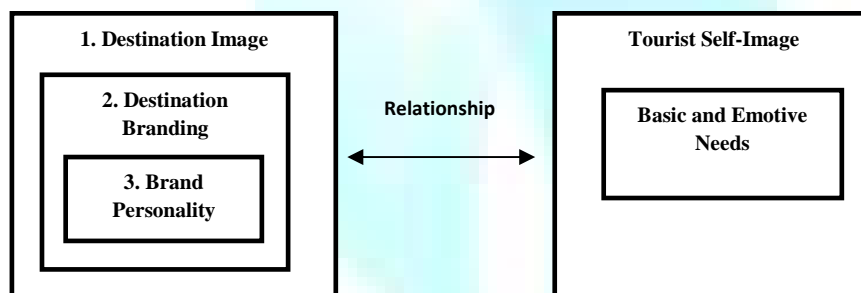
In the context of tourism a geographic location is a destination brand. A destination brand is defined as a 'name, symbol, logo, word or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination; furthermore, it conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; it also serves to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of destination experience' (Kerr 2006, 277).

TOURISM BRANDING

Tourism basically entails a search for that which is extraordinary (Urry, 1990) compared to one's everyday life and environment. A definition proposed by Ritchie and Ritchie (1998, p.17) describes tourism destination brands as: "A name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination; furthermore, it conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; it also serves to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of destination experience". Faced with growing global competition where destinations are becoming highly substitutable, destination marketing organisations (DMOs) are in a constant battle to attract travelers" (Pike and Ryan, 2004 in Ekinci, 2006). The political, economic and cultural existence of places outside the tourism context means that tourism destinations have a more comprehensive meaning potential than most other consumer products, and meanings which are closely tied up with the present and historical relations between the country of origin of the tourist and that of the destination" (Therkelsen, 2003).

A tourist destination may be viewed as an amalgam of individual products and experiences that combine to form the total experience of the area visited (Murphy in Ekinci, 2006). Researchers agree that in today's competitive tourism market, destination branding is an effective tactic for building successful tourism images and programs (Morgan & Pritchard, 1999; Morgan, Pritchard, & Piggott, 2003). For the tourist, the product covers the whole set of the experiences "from the moment he leaves home until he returns" (Middleton, 2001:122). Ekinci & Hosany, (2006) specified a distinctive and emotionally attractive destination personality which is shown to have an influence on the perceived image of a place. This in turn, influences on tourists choice behavior. Ekinci (2003) propounded a framework, in which he cleared out the point that the destination image is built on three components: the overall image, the destination brand and, within it, brand personality (marked with numbers 1-3 in Figure 2).

FIGURE 2: DESTINATION IMAGE AND DESTINATION BRANDING



Source: From Ekinci, Y. (2003) in "Using Brand Personality to Differentiate Regional Tourism Destination" by Murphy, L., Moscardo, G., & Benckendorff, P., 2007, *Journal of Travel Research* (46)8, p. 6.

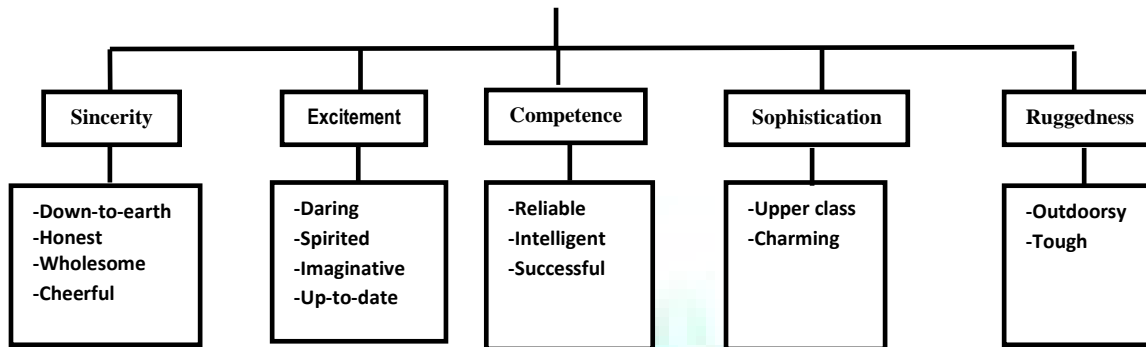
Thus, it is very clear from the above figure that the destination image connected to the tourist's self image. Accordingly, tourism destinations are intangible or abstract because travel experiences cannot be processed or evaluated before purchasing (Awaritefe, 2003). The aim of applying branding in tourism industry is to differentiate a tourism destination from others and creating a unique brand image of a certain place in the minds of target market. The aim of destination branding is to accentuate the singularity of a tourism brand and present a favorable image of the mentioned brand to a target market and so the marketing communications has become important for destinations to promote their brand identity and brand image to target audiences (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991).

BRAND PERSONALITY

Destination branding is about how consumers perceive the destination in their minds. Branding a destination is not just about creating a logo or a slogan. It is about capturing the distinct elements of the destination in the brand and communicating these elements through the brand's components: identity, essence, personality, image, character and culture. Faced with growing global competition where destinations are becoming highly substitutable, destinations are increasingly embracing branding initiatives such as the use of taglines and logos in order to attract visitors and expenditures to their respective destination (Blain, Levy and Ritchie, 2005 in Ekinci, 2006). But Brand personality influences consumer preferences, and although it's considered a metaphor used for understanding customers' perceptions about brands, there is selection of literature concerning destination personality and their image. For some authors brand image is a wider term which also includes its personality. Others consider them similar and reflecting the customers' perception about brands (Ekinci, 2006).

Aaker (1997) has developed a theoretical framework of the brand personality conducted by determining the number and the nature of dimensions of brand personality. This may help to understand the symbolic use of brands in consumer goods and behaviour context. The five personality dimensions are: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness (see Figure). Aaker (1997) found 15 facets for these five dimensions: sincerity and excitement each have four, competence has three and both sophistication and ruggedness have two. These facets act as representative traits that provide depth into every dimension.

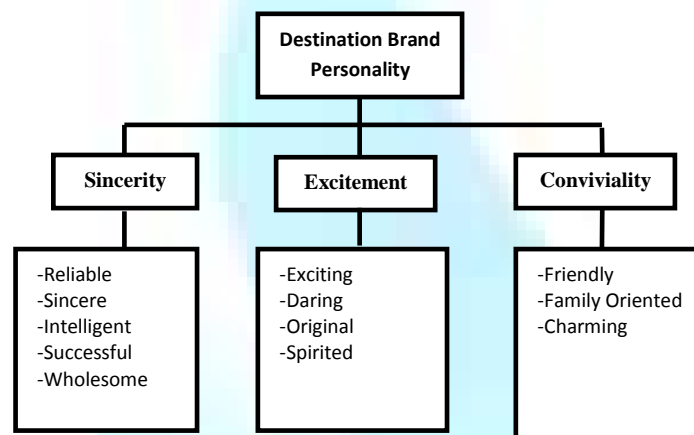
FIGURE3: A BRAND PERSONALITY FRAMEWORK



Source: "Dimension of Brand Personality" by Aaker, J.L., 1997, Journal of Marketing Research (34)3, p. 352.

According to the authors, it is not surprising that tourists associate these traits to destinations as they are some of the most common themes that destination marketers use in order to characterise destinations in today's travel media.

FIGURE4: DESTINATION PERSONALITY



Source: Thesis titled "Tourism Destination Development in the context of brand Personality and Advertising Message-A case study of Swedish Lapland" by Miia-Ilona Lohela, 2008

This study, which sought to clarify destination branding from a theoretical as well as empirical perspective, is considered timely as the destination branding concept has become an increasingly important topic among destination management organizations. Both researchers and practitioners emphasize the importance of image creation and destination differentiation as integral elements in building a strong destination brand.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Today Tourism Industry has gained a lot of attention and this sector is growing worldwide. To attract more and more tourists to a destination is the need of a tourism market. Hence various strategies are being adopted among which the concept of personality plays a dominant role in attracting the tourists. Although most of the theoretical and empirical studies have been conducted for the same but still most studies to date have been limited to the destinations on the basis of their perceived images only, differentiation based on personality traits has as yet been underexplored.

In today's competitive environment, creating and managing an appropriate destination personality is of vital importance to the survival and success of tourist destinations. Therefore, here an attempt has been made to explore the consequences of the relationship between the tourists and the destinations personalities. The dimensions of Aaker (Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness) can be taken as a major source of measuring the dimensions of personality. It creates brand personality by defining the destination's personality in few human characteristics. There can be recognised a strong connection between the brand's core values and brand personality. However, the potential contribution of this study is in the theoretical advancement in the field of tourism research by understanding the concept of correlation between the tourist's personality and destination personality, and investigating the impact of such congruency on tourist's behavior. The model clearly specifies that if a positive relation is built between the personalities of the two then it strongly and positively affects the consumers' attitude towards the destination preference & the tourist's involvement.

The study here will help the destination managers and marketers with the planning of strategic marketing programs, such as how to build a strong and distinct destination personality that is congruent with their targeted tourist markets by adopting proper promotional strategies. Also, the destination marketers should build a unique personality for their places. Thus, many other related areas can be explored as that of the congruency effect, the positioning of tourism destinations using the personality dimensions, etc which can enhance the tourism sector. Finally, the result of this study creates an understanding of what influences tourist's behaviour and the theoretical analysis, here, can aid in designing and implementing suitable marketing strategies for creating and enhancing tourist destination personality to attract particular markets, and designing and promoting tourism destinations.

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