Destination Image and Destination Personality: An Application of Branding Theories to Tourism Places

Sameer Hosany, Yuksel Ekinci and Muzaffer Uysal

Author contact: Sameer Hosany, School of Management, Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham, TW20 0EX, U.K., sameer.hosany@rhul.ac.uk

Destination Image and Destination Personality: An Application of Branding Theories to Tourism Places

Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between destination image and destination personality. While brand image and brand personality studies is well documented in the generic marketing literature, application of branding theories to places, in particular to tourism destinations, is relatively new. Using tourism destinations as a setting, this study contribute to the debate on the brand image – brand personality relationship. Results indicate that destination image and destination personality are related concepts. Canonical correlation analysis reveals that the emotional component of destination image captures the majority of variance on destination personality dimensions.

*Keywords***:** Brand image, Brand personality, Destination image, Destination personality, Destination branding.

1. **Introduction**

Brand management scholars (e.g., Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 1997) argue that brand image is an essential part of powerful brands. A strong brand can differentiate a product from its competitors (Lim and O'Cass, 2001), reduce search costs (e.g., Assael, 1995), minimize perceived risks (Berthon et al., 1999) and represent high quality from a consumer's point of view (Erdem, 1998). Despite the importance of brand image in the realm of marketing, much ambiguity exists as to its relationship with brand personality (Patterson, 1999). At the theoretical level, brand image has been defined in terms of brand personality (Hendon and Williams, 1985; Upshaw, 1995) and in some cases, the terms brand image and brand personality have been used interchangeably to gauge consumer perceptions of brands (e.g., Gardner and Levy, 1955; Smothers, 1993; Graeff, 1997). Past studies have attempted to provide some explanations to the brand image-brand personality relationship debate, but most such discussions have remained only theoretical (e.g., Karande et al., 1997; Plummer, 1985). Indeed, to the best of our knowledge, to date no empirical study has been carried out to identify how brand image and brand personality are related. Furthermore, while the branding of goods and services is well documented in the generic marketing literature, the application of branding techniques to places, in particular to tourism destinations, is still in its infancy (Gnoth, 1998; Pritchard and Morgan, 2002). Accordingly, this study applies branding theories to tourism destinations, and examines the relationship between destination image and destination personality.

2. Destination Image and Destination Personality

Studies on destination image began in the early 1970s, when Hunt's (1975) influential work examined the role of image in tourism development. Since then, destination image has become one of the dominant areas of tourism research. Destination image is defined as an attitudinal concept consisting of the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a tourist holds of a destination (Crompton, 1979). An increasing number of researchers supports the view that destination image is a multidimensional construct consisting of two primary dimensions: cognitive and affective (e.g., Lawson and Band-Bovy, 1977). The cognitive component can be interpreted as beliefs and knowledge about the physical attributes of a destination, while the affective component refers to the appraisal of the affective quality of feelings towards the attributes and the surrounding environments (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999).

Destination image is a widely investigated topic, but the application of brand personality to tourism is relatively new. In the consumer behaviour literature, Aaker (1997: 347) defines brand personality as "the set of human characteristics associated to a brand". Aaker (1997) provided evidence for the validity of the brand personality construct through the scaling procedure. The Brand Personality Scale (BPS) consists of five generic dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. Since then, Aaker's (1997) study has been replicated using various consumer brands within different product categories and across different cultures (e.g., Siguaw et al., 1999; Aaker et al., 2001). However, to date, research on the application of the BPS to places and tourism destinations has been sparse. Adapting Aaker's (1997) research, we view destination personality as a multidimensional construct and is defined as "the set of human characteristics associated to a tourism destination".

3. Relationship between Brand Image and Brand Personality

Brand image and brand personality are key components of brand loyalty and brand positioning (Plummer, 1985; Keller, 1998). Although several models exist to explain the two concepts, much ambiguity surrounds the relationship between brand image and brand personality. Poor conceptualization and a lack of empirical studies have hampered progress in understanding this relationship. At the theoretical level, two issues can be identified: definitional inconsistencies and the interchangeable use of the terms brand personality and brand image. Patterson's (1999) review of the branding literature identified 27 definitions of brand image and 12 definitions of brand personality. In some instances, brand image has been defined in terms of brand personality (e.g., Hendon and Williams, 1985; Upshaw 1995). The terms brand image and brand personality have also been used interchangeably in the literature (e.g., Smothers, 1993; Graeff, 1997). Patterson (1999) concluded that most studies fail to distinguish between the concepts of brand image, brand personality, brand identity and user image. Still, some scholars have attempted to provide some theoretical explanations of the nature of relationship between brand image and brand image (e.g., Plummer, 1985; Patterson, 1999). For these authors, brand image is conceptualized as a more encapsulating concept and, as such, has a number of inherent characteristics or dimensions including brand personality, user image, product attributes and consumer benefits. For example, in their brand model, Heylen et al., (1995) posit that brand personality and brand identity are two antecedents of brand image. However, this conceptualization contrasts with Kaperer's (1997) identity prism, in which personality and self-image are seen as antecedents of brand identity, along with physical, relationship, reflection and culture dimensions. Thus, the lack of theory development has resulted in much confusion, and this impedes the establishment of managerial

implications. In the tourism literature, destination image has been identified as a key component of destination loyalty. However, to the best of our knowledge, no study has yet investigated the relationship between destination image and destination personality.

4. Method

The measures for all the constructs in the study were drawn from previous research. Destination image was operationalised in terms of both its affective and cognitive components. Affective image was measured on a 7-point scale using 4 bipolar items adopted from Russell (1980). The cognitive image measure was adapted from Ong and Horbunluekit's (1997) study, and consisted of 17 bipolar adjectives on a 7-point scale. Destination personality was captured using Aaker's (1997) five dimensional brand personality scale (BPS). At a preliminary stage, the BPS 42 personality traits were tested for content validity (Churchill, 1979). Some items were redundant, because they were not suitable to define a tourism destination. A final set of 27 items, split across 5 dimensions, was retained. The items were measured using a 5-point Likert type scale, with anchors (1) not descriptive at all and (5) extremely descriptive, consistent with Aaker's (1997) study. Multiple dependent measures were included to assess the criterion validity of the scales (Churchill, 1979). Overall, destination image was measured using a 7-point scale, with anchors (-3) extremely poor and (+3) extremely good. Finally, intention to recommend was measured on a 7-point scale, anchored with (-3) extremely unlikely and (+3) extremely likely (Cronin and Taylor, 1992).

The study was carried out in three different cities in the United Kingdom (UK) via a personally administered questionnaire. Randomly approached participants were

instructed to recall their experiences about the most recently visited tourism

destination outside the UK within the last three months. A total of 148 usable

questionnaires were collected from British nationals. The sample was 48 percent

male, 52 percent female and, in terms of age group, 18 percent were between 16 and

24, 24 percent were between 25 and 34, 27 percent were between 35 and 44, and 31

percent were 45 or above. Fifty-eight percent travelled to a European country, which

can be explained by the ease of travel across the European Union. Spain and France

are the two most popular European destinations, with 20 percent and 14 percent

respectively. A large proportion of respondents (56%) were first-time visitors.

5. Findings

The first stage of the analysis involved testing the validity of the destination

image and destination personality scales. To this end, two separate exploratory factor

analyses were conducted for both scales. Principal component extraction with

Varimax rotation was applied to the 21-item destination image scale. The KMO value

was 0.79 and Bartlett's test was significant at the 0.00 level. These results

demonstrate the factorability of the data matrices (Hair et al., 1998). The criterion for

the significance of factor loadings was set at 0.45, as suggested by Hair et al. (1998),

for sample size of 150. Items exhibiting low factor loadings (<0.40), high cross

loadings (>0.40) or low communalities (<0.30) were candidates for elimination until a

clean and rigid factor structure was obtained. Accordingly, 9 items were eliminated

from the scale. A final three-factor model was estimated with the remaining 12 items.

The factor solution accounted for approximately 62.3 percent of the total variance

with all communalities ranging from 0.53 to 0.70. These findings provided evidence

for the construct validity of the scale (Churchill, 1979). Furthermore, all factors had

relatively high alpha reliability coefficients, ranging from 0.70 to 0.77. The factors were labelled as affective, physical atmosphere, accessibility, and explained 22.2, 20.30 and 19.80 percent of the total variance in the data respectively. The criterion validity of the destination image scale was assessed using two ordinary least square (OLS) regressions analyses. Across the two OLS regression models, the three destination image scales were found to be statistically significant in estimating the global evaluation of destination image ($R^2 = 0.40$, $F_{(3,144)} = 30.33$, $p<0.000$) and intention to recommend ($R^2 = 0.46$, $F_{(3,144)} = 41.54$, $p<0.000$).

Similarly, the 27-items of the destination personality scale was subjected to exploratory factor analysis. Applying the same empirical and substantive considerations in item trimming as for the destination image scale, a three-factor model emerged. The factor solution was adequate, as all eigenvalues were greater than 1 and accounted for 59.1 percent of the total variance in the data. The first factor was labelled sincerity and explained most of the variance (26%). The second factor was labelled as excitement, given that three of the scale items were the same as in Aaker's (1997) study. The excitement dimension explains 18 percent of the total variance. The last factor was labelled conviviality and accounted for 16 percent of the total variance. The factor loadings were reasonably robust to support the construct validity of the scales (Churchill, 1979). All the factors had relatively high reliability coefficients ranging from 0.69 to 0.81. Finally, the OLS regression result showed that the three-dimensional destination personality scale was statistically significant in predicting intention to recommend ($R^2 = 0.23$, $F_{(3,144)} = 14.34$, $p=0.00$). Thus, this result provided evidence for the criterion validity of the scale (Churchill, 1979).

5.1. Relationship between Destination Image and Destination Personality

The relationship between destination image and destination personality was tested using canonical correlation, which is a multivariate statistical model that facilitates the study of interrelationships between a set of multiple variables. The underlying logic involves the derivation of a linear combination of variables from each of the two sets of variables (the destination personality and destination image summated scales, each consisting of three sub-scales) called canonical variates. This procedure attempts to maximize the correlation between those two linear combinations of variables (Hair et al., 1998). Using the MANOVA method in SPSS, canonical analyses of both destination image and destination personality scales, with their associated sub-scales, were carried out. The procedure resulted in two meaningful canonical functions significant at the 0.05 or better probability level. Table 1 presents the overall results of canonical correlation analysis.

Table 1
Overall Results of Canonical Correlation Analysis ($n = 148$)

Statistics	Variate Number		
	1	2	3
Canonical Correlation	0.47	0.28	0.09
Wilki's lambda significance	0.00	0.01	0.30
Percentage of variance explained			
Destination Image	0.43	0.35	0.22
Cumulative %	0.44	0.78	1.00
Destination Personality	0.48	0.35	0.17
Cumulative %	0.48	0.83	1.00
Redundancy			
Destination Image	0.10	0.03	0.00
Cumulative %	0.10	0.12	0.12
Destination Personality	0.11	0.03	0.00
Cumulative %	0.11	0.13	0.13

For the significant functions, the canonical correlations ranged from 0.02 to 0.99, as seen in Table 2.

Table 2

Canonical Loadings for Destination Image and Destination Personality Sub-Scales

Scales	Variate Number		
	1	2	3
Destination Image[*]			
Affective[a]	-0.99	0.02	0.12
Physical Atmosphere[b]	-0.06	-0.99	-0.03
Accessibility[c]	-0.55	0.21	-0.80
Destination Personality[#]			
Sincerity[d]	-0.54	0.53	-0.65
Excitement[e]	-0.54	0.79	-0.30
Conviviality[f]	-0.92	-0.39	0.04

[*] Items measured on a 7-point semantic differential scale; [#] Items measured on a 5-point Likert scale.
[a] Affective image: unpleasant/pleasant; distressing/relaxing; pretty/ugly; gloomy/exciting ($\alpha = 0.77$).
[b] Physical atmosphere: quiet/noisy; innocent/sinful; sleepy/arousing; overcrowded/sparse ($\alpha = 0.74$).
[c] Accessibility : lively/stagnant; friendly/cold; easily accessible/isolated; interesting/boring ($\alpha = 0.70$).
[d] Sincerity scale: sincere, intelligent, reliable, successful, wholesome, down-to-earth ($\alpha = 0.81$).
[e] Excitement scale: exciting, daring, spirited, original ($\alpha = 0.72$).
[f] Conviviality scale: friendly, family oriented, charming ($\alpha = 0.69$).

As a rule of thumb, only variables (summated scales) with canonical loading greater than 0.40 should be considered for the variate interpretation. For example, in the first significant variate, the sub-scale of physical atmosphere of destination image does not appear to be part of the canonical variable. However, for the second significant variate, the sub-scale of conviviality (destination personality) and the sub-scales of affective and accessibility (destination image) appear to have a loading value of less than 0.40. Nevertheless, if we employ the very first significant and meaningful variate, then the only sub-scale that does not qualify is physical atmosphere, which was therefore omitted from the study findings. The results of the analysis also indicated that the two significant variates explained 82 percent and 78 percent of the total variance, respectively. However, the destination personality variance that could be recovered from the destination image scale was 13 percent (see Table 1). The two significant pairs revealed that, with the exception of physical atmosphere as part of destination image, the sub-scales affective and accessibility of destination image are,

in general, directly related to the sub-scales (sincerity, excitement and conviviality) of destination personality. This outcome establishes the duality of the relationship between the two constructs.

6. Discussion

The study makes an important contribution to the understanding of brand image and brand personality in the context of tourism destinations. Our results indicate that destination image and destination personality are related concepts. At least two of the destination image scales (affective and accessibility) were significantly related to the three destination personality scales (sincerity, excitement and conviviality). The findings of this study partially complement Plummer (1985) and Patterson (1999) who argue that the brand image and brand personality are related. In line with this study, brand image seems to be more encompassing concept and brand personality is more related to affective components of brand image. While these authors took a conceptual approach, this study builds upon an empirical stance at delineating the relationship between brand image and brand personality.

Our findings also support for the application of Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale to places. Previous studies have focussed mostly on the applicability and validity of the BPS to consumer goods and across cultures, but very little research has attempted to test the relevance of brand personality to tourism destinations. The study results, however, did not fully replicate Aaker's (1997) five dimensional model. Instead, destination personality was found to comprise three salient dimensions: sincerity, excitement and conviviality. The evidence of a three dimensional as opposed to a five dimensional model, is in line with Caprara et al.'s (2001) argument that brand personalities can be described using only a small number of dimensions.

6.1. Implications and Future Research Areas

In today's competitive environment, creating and managing an appropriate destination image (or brand image) and destination personality (or brand personality) has become vital for effective product positioning. Our study provides evidence that personality traits are ubiquitous in consumers' evaluations of tourism destinations. Thus, destination marketers should concentrate on developing promotional campaigns that emphasize the distinctive personality of tourism destinations, based on the emotional components of destination image. Furthermore, the study found that consumers' evaluation of destinations comprised cognitive, affective and personality dimensions. Destination marketers should also capitalize on these findings, by devising an appropriate branding strategy that encompasses these three components in order to create a favourable image. Although this study makes important theoretical contributions to the understanding of the relationship between destination image and destination personality, it entails several limitations and these must be acknowledged. Destination personality was measured using the BPS originally developed for consumer goods. As such, the personality traits used in this study may not fully reflect all the personality characteristics of destinations. Furthermore, the sample size was small, and so the findings cannot be generalized to the wider tourist population and to other product categories. Further studies should investigate the nature of this relationship using different products across different industries.

References

Aaker DA. Building strong brands. New York: The Free Press; 1996.

Aaker JL. Dimensions of brand personality. J Mark Res 1997; 34:347-356.

Aaker JL, Benet-Martinez V, Garolera J. (2001). Consumption symbols as carriers of culture: A study of Japanese and Spanish brand personality constructs. J of Pers Soc Psychol 2001; 81(3):492-508.

Assael H. Consumer behaviour and marketing action. Cincinnati: South Western College Publishing; 1995.

Baloglu S, McClearly KW. A model of destination image formation. Anna Tour Res 1999;26(4):868-897.

Berthon P, Hulbert JM., Pitt LF. Brand management prognostications. Sloa Manage Rev 1999; 40(2):53-65.

Caprara GV, Barbaranelli C, Guido G. Brand personality: How to make the metaphor fit? J Econ Psychol 2001; 22:377-395.

Churchill Jr GA. A paradigm for developing better measures of marketing constructs. J of Mark Res 1979; 16(February):64-73.

Crompton JL. An assessment of the image of Mexico as a vacation destination and the influence of geographical location upon that image. J of Trav Res 1979; 17(4):18-23.

Cronin JJ, Taylor SA. Measuring service quality: A re-examination and extension. J Mark 1992(56):55-68.

Erdem T. An empirical analysis of umbrella branding. J Mark Res 1998; 35 (August):339-351.

Gardner BB, Levy SJ. The product and the brand. Harv Bus Rev 1955; 33-39 [March-April].

Gnoth J. Conference reports: branding tourism destinations. Anna Tour Res 1998; 25:758–760.

Graeff TR. Consumption situations and the effects of brand image on consumers' brand evaluations. Psychol Mark 1997; 14(1):49-70.

Hair Jr JF, Anderson RE Tatham RL, Black WC. Multivariate data analysis. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall; 1998.

Hendon DW, Williams EL. Winning the battle for your customers. J Cons Mark 1985; 2(4):65-75.

Heylen JP, Dawson B, Sampson P. An implicit model of consumer behaviour. J Mark Res Soc 1995; 37(1):51-67.

Hunt JD. Image as a factor in tourism development. J of Trav Res 1975; 13(3): 1-7.

Kapferer JN. Strategic brand management: creating and sustaining brand equity long term. (2nd Ed.). London: Kogan Page Limited; 1997.

Karande K, Zinkhan GM, Lum AB. Brand personality and self-concept: A replication and extension. Amer Mark Assoc Sum Conf 1997; 65-171.

Keller KL. Strategic brand management: building, measuring and managing brand equity. New Jersey: Prentice Hall; 1998.

Lawson F, Band-Bovy M. Tourism and recreational development. London: Architectural Press; 1977.

Lim K, O'Cass A. Consumer brand classifications: An assessment of culture-of-origin versus country-of-origin. J Prod Bran Manage 2001, 10(2):120-136.

Ong BS, Horbunluekit S. The impact of a Thai cultural show on Thailand's destination image. Amer Busi Rev 1997; 15(2):97-103.

Patterson M. Re-appraising the concept of brand image. J Bran Manage 1999; 6(6):409-426.

Plummer JT. How personality makes a difference. J Adv Res 1985; 24(6):27-31.

Pritchard A, Morgan N. Mood marketing - the new destination branding strategy: a case study of 'Wales' the brand. J Vac Mark 1998, 4(3): 215-229.

Russell JA. A circumplex model of affect. J Pers Soc Psychol 1980; 39(6):1161-1178.

Siguaw JA, Mattila A, Austin JR. The brand personality scale - an application for restaurants. Cornell Hot Res Admin Q 1999; 40(3):48-55.

Smothers N. Can products and brands have charisma? In: Aaker DA, Biel A, editors. Brand equity and advertising. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum Associates; 1993:97-111.

Upshaw L. Building brand identity: A strategy for success in a hostile market place. New York: John Wiley and Sons; 1995.