The Attractiveness of Tourism Brand Equity Dimensions in Central Philippines

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Abstract

The study presented the attractiveness of tourism brand equity dimensions in Central Philippines. The Brand equity may be described based on the interests of the customer and the brand preferences, purchasing intentions and choice of words to the other brands. The dimensions of brand equity include the awareness, image, perceived quality, and loyalty. The descriptive design was employed in the study. Though it was apparent that the tourists attained a very high level of attractiveness in the tourism brand equity dimensions, results implied that tourists were looking forward to a brand equity quality dimension with excellent hotel accommodations, shopping venues, and nightlife and entertainment in their visits to the various tourists' destination in Central Philippines.

Keywords: tourism management, tourism brand equity dimensions, awareness, image, quality, loyalty, descriptive design, Philippine
INTRODUCTION

A destination brand may be considered as an umbrella brand for the reason that it affects local residents, potential travelers, and other destination stakeholders. Examining how customer-based brand equity for a tourist destination can be pinned on products associated with a destination brand can provide marketing tactics for destination marketers and stakeholders (Lim, Chung, & Weaver, 2012). There is fierce competition in the tourism industry focusing on the attraction but does not concentrate on brands. Tourism is an offering of components of tourism goods and services of a country's destinations which without having a commercial name, and a unique brand won't be able to compete with other countries (Vashmehsaraei, Vahedi, & Shirian, 2014). Successful destination branding strategies require the commitment and mobilization of internal stakeholders, which can be evaluated using the customer-based brand equity (CBBE) model, in order to reinforce the communication of the brand message to the tourist market (Sartori, Mottironi, & Corigliano, 2012).

Brand Equity (BE) emerges as the most integrated and time enduring (Giannopoulos, Kladou, Mavragani, Chytiri, 2012) element of destination branding. Given how Brand Equity (BE) has been formulated by Keller (2003), destination marketers direct their attention on BE dimensions other than brand assets (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014).

Significant contribution in building up brand equity was made by Aaker (1996) and Keller (2003). Aaker (1996) discussed the brand equity components, how to measure them, and describes brand equity as the set of brand liabilities and assets associated to the brand - its name and symbols that add value or subtract value from a product or service.
Moreover, Keller (1993) introduces the concept of customer-based brand equity defined as the differential effect of brand information on consumer response to the marketing of the brand (Chauhan, Kaur, & Medury, 2011).

Also, Brand equity is a collection of perceptions, emotions, and attitudes belonging to the brand, thus, the brand is a value that can influence consumer’s interests, preferences, beliefs and their purchasing behavior (Vashmehsaraei, Vahedi, & Shirian, 2014). They added that brand equity may be described according to the interests of the customer and the brand preferences, purchasing intentions and choice of words to the other brands. Hence, identification of incremental factors of tourism destination brand equity can be accounted as a challenge for tourism marketers and stakeholders (Qaemi, 2012).

Furthermore, brand equity mainly develops from works on corporate and product brand equity (Yoo & Donthu, 2002; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014). According to Aaker (1996), brand equity measures are classified into five dimensions: awareness, associations/image, perceived quality, loyalty and brand assets (Lim, Chung & Weaver, 2012; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014).

However, in the field of tourism, researchers argued that a customer’s (tourist’s) perspective on the tourism destination phenomenon consists of tourism destination awareness, tourism destination image, and quality dimensions, as well as tourist’s loyalty toward the investigated destination. Numerous studies have already proposed a spectrum of variables which incorporates an aspect of the tourism destination image concept (Gallarza, Gil, & Calderon, 2002). Thus, during the review, researchers concluded that the previous tourism
destination image studies could also include a quality dimension (Konecnik, 2005a; Konecnik & Ruzzier, 2006).

This study proposes that a tourism destination's degree of attractiveness as to the dimensions of brand equity is based on its image and quality and the tourists' awareness and loyalty to the destination.

**Objective**

The main purpose of the study was to determine the level of attractiveness of the tourist destination in the Central Philippines on the core dimensions of brand equity which include image, awareness, quality, and loyalty when the tourists are taken collectively and when they were grouped according to age, sex, and marital status.

**Framework**

Brand equity is an important concept in marketing because it brings competitive advantage (Sarvari, 2012). Brand equity has been studied from product branding perspectives and most often in the consumer goods context (Keller, 1996; Juntunen, Juntunen, & Juga 2011). With this, destination branding is regarded as an important aspect of current destination management application, as expanding tourist opportunities and travel locations have occurred in the increased substitutability and lack of differentiation among destinations (Pike, 2005; Sarvari, 2012).

In addition, there are attempts to study brand equity in business to business (B2B) markets in the service sector (Davis, Golicic, & Marquardt, 2008; Kim, Kim, Kim, Kim & Kang, 2008; Rauyruen, Miller, & Groth, 2009; Juntunen, Juntunen, & Juga, 2011). Brand equity is a set of brand assets and liabilities associated to a
brand, its name, and symbol, which comprise the value contributed by a producer, by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers' (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014).

The customer's perspective on brand evaluation was introduced through the concept of customer-based brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993; Konecnik & Ruzzier, 2006). The concept has attracted considerable interest to marketers (Vazquez, del Rio, & Iglesias, 2002). The four dimensions of customer-based brand equity should be considered in understanding a destination brand (Lim, Chung & Weaver, 2012). This approach was used in analysis based on Aaker (1996) and Keller's (1993) categorization. The customer's evaluation of a brand comprises awareness, image, quality and loyalty dimensions (Konecnik & Ruzzier, 2006).

Aaker's Model views Brand Equity model as a set of five categories of assets and liabilities linked to the brand that add or subtract from the value provided by the product or service to the firm and the firms' customers. Those categories of brand assets are: (1) brand loyalty, (2) brand awareness, (3) perceived quality, (4) brand associations and (5) other proprietary assets. Each component comes with benefits for both consumer and producer (Sarvari, 2012). The demand-side perspective on the branding concept can be viewed from the idea of customer-based brand equity (Keller, 1993) which comprises several dimensions.

The value of a brand is its power to capture consumer's preference and loyalty (Kotler & Keller, 2009) which is based on awareness of the brand, and it is a quality perception and overall customer satisfaction (Sarvari, 2012). Well managed brand may lead to increased market share (O, Neill & Mattila, 2004). A strong
brand appreciates a high level of consumers' brand experience and loyalty (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012; Sarvari, 2012). To create strong brand equity, particularly for a place, destination, or a city, it is crucial to examine brand equity from the viewpoint of the customer and his or her perceptions of the location in question (Yuwo, Ford, & Purwanegara, 2013). The tourism destination can be treated as a brand (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Konecnik & Ruzzier, 2008; Ruzzier, 2010).

A number of tourism destination studies investigate brand equity through the concept of tourist destination image, (Konecnik, 2004; Ruzzier 2010; Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011). The image is the brand dimension that has received the most attention in the academic literature. Destination brands formed sets of images of a site before experiencing like product and service brands. Evidence suggests that visitors' preferences about destinations are focused on the degree to which they generate respective images: the more favorable images of a destination, the numerous the variety of chance (Bilim & Bilim, 2014). The image refers to the attributes one expects a destination to possess. Image for a long time was viewed as encompassing all the other brand dimensions (Ritchie & Ritchie 1998), but this view is changing; “Image formation is not branding; the former constitutes the core of the latter.

Also, Milman and Pizam (1995) described a destination image as the mental impression of a site or a product experienced by the tourists. Brand image is an impression created by promotions, advertisements, and experience which permits the potential visitor to recognize a product, evaluate the quality, lower purchase risks, and obtain specific experience and satisfaction out of product differentiation (Lin & Lin, 2007). Also, brand image may guide customers in their purchase decision (Richardson,
Dick, & Jain, 1994). Thus, Destination branding is selecting a consistent mix of brand elements to define and distinguish a destination through positive image building (Bilim & Bilim, 2014).

A destination with the positive image can eliminate risks that the potential visitors may encounter when they make their decision (Lin & Lin, 2007; Molina, Gómez, & Martín-Consuegra, 2010; Kasim & Alfandi, 2014). Beerli and Martin, (2004a) posit that because potential tourists have no previous visit to the destination and usually they have limited information about the goal. The destination with definite, positive, and recognizable images has more possibility of being chosen by the tourists (Kasim & Alfandi, 2014).

Images are formed on many different levels and throughout one's lifetime (Gartner & Ruzzier 2011). They further mentioned that “images are used to reduce risk to the consumer associated with visiting a place one knows very little about it. Destinations use images extensively in their promotional literature to gain awareness for the attributes that set them apart from competitors. Images are also used to counteract negative qualities that may have been acquired through media sources”.

Awareness is also an essential brand equity dimension. It is the first step in building and increasing brand value (Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011) and is also a necessary step leading to destination visitation (Konecnik & Ruzzier, 2006). A place must be known to the consumer, in some context, before it can even be considered as a potential destination. Brand awareness is linked to the strength of the brand trace in mind, as reflected by customers’ capacity to remember or recall the brand under different circumstances (Ntaganda, 2012).
Awareness includes what tourists know or perceive about the destination in question inquiring whether they had heard of the city, what characteristics came to mind, and recognition of pictures, tag-lines and logos related to the destination (Yuwo, Ford, & Purwanegara, 2013).

The tourism destination image, which includes the quality, has been the subject of many empirical studies in tourism research (Gallarza, Gil, & Calderon, 2002; Konecnik, 2004). Brand quality in tourism is concerned with perceptions of the quality of a destination's infrastructure, hospitality service, and amenities such as accommodation (Pike, Bianchi, Kerr, & Patti, 2010).

The perception of high-quality services is directly related to the opinion of visiting a particular destination, and a knowledge of the low quality of tourism services is related to the intention of choosing another destination (Olimpia, Luminita, & Simona, 2011). Brand positioning should reinforce the determinant attributes for which the destinations are already perceived positively and competitively (Aziz, Kefallonitis, & Friedman, 2012).

The perceived quality is at the core of what customers are buying and reflects gains and declines generated by a wide array of determinants and can differ from the real quality (Crescitelli & Figueiredo, 2009). Perceived quality becomes crucial regarding brand equity as it affects the awareness, image, and also the customer's loyalty. Perceived quality is a significant effector of brand loyalty and ultimately firm profitability (Yuwo, Ford & Purwanegara, 2013). Perceived quality can also influence usage experience (Cobb-Walgren, Ruble, & Donthu, 1995; Omar & Ali, 2010). Heavy advertising may improve the perceived quality of experience goods, which by definition are difficult to evaluate before purchase (Omar & Ali, 2010).
Brand loyalty is at the center of brand equity. The consumer who feels a bond with the brand will exhibit loyalty towards the brand. In this era of relationship marketing, keeping the customer loyal will occur in increasing positive effect concerning the volume of purchases and positive word of mouth (Yuwo, Ford & Purwanegara, 2013).

Brand loyalty describes the level of attachment to the destination. This brand loyalty can be viewed concerning visitation, intent to visit, and word of mouth referrals to others (Pike, Bianchi, Kerr, & Patti, 2010). It is also described as a consumer frequently procuring goods and services, while brand awareness comprises a consumer being able to rightly identify a particular brand (Aaker, 1991; Matthews, 2014).

Konecnik and Gartner (2007) offered a theoretical conceptualization of customer-based brand equity evaluation of a tourism destination (CBBETD) and identified the following brand dimensions: awareness, image, quality, and loyalty. The model was tested on one tourism destination from the perspective of tourists, and the brand was analyzed within the destination image studies framework. Marketing segments are connected to several dimensions which are positively linked to brand equity (Rahmani, Mojaveri, & Allahbakhsh, 2012). The tourists from different markets value the brand dimensions of a destination differently (Sibireva, 2014).

Destination branding studies reveal variations in the four core dimensions. Brand awareness is considered to be the key attribute of a brand (de Chernatony & McDonald, 2003; Sibireva, 2014) and corresponds to the cognitive component of destination image (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). In line with the destination image studies, the productive element of the destination image is
influenced mostly by the dimensions of image and quality awareness are assessed (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Sibireva, 2014). Loyalty corresponds to the conative component. Loyalty is an essential concept in marketing strategy and brand loyalty is the core of brand equity (Rahmani, Mojaveri, & Allahbakhsh, 2012).

All four dimensions in this study have been the subject of a number of previous tourism destination investigations. Milman and Pizam (1995) combined the idea of a destination image with the awareness dimension considering awareness as a necessary step leading to destination visitation. Further, Bigne, Sanchez, and Sanchez (2001) combined the image with a quality dimension and added some variables investigating attitudinal loyalty.

Other studies about tourism destination have incorporated the loyalty dimension which should not be neglected when examining tourism destination selection and performance (Ruzzier, 2010a). Studies that combine more dimensions of the brand equity concept for a tourism destination have been published (Konecnik & Ruzzier, 2008; Boo, Busser, & Baloglu, 2009).

![Figure: 1 Schematic Diagram of the Framework of the Study](image-url)
Indeed, brand loyalty is built over time through a compilation of positive happenings. Loyal consumers are repeat customers who prefer a company's brand without even considering other alternatives (Manternach, 2010). They purchase more and regularly and also they frequently recommend and even advice about a brand to others (Latif, Islam, Bin, & Noor, 2014).

Tourism destination marketers have long been interested in the concept of brand loyalty because brand loyalty is a measure of the attachment that a customer has to a brand (Aaker, 1996). Brand loyalty brings the tourism destinations many benefits (Pike, Bianchi, Kerr, & Patti, 2010), including repeat visits and recommendations of the destination brand to friends and relatives.

Mittal and Lassar (1998) found that customer satisfaction has a positive impact on brand loyalty. Brand satisfaction may act as a strong determinant of behavioral aspect of brand loyalty, in fact, many studies have proved that satisfaction is an antecedent of brand loyalty (Matthews, 2014). Tourist satisfaction is a crucial factor to generate destination loyalty (Shirazi & Som, 2013). Oppermann (2000) argues that the loyalty dimension should also not be neglected in a tourism destination.

**METHODOLOGY**

This descriptive research used a researchers-made questionnaire, with a validity rating of 4.21 and a reliability coefficient of 0.794, to collect the data. Convenience sampling was used to reach 100 participants who were tourists visiting the various destinations in Central Philippines. The data obtained were statistically examined using the frequency, mean and standard deviation.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On the Level of Attractiveness of the Brand Equity Core Dimensions of the Tourists Visiting the Various Tourists Destination in the Central Philippines.

Results reveal a high level of attractiveness of the tourist destination in the Central Philippines on the core dimensions of brand equity which are the image ($\bar{x}=3.37$), awareness ($\bar{x}=3.31$), quality ($\bar{x}=3.01$), and loyalty ($\bar{x}=3.24$). Among all factors, it can be gleaned that the highest is on destination image factor 1 which is 'having good state parks and forests' ($\bar{x}=3.58$; $sd=0.59$) very high level while the lowest is on destination quality factor 3 which is 'having good nightlife and entertainment such as bars, clubs, dancing and the like' ($\bar{x}=2.70$; $sd=0.88$) high level.

The research of Kim and Kim (2005) which measured the association between the brand equity of hospitality businesses concluded that the measure of brand loyalty comes from the importance of customer satisfaction (Myagmarsuren & Chen, 2011). Moreover, perceptual brand equity such as brand awareness is a
necessary condition for the creation of a brand image and leads to brand perceived quality which is inferred attributes (Esch, Langner, Schmitt & Geus, 2006; Myagmarsuren & Chen, 2011).

On the Level of Attractiveness of the Brand Equity Core Dimensions of the Tourists Visiting the Various Tourists Destination in the Central Philippines when grouped according to Age.

The study revealed that factor 1: 'destination has good state parks and forests' on destination awareness is the highest for both the younger and older groups.

Furthermore, for younger category the item for factor 1 on destination image, the highest is into “The destination has good state parks and forests” which got the standard deviation of 0.62 with the mean score of 3.58 (very high level), while the lowest mean of 2.63 is into factor 3 on destination quality on “The destination has nightlife and entertainment (bars, clubs, dancing ...)” (high level) with 0.89 standard deviation.

Figure 3 reflects the level of attractiveness of the tourist destination in the Central Philippines on the core dimensions of brand equity concerning image, awareness, quality, and loyalty when grouped according to age. It reveals that the factor 1 on destination awareness had the highest mean for both younger and older categories and the lowest factor is into destination quality for both groups.
Moreover, for older category the item under factor 1 on destination image the highest is into “The destination had good state parks and forests” received the standard deviation of 0.55 with the mean score of 3.59 (very high level), while the lowest mean of 2.80 (high level) is into factor 3 on destination quality on “The destination has good nightlife and entertainment (bars, clubs, dancing...)” with 0.87 standard deviation.

Age served as a marker variable unrelated to the predictor and criterion for brand equity items (Demangeot & Broderick, 2010).

The tourists are heterogeneous in their knowledge of travel characteristics. Travel attributes may be perceived variedly by tourists of different cultures (Mill & Morrison, 1985) and from different countries (Mill & Morrison, 1985; Chen & Kerstetter, 1999) to their favorite destinations. According to Baloglu and McCleary (1999), an individual's age affected the perceived image of various tourist destinations. A study of the model of Pennsylvania as a rural tourism destination indicated that the tourists gender significantly influenced the perceived image (Chen & Kerstetter, 1999). According to Hwang, Kim, and
Hyun (2013), marketing research scholars have postulated that socio-demographic factors could play moderating roles in consumer behavior. According to the gender, age and marital status have been revealed to have moderating roles in consumer behavior. This study assumed that the tourists' groups concerning gender, age, marital status, and geographical origin could be segregated based on the relationship of their perception of travel attributes to satisfaction (Ragavan, Subramonian, & Sharif, 2014).

**On the Level of Attractiveness on the Brand Equity Core Dimensions of the Tourists Visiting the Various Tourists Destination in the Central Philippines when grouped according to Sex.**

Figure 4 illustrates the level of attractiveness of the tourist destination in Central Philippines on the core dimensions of brand equity concerning image, awareness, quality, and loyalty when grouped according to sex. It exposes that factor 1 on destination awareness got the highest mean for both male and female category and the lowest factor is into destination quality for both groups.

For male tourists, under destination image, the highest is into “The destination has good state parks and forests” got the standard deviation of 0.59 with the mean score of 3.58 (very high level), while the lowest mean of 2.77 is into factor 3 on destination quality on “The destination has good nightlife and entertainment (bars, clubs, dancing...)” (high level) with 0.80 standard deviation.
When creating marketing strategies, marketers need to be conscious of how a brand is perceived and assessed by male and female consumers. Kim, Lehto, and Morrison (2006) aver that gender is one of the most usual forms of segmentation used by marketers and advertisers since males and females are likely to vary in decision making. Tan, Su-Mae, Lee, Ong, & Liew (2012) also concluded that gender should be added as a customer characteristic in the midst of building a brand image. Females favor a brand which can give excitement while males prefer a brand which emphasize functional benefits (Seock & Bailey, 2008). This shows the necessity to understand how both male and female consumers perceive a brand in the target market and create marketing strategies according to their varying desires and tastes (Jansson, 2013).

Similarly, Tan, Su-Mae, Lee, Ong, & Liew (2012) suggested that female and male demonstrated systematic bias on a causal relationship among brand awareness and brand image constructs due to differences in responses to the latent variables.
Brand image is a prime marketing tool for many destination marketers. A strong brand image is equivalent to a rise in first-time customer purchase, positive word-of-mouth (WOM) and customer loyalty (Naidoo, Durbarry, & Ramseook-Munhuruun, 2010). Men and women can attach different meanings to the same brand. Thus, destination marketers need to pay attention not only to cultural but also to gender differences in the markets where the brand operates to create appropriate marketing strategies (Jansson, 2013).

**CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers concluded that the tourists visiting the Central Philippines perceived the tourist destinations in Central Philippines as highly attractive. However, tourists were looking forward to a quality destination with excellent hotel accommodations, shopping venues, and nightlife and entertainment during their visits to the various tourists' destination in the Central Philippines.

**LITERATURE CITED**


The Attractiveness of Tourism Brand Equity Dimensions in Central Philippines


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