



BRAND EQUITY: ATTRIBUTE MEASUREMENT OF INDIAN TOURISM PRODUCTS USING MULTIDIMENSIONAL SCALING TECHNIQUES

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Abstract

The aim this study is to perceptually map the brand equity of Indian Tourism. The purpose of this paper is to review the concepts and theoretical underpinnings of destination branding and to refine and enhance destination branding to more fully represent the complexities of the tourism product. The approach designed for this study was qualitative approach. Subjective assessment of awareness, preference, behaviours, and loyalty were discussed, and the adopted technique for sampling was non-probability sampling. For more accurate analysis by formulating working hypotheses, the exploratory research study was accustomed for this study. To select the potential unbiased respondent into the sample, convenience random sampling was used. Domestic and foreign travellers of leading Indian tourist destinations were interviewed in person. The survey yielded 216 completed and valid questionnaires. The statistical analysis was done using Partial Least Squares Regression Analysis. Resampling was done using a bootstrapping technique. This study suggests that many destination marketing campaigns have a general perception of destination branding and are exercising it to a certain extent. Nevertheless, there are many encouraging patterns determined in this study that could heighten destination branding. Implications for practitioners and researchers were also addressed in this study, and some future research directions were suggested.

Keywords: *Destination Branding, Brand Cognizance, Brand Preference, Brand Loyalty, and Brand Equity.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Brand is the personality; like, name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them, that identifies a product, service or company and how it associates to key electorates: customers, staff, partners, and investors (Simeon, 2006). Some people characterize the psychological expression, brand associations like thoughts, feelings, perceptions, images, experiences, beliefs, and attitudes that become attached to the brand, of a brand from the experiential aspect (Padgett and Mulvey, 2009). By means of promoting value, image, or prestige branding must appeal and retain customers. The brand must communicate information and increase trust. Branding facilitates to identify and recall key factors among the competitors (Palumbo and Herbig, 2000). Later, this concept has been further explored in the book, Destination Branding (Morgan *et al.*, 2004).

Branding a destination is really a challenging task. By attracting diverse customers, generally, the delivered product is often extremely customized to the customer in control. As destination brands act as umbrella brands, corresponding corporate brands, for a portfolio of leisure, medical, hill stations, eco-tourism, adventure, cultural, business tourism, and stakeholder and citizen welfare products (Trueman *et al.*, 2004). Similar to product and services, destination brands have tangible and intangible components, and predominately service dependent. The aim this study is to perceptually map the brand equity of Indian Tourism. The purpose of this paper is to review the concepts and theoretical underpinnings of destination branding and to refine and enhance destination branding to more fully represent the complexities of the tourism product.

1.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- Role of Brand Cognizance of Indian Tourism in Destination Branding.
- Impact of Brand Preference of Indian Tourism in Destination Branding.
- Influence of Brand Loyalty of Indian Tourism in Destination Branding.



2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

There exist several possible ways to develop destination brand, most evidently through advertising, direct marketing, personal selling, e-marketing, brochures, public and media relations, and by cooperation destination marketing organizations (Venkatachalam and Venkateswaran, 2010). Anholt, (2008) determined place promotion as the cognizant use of publicity and merchandising to address the selective brand image of particular geographic localities or areas to a target audience. Destination branding not only necessitates advertising and publicity, but also comprehends flagship advancement and spotlight, events in the arts, media, leisure, heritage a, retailing or sports industries. In the recent past, a respectable industry focused literature comprehending destination marketing issues from stakeholder investments (Morgan *et al.*, 2003) to marketing management and destination branding (Morgan. *et al.*, 2003). Buhalis (2000) established that a destination could be marketed as a product.

An ascertained branding as the most powerful marketing weapon available to marketers of destination. Being unique in culture, landscape and heritage, many countries claim itself as the most compassionate people and high standard of hospitality and facilities. As a result of these campaigns, the demand for destination to construct a unique identity for distinguishing from competitors has become vital. Dissimilar aspects of destination branding conception have been depicted by the Canadian Tourism Commission (2004). Hamilton (2000) viewed the nation as uniquely strong in integrity, inventiveness, tenacity, and spirit from a destination branding standpoint. These studies stressed the importance of reinforcing an incomparable image or brand personality likewise distinguishing the destination from competitors.

The extent of literature search evidenced less attention towards the role of services branding theory in place branding. People visit destinations because of the services rendered. Hence, services constitute the core of the place product and provide the benefits that the place brand offers. By adapting the Servuction Model to places as retail centres, which has direct connection to the place product? The brand preference of the place product is delivered by its principal services such as cultural fascinations, shopping malls, financial and leisure services. Primary services in the form of infrastructural services such as transport, policing, environmental health, the maintenance of the public services cape like parks and other open spaces, public buildings and monuments are affirmed by 'back office' services. It was already been assumed the services marketing mix in the context of city branding. Unfortunately, city branding has not deduced widespread recognition in brand preference (Kavaratzis, 2008).

With regard to brand loyalty, in spite of the overall agreement between practitioners and academics about the essentiality of loyalty, there is a lack of alignment about the scope of the aftermaths (Bougie *et al.*, 2003). From the practitioner perspective, Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2008) conceptualized strong link between short-term, activity-based performance, such as occupancy rates, and brand funding that countermines long term brand loyalty. Despite, none of the recently published articles contribute to this issue. From a tourism paradigm, the emphasis is on the need to formulate a better agreement of place brand loyalty based on consumer-based brand equity (Pike, 2009) and the influence of place branding on business competitiveness amongst key groupings of stakeholders. Suggestions were made for future developments to examine the relationship between different indicators of place performance, which in addition to tourism should include citizen satisfaction indicators, changes in place loyalty and financial returns. Greater use of marketing metrics in place branding research was necessitated in destination branding (Dinnie, 2008).

The application of the concept of brand equity to place branding comes predominantly from the tourism domain (Hankinson, 2010). Especially, the customer based brand equity model has appealed concern as a destination brand performance measure (Konecnik and Gartner, 2007). Pike (2009) included destination brand equity as one of the potential research gaps, suggesting that further research in this area might usefully be extended to the measure the branding and positioning strategies of a destination.



2.1 Hypotheses

Following hypotheses were developed after reviewing the extant literature on destination branding,

- H1: Influence of brand cognizance will exert a positive influence on brand equity
- H2: Brand preference will be strongly related to brand equity
- H3: Brand loyalty has a positive effect on brand equity
- H4: Brand equity will increase the destination branding of Indian Tourism

2.2 Conceptual Model

The research framework of this study is presented in the following figure,

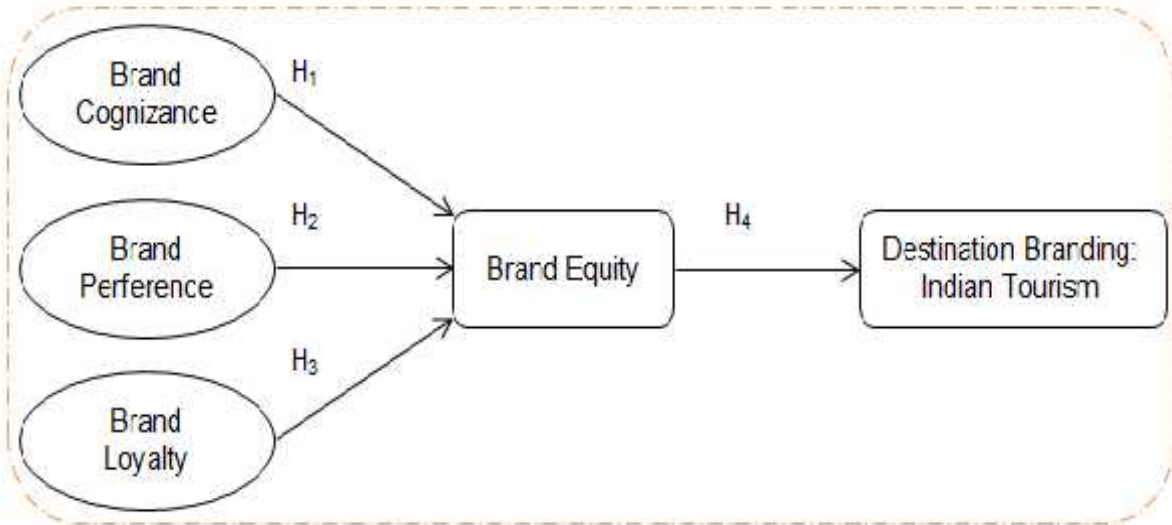


Figure 1: Diagrammatic illustration showing Conceptual Model

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND STRATEGIES

According to advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, Oxford (1952), the term "research", which had rooted from the term "search", has French origins and appeared in the 16th century. Research can be defined as the deliberate investigation or inquiry particularly through search for new facts in any branch of knowledge." In this paper, respective measures that were generally assumed in studying the research problems are critically analyzed. The approach designed for this study was qualitative approach. Subjective assessment of awareness, preference, behaviours, and loyalty were discussed, and the adopted technique for sampling was non-probability sampling. For more accurate analysis by formulating working hypotheses, the exploratory research study was accustomed for this study. To select the potential unbiased respondent into the sample, convenience random sampling was used.

An inductive method was used by reviewing the existing literature (Venkatachalam and Venkateswaran, 2010; Morgan et al., 2003; Buhalis, 2000; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008; Dinnie, 2008; Hankinson, 2010; Konecnik and Gartner, 2007). This was accompanied by structured questionnaire, observation method, and through direct interview. The first part of the questionnaire constituted the demographic factors of the respondents and the later part of the questionnaire dealt with brand equity of destination branding of Indian Tourism (Delone and McLean, 2003). Domestic and foreign travelers of leading Indian tourist destinations (Taj Mahal, Ajanta and Ellora Caves, Khajuraho Temples, Goa, Kerala Backwaters, Jaipur, Munnar, Udaipur, Jaisalmer, and Leh and Ladakh) were interviewed in person (n=245) and asked to recall any helpful or thoughtful travel experience (critical incident). After eliminating/revising double-barreled, equivocal, and misleading affirmations, 216 observations remained. Secondary data collection was done through journals, articles, and other sources of published information.



4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

From the relevant literature, wherever possible, all of the item scales were adopted and were characterized to correspond the destination branding context. Seven-point Likert scale anchored at “strongly disagree” (1), “strongly agree” (7), and “neither agree nor disagree” (3) was used. Empirical assessment of the above designed conceptual framework was conducted through partial least squares (PLS) regression analysis as the primary statistical technique, specifically using XLSTAT>. Bootstrapping analysis on the PLS method was used to test the confidence intervals, instead of making assumptions about the distribution of values, of the research framework. The bootstrapping analysis was done with 90 re-samples. The square root of the average variance extracted for each construct should be greater than the correlations between constructs in order to assess the discriminant validity (Fornell and Lacker, 1981). The highest correlation between any pair of constructs was lower than the lowest square root of the average variance extracted. Therefore, establishing adequate destination branding attributes for all of the measures, standard of discriminant validity was satisfied.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It was found that most of the travellers were female (62%). In order to generalize the study, the proportion was stratified in such a manner that 60per cent of domestic and 40per cent of the foreign respondents were considered. The majority of the domestic respondents were from South India (12%) and the majority of the foreign respondents were from Europe (11%). Brand Cognizance was high for hospitality (3.89) and least for promotional awareness (1.45). Brand preference score was high for the environment (4.01) and least for physical facilities (2.38). In today’s economic position, devising and restraining customer loyalty is indispensable (Aaker and Joachimstaler, 2000). Customers of tourist industries have various choices around the globe. In this interlocked era, it can ascertain tourism and travel competition by a number of options including the cost of travel, the languages spoken, and the quality of the total product. The most preferred loyalty program was seasonal offers (4.09) as the travellers traffic would be at the peak during such periods and least was for air frequent-fly programs. Effective customer loyalty program is some other way to earn the best possible customers (Harris *et al.*, 2003). It is not that repeat customers incline to spend more money, but such customers are often the people who tend to provide the most beneficial word-of-mouth advertising. The most accepted brand equity approach was proactive approach (4.24). Numerous tourism industries have modernized brand equity approaches.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper furnishes positive guidelines towards the growth of destination branding. Study on destination branding necessitates focus and commitment of time, people, resources and changes in policies, culture and the customer's mindset (Lovelock and Christopher, 2011). This study suggests that many destination marketing campaigns have a general perception of destination branding and are exercising it to a certain extent. Nevertheless, there are many encouraging patterns determined in this study that could heighten destination branding. In spite of providing practicable penetrations towards destination branding in this present study, there are several limitations deserve addressing. Future research could be conducted deliberating the limitations of this study. Initially, the results must be viewed in accordance with the fact that the sample was limited to 40 per cent of the foreign travellers in India, evoking into question the generalizability of the findings. Following studies could meliorate our findings by examining the research framework. By extending to depict on the hypotheses and findings of related studies as suggested, the authors conceive the resulting increased richness of models and explanations would significantly encourage the understanding of the important phenomenon of destination branding of Indian Tourism.

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APPENDIX

Table 1: Sample characteristics

MEASURES	(N=216)
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	82 (38%)
Female	134 (62%)
<i>Domestic Travelers</i>	129 (60%)
<i>Central India</i>	22 (10%)
<i>East India</i>	15 (17%)
<i>North India</i>	19 (9%)
<i>South India</i>	25 (12%)
<i>West India</i>	18 (8%)
<i>Northeast India</i>	19 (9%)



<i>Islands of India</i>	11 (5%)
<i>Foreigners Travelers</i>	87 (40%)
Africa	15 (7%)
Asia	19 (9%)
Europe	23 (11%)
North America	12 (6%)
Oceania	10 (5%)
South America	8 (4%)
<i>Brand Cognizance</i>	
Hospitality	3.89
Advertising Campaign	3.20
Place Category	2.96
Price	2.21
Promotions	1.45
<i>Brand Preference</i>	
Friendliness	3.46
Environment	4.01
Packages	2.56
Safety	3.41
Comfort	3.22
Travel Feasibility	2.75
Mode of Payment	2.97
Physical Facilities	2.38
<i>Loyalty Enrollment Program</i>	
Point System	3.87
Discounts	4.03
Seasonal Offers	4.09
Air Frequent-Fly Programs	2.21
Hotel Frequent-Guest Programs	3.65
<i>Brand Equity Approaches</i>	
Proactive Approach	4.24
Reactive Approach	3.45
Partnership Approach	2.41

Table 2: Results of Factor Analysis

MEASURES	ITEMS	AVERAGE VARIANCE EXTRACTED
Point System	5	0.65
Discounts	5	0.71
Seasonal Offers	5	0.73
Air Frequent-Fly Programs	5	0.51
Hotel Frequent-Guest Programs	5	0.64
Proactive Approach	5	0.74
Reactive Approach	5	0.65
Partnership Approach	5	0.54