

The Effects of Destination Personality Items on Destination Brand Image

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to investigate the perceived destination brand personality of Istanbul and to examine the relationships among destination brand personality and destination brand image. A convenience sample of 200 visitors to Istanbul was surveyed via face-to-face interviews. Initially, a series of exploratory factor analyses (EFA) were conducted for each measurement scales (brand personality and destination brand image) in order to identify the potential underlying factor structure of the data. Then multiple regression analysis was used to investigate the relationship between variables using PASW 18. The findings of this study indicate that destination brand personality has a positive impact on destination brand image. However, the results are not fully represent all personality traits associated with tourism destinations. While four dimensions of the destination brand personality scales (vibrancy, competence, contemporary and sincerity) are found to be significantly related to the destination brand image, sophistication dimension is not significant in predicting destination brand image.

1 Introduction

It is generally accepted that a brand is a powerful means of differentiation, and that differentiation is a significant competitive marketing strategy (Boo et. al., 2009: 221). Ever since the brand literature commenced in the 1940s, there has been consistent recognition that branding offers organisations a means for differentiation in markets crowded with similar offerings. For destinations, effective differentiation is critical given the increasingly competitive nature of tourism markets, where many places offering similar features are becoming substitutable (Pike, 2009: 861). A tourism destination can also be seen as a product or perceived as a brand since it consists of a bundle of tangible and intangible attributes. Destination branding has become a popular and powerful marketing tool because of increasing competition, product similarity, and substitutability in tourism markets (Uşaklı and Baloğlu, 2011: 117).

As the tourism marketplace is becoming more highly competitive, destination marketers are adopting branding techniques to craft an identity which focuses on the uniqueness of their products, namely destinations. Similar to those marketing consumer products, destination marketers have had to turn to branding to distinguish their destinations to convey a positive message that will motivate tourists to visit them. However, evidence to support the successful implementation of destination branding is mixed. A combination of destination image and destination personality has thus been used as a strategy by destination marketers to differentiate their brands from other competing ones (Chen and Phou, 2013:271).

At the theoretical level, brand image has been defined in terms of brand personality and in some cases, the terms brand image and brand personality have been used interchangeably to gauge consumer perceptions of brands. Past studies have attempted to provide some explanations to the brand image–brand personality relationship debate, but most discussions have remained only theoretical (Hosany et. al., 2006: 640).

2 Destination Personality

Personality is viewed as one part of a person's self-concept. In order to grasp the attributes and associations linked to a brand, the concept of brand personality can be employed (Nicola and Sauer, 2011: 1283). In theoretical terms, product/brand personality reflects the "set of human characteristics associated with a brand". It evokes emotional links between brands and consumers, and gives the latter a tangible reference point, which is vivid, alive, and more complete than the sense conveyed by a generic offering. At the practical level, brands can be characterized by personality descriptors, such as youthful, energetic, extrovert, or sophisticated. For example, one may use the word masculine to describe Marlboro cigarettes, rugged to describe Levi's jeans, feminine to describe Chanel perfumes, and intelligent to describe IBM computers. Similarly, destinations can be described using human personality traits, such as Europe is traditional and sophisticated; Wales is honest, welcoming, romantic, down to earth; Spain is friendly and family oriented; London is open-minded, unorthodox, vibrant, creative; Paris is romantic. Accordingly, in this paper, destination personality is defined as: "the set of human characteristics associated with a destination" as perceived from a tourist rather than a local resident viewpoint (Ekinci and Hosany, 2006:128).

Destination image and destination personality are different but related concepts, with both being cognitive constructs. Destination image involves subjective knowledge of a destination (i.e., whether it is expensive, exotic, urban, cold, or developed), while destination personality refers to brand personality in the tourism

context, and uses human personality traits to describe a destination (e.g., whether it is original, interesting, exciting, or friendly) (Chen and Phou, 2013: 272).

Destination brand personality scale developed by Uşaklı and Baloğlu (2011: 119) consisted of five dimensions namely (1) vibrancy, (2) sophisticated, (3) competence, (4) contemporary, (5) sincerity in this study.

3 Destination Brand Image

Studies on destination image began in the early 1970s, when Hunt's influential work examined the role of image in tourism development. Since then, destination image has become one of the dominant areas of tourism research (Hosany et. al., 2006: 641).

The image of a destination is a key concept related to understanding tourists' destination selection processes. Destination image can be facilitated by the strengths of a destination in the eyes of potential visitors. Many studies have defined tourism image as an individual's overall perception of a destination and it has been identified as an important element in travel decision-making. Destination image is a key determinant influencing tourists' attitudes toward the destination (Veasna et. al., 2013: 513).

Brand image has been considered as the reasoned or emotional perceptions consumers attach to specific brands. Brand image has also been identified as an important source of brand equity. Blain et al. suggested that destination image should be included in the definition of destination brands (Boo et. al., 2009: 222).

Brand image plays a significant role in building brand identity, whereas brand image is also a reflection of brand identity, that is, consumers build a destination image in their minds based on the brand identity projected by the destination marketers. Then, destination marketers establish and enhance brand identity based on their knowledge about consumer's brand image on the particular destination (Qu et. al., 2011: 466).

4 The Relationship Between Destination Brand Image and Destination Brand Personality

Brand image and brand personality are key components of brand loyalty and brand positioning (Plummer, 1985). Patterson's 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. The terms brand image and brand personality have also been used interchangeably in the literature (Hosany, Ekinci and Uysal, 2006). Patterson (1999) concluded that most studies fail to distinguish between the concepts of brand image, brand personality, brand identity and user image. Kapferer (1997) argues that personality and self-image are antecedents of brand identity. Aaker and Biel (1993) views brand image as a cluster of attributes and associations that a consumer attach to a brand, and brand personality is perceived as the emotional side of brand image. An emergent research strand (Hosany *et. al.*, 2006, 2007; Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Murphy *et al.*, 2007) has established that the two constructs are distinct, but related concepts, and that an attractive destination personality can effectively leverage the perceived image of a place and thereby influences tourist choice behavior. Since the relationship between brand personality and brand image need further research in order to extend the theoretical link between them the aim of this study is to explore variations in brand perceptions in a different destination namely Istanbul.

5 Research Model

Based on the literature review a model on destination brand image is proposed. In this model there are five categories of brand personality, namely vibrancy, sophistication, competence, contemporary and sincerity. Model predicts that brand personality dimensions are expected to determine destination brand image. The following hypotheses are developed based on the literature and proposed model.

- H₁: Vibrancy is positively related to destination brand image
- H₂: Sophistication is positively related to destination brand image
- H₃: Competence is positively related to destination brand image
- H₄: Contemporary is positively related to destination brand image
- H₅: Sincerity is positively related to destination brand image

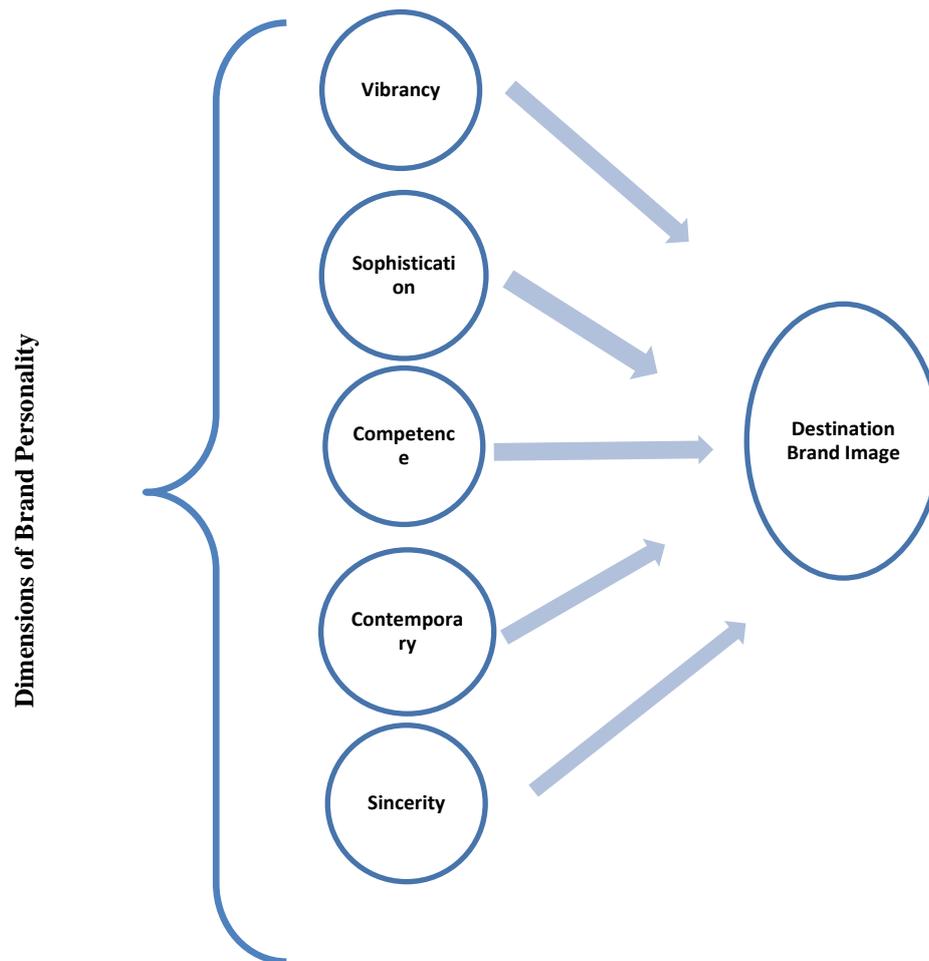


Figure 1: Research Model

6 Methodology

This article documents a study of the dimensions of destination brand personality associated with destination brand image. In particular, the research objective is to examine empirically and investigate variations in destination brand image which may be related to destination brand personality.

In order to explore the relationship between destination personality items and destination brand image, descriptive research design was adopted and conducted. Multiple items adopted from Uşaklı and Baloglu (2011) and Boo et al. (2009) scales were used to compile the measurement instrument for his study. Destination brand image was measured using by Boo et. al. (2009)'s four items destination brand image scale. Destination personality was measured using Uşaklı and Baloğlu's destination personality scale which is adapted from Aaker's (1997) five dimensional BPS. The BPS is the most comprehensive instrument for measuring brand/product personality and numerous studies (Siguaw et al., 1999) adopt this scale to capture consumers' perception of brand personality. The multidimensional operationalisation of destination personality items allowed the testing of the relationship between the items of destination personality and destination brand image. The questionnaire items were scored on a 5 point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Destination brand personality comprised five dimensions and included 24 items in total. Destination brand image included 4 items.

The data were collected via face-to-face interviews with multiple informants (tourists in Istanbul). To participate in the survey, respondents were approached randomly around touristic places of Istanbul. In general, respondents were responsive and willing to participate, and refusal rates were predominantly low (around 20 percent). A total of 200 usable questionnaires were obtained. A total of 51 percent of the sample is female, the mean age of the sample is less than 29 years, respondents are highly educated (47 per cent holding university degrees), and mainly earning up to 2000-3000 Turkish Lira a month (25 per cent).

6.1 Exploratory Factor Analysis

A series of exploratory factor analyses (EFA) were conducted for each measurement scales (brand personality and destination brand image) used in this study in order to identify the potential underlying factor structure of the data. Factor analyses were conducted without constraining factor which means based on factor's eigenvalue that represents the variance explained by each factor. In EFA 1 (destination personality scale) item loadings less than 0.40 were dropped to enhance reliability. 8 items were eliminated from destination personality scale. In the first EFA as expected items that loaded highly on the first factor reflected vibrancy, the second factor reflected contemporary, the third factor reflected competence, the fourth factor reflected sincerity and the fifth factor reflected sophistication. A single factor was extracted for destination brand image scale in EFA 2, using an eigenvalue of 1 as the cut-off point (which indicates that the measurement scale used in this study was unidimensional). The Bartlett test of sphericity showed overall significance of the correlation matrix of the 24 items (brand personality) and 4 items (destination brand image), indicating the appropriateness for factor analyses. In addition, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was 0.83 for EFA 1 and .79 for EFA 2, confirming the appropriateness for factor analyses.

The reliability of each scale was examined using Cronbach's coefficient alpha which is the most widely used measure for internal consistency in cross-sectional studies (Netemeyer, Bearden, and Sharma, 2003). Cronbach's alpha coefficients are all higher than .40 (ranging from X to Y) indicating good internal consistency for each factor.

6.2 Test of Hypotheses

Multiple regression analysis is used to investigate the relationship between the dependent variable (brand destination image) and the five independent variables (brand personality) (Cohen et al., 2003). The overall model using simultaneous estimation showed statistical significance ($p < 0.05$), indicating acceptable model fit. The beta coefficient is used to assess each independent variable's relative explanatory power on the dependent variable. The results of multiple regression analysis, including the standardized beta coefficients and the coefficient of determination, are tabulated in Table 1 and Table 2.

Multicollinearity is assessed by the variance inflation factor (VIF) value of each independent variable. As shown in Table 2 each of the independent variables have a variance inflation factor value far less than the suggested threshold of 10, and thus, each one have sufficient variability not explained by the others (Mason and Perreault, 1991; Cohen et al., 2003).

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	51.460	5	10.292	22.017	.000 ^a
Residuals	90.689	194	.467		
Total	142.149	199			

a. Predictors: (Constant), sincerity, competence, vibrancy, contemporary, sophistication,

b. Dependent Variable: destimage

Table 1. Multiple regression analysis results – analysis of variance^b

Standardized Coefficients	Beta	t	Significance	VIF
Vibrancy	.129	1,988	,048	1.27
Sophistication	.071	,946	,345	1.73
Competence	.208	2,917	,004	1.55
Contemporary	.139	1,957	,052	1.54
Sincerity	.270	3,960	,000	1.41

Table 2. Multiple regression analysis results – independent variables

The brand personality antecedents jointly established an explanatory power (R²) of 36,2 percent for the variance in tourists' evaluation of destination brand image. Results showed that sincerity ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.05$), competence ($\beta = 0.20$, $p < 0.05$), contemporary ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < 0.05$) and vibrancy ($\beta = -0.12$, $p < 0.05$). have positive effects on destination brand image, respectively. Therefore, *H1*, *H3*, *H4*, *H5* are all supported. However, the non-significant beta coefficient indicated that sophistication does not always have a "true" impact on destination brand image. Thus *H2* is not supported.

7 Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceived destination personality of Istanbul and to empirically examine the relationships among destination brand personality and destination brand image. The results of the present study make important theoretical and practical contributions to the understanding of destination brand personality and destination brand image in the context of tourism destinations.

The findings of this study indicate that destination brand personality has a positive impact on destination brand image, consistent with previous research (Uşaklı and Baloğlu, 2011; Ekinci, Hosany and Uysal, 2006). However, the results are not fully represent all personality traits associated with tourism destinations. The four dimensions of the destination brand personality scales (vibrancy, competence, contemporary and sincerity) are significantly related to the destination brand image. Only the sophistication dimension is not significant in predicting destination brand image.

From a practical standpoint, the findings of the study provide important implications for destination marketers. Today, destinations are faced with increasingly tough competition than they ever faced before. The findings of this study provide evidence that four dimensions of destination brand personality (vibrancy, competence, contemporary, sincerity) are crucial understanding the complex nature of traveller perception who visited Istanbul. Thus, destination marketers should focus on developing marketing strategies that emphasize the distinctive personality items of their destinations.

The study has also specific practical implications for the destination marketer of Istanbul. Although all the four personality dimensions of Istanbul are found to be significant predictors of destination brand image, the vibrancy is found to be the most influential personality dimension affecting Istanbul's destination brand image. The second and third most influential dimensions on destination brand image are competence and contemporary respectively. The destination marketers of Istanbul should concentrate more on these three dimensions (competence, contemporary and sincerity) in their marketing efforts.

An additional practical implication is that tourist who experience a match between how they see the destination and themselves or how they would like to see themselves are more likely to have favorable attitudes toward those destination, resulting in more favorable destination brand image of Istanbul. Therefore, destination marketers should concentrate on developing promotional campaigns that emphasize the distinctive personality of tourism destination based on destination brand image. Destination marketers should also capitalize on these findings, be devising an appropriate branding strategy that encompasses these four components in order to create a favourable destination brand image.

Although this study makes important theoretical contributions to the understanding of the relationship between destination brand personality and destination brand image, it entails several limitations and must be acknowledged. Destination personality is 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 destination. Furthermore, the sample size is small, and so the findings cannot be generalized to the wider tourist population and to other destinations. Further studies should investigate the nature of this relationship using different destinations across different countries.

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