

Impact of Destination Image on the Loyalty of International Tourists to Hanoi

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Abstract: The paper aims at enhancing the competitiveness of tourism destinations by taking into account the point of view of tourists. Founded on customer-based brand equity (Keller, 2003 [1]; Aaker, 1991 [2]), our purpose is to build a linkage between tourism destination image and a tourist's loyalty in their selection of a tourist destination (revisit and/or recommendation to other people), in order to better understand the role of branding tourism destinations. This paper carried out a survey of international tourists who selected Hanoi - Vietnam as their holiday destination. The results indicated that international tourists to Hanoi considered Hanoi's image as being significant in determining their loyalty. The findings further indicated that the authority needs to expand Hanoi tourism to encourage the current tourists to revisit Hanoi one more time or at least that they recommend Hanoi positively to other people by using destination branding methods.

Keywords: Destination image, customer-based brand equity, tourist behaviour, tourists' behavioral intentions.

1. Introduction

Branding has existed for centuries as a way of distinguishing the goods of one producer from those of another, while modern branding finds its origins in the 19th century (Room, 1992) [3]. Accordingly, a brand can be considered as a legal instrument, logo, company, identity system, image, personality, relationship, and/or as adding value. Especially, brands are the heart of most customer business (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2003) and building brand equity, or strong brands, is considered to be one of the key drivers of a business's success.

Maja and William (2007) concluded that destination choices are expanding more and more and destinations are becoming increasingly more competitive which means more chances for tourists to select a final destination that they want [4]. More destinations adopted the idea of using a name or symbol to enhance their value. The meaning of studying brand equity from a strategy-based perspective is that destination marketers can improve their marketing productivity by understanding the destination brand perceived by the consumers and suppliers as well. Destination brand equity is a combination of key factors that can be described as the overall utility that tourists place on the destination

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brand when compared to its competitors. The evaluation of the destination phenomenon from the tourist perspective has attracted both researchers and practitioners. A theoretical conceptualization of such evaluation of a destination consisting of awareness, image, quality, and loyalty dimensions is proposed. All equity is based on the feeling and perception of tourist about destination that you have gone or not. The theoretical representation of each proposed dimension is a synthesized review of previous findings from marketing and tourism research as well as the authors' approach to each dimension's conceptualization. The results of the evaluation can help practices to enhance the equity in destination brands that have been employed, such as building a stronger emotional attachment through destination imagery campaigns and destination loyalty programs.

To develop tourism industry - the non-smoke industry, it is crucial to explore both domestic and international tourism markets and more importantly to exceed the visitors' expectation to attract their return. To achieve this level, the industry needs to understand the visitors' needs to serve them better and satisfy their demands so as to attract their returns. From 2011 to 2015, Hanoi was recognized as one of the top ten tourist attractions in Asia by Smart Travel. It was also ranked eighth in 2014 and fourth in 2015 among 10 most attractive destinations worldwide, according to TripAdvisor. In 2015, the capital city received around 3.3 million international arrivals, an increase of 8 percent compared to the same period last year. Total revenue from visitors is over VND 50,000 billion, a year-on-year increase of 10 percent. In fact, there are many international visitors to Vietnam yearly, but only 15 percent to 20 percent of the visitors are interested in revisiting (Thu, 2012 [5]; Phuong

Giang Quach, 2013 [6]). Vietnam's capital city, Hanoi, has a long and turbulent history of more than one thousand years. It is a bustling city whose inhabitants embrace the future without letting go of the past, and it is these stark differences that make Hanoi such an interesting and exciting place to visit. Most of actions are quite spontaneous, individual, of low uniformity, and are not in the right direction for the long-term goals.

In fact, there are a lot of critical points of view of researchers as to who builds up the destination's reputation or the destination's image. Kotler and Gertner (2002) said that it is the result of customers' association of brand with a country [7]. Perhaps in strict marketing terms destinations cannot be a brand, which is why some authors talk about reputation management (Anholt, 2002 [8]). Some researchers considered that reputation reflects the reality that reputation is delivered from the host of a destination. In order to develop tourism in Hanoi more attractively and to create a reputable destination brand that contributes to the attraction of tourist to Hanoi and Vietnam; both academic researchers and destination managers need to undertake a study that must be suitable in terms of reality and based on scientific theories related to destination branding.

2. Literature review

2.1. Destination branding

Nowadays, tourism destination branding is viewed as the most powerful tool for destination marketers for differentiation strategies, as places have been becoming more and more substitutable (Thi Lan Huong Bui, 2010) [9]. Destination branding is considered to

be a key driver for success in the hospitality industry and consequently brand expansion has become a major trend in many markets worldwide. Following Pike (2002, 2005, 2007) [10, 11, 12], destination branding is vital in the current destination management practice, as expanding tourist opportunities to select destination and travel locations have resulted in increased substitutability. The key success of each destination management organization (DMO) or tourism company is differentiation among their competitors. Nevertheless, most researches have only focused on destination image (Boo, Busser and Baloglu, 2009) [13] which is one of the components of destination branding. Therefore, this leads to the need for establishing the framework and the concept of the destination brand from the elements of branding theory and other concepts found in the marketing literature (Blain, Levy & Ritchie, 2005) [14]. A place marketing literature review reveals different conceptions in the definition of a destination brand, although the richest view establishes a separation between two approaches: urban planning and tourism and vacation marketing (Hankinson, 2004) [15].

The key for destination brand is to develop an emotional link with tourists (Morgan, Pitchard and Pride, 2004) [16]. Another definition of this concept comes from Morrisson and Aderson (2002) [17] who argue that destination brand is *“the process used to develop a unique identity and personality that is different from all competitive destinations”* (2002, p. 17). However, some consider the concept of destination brand is a myth and a misleading notion due to the lack of clear ownership and control (Mundt, 2002) [18]. The process of destination branding can only be successful if all the destination stakeholders are

involved. A synergetic interaction, unity and collaboration among stakeholders is an essential feature for a positive outcome as far as destination brand is concerned, making this process a *“highly complex and politicized activity”* (Morgan et. al, 2003) [19]. Tourism literature is consistent when illustrating the process of branding a destination as a collective effort (Kaplanidou and Vogt, 2003) [20]. Several authors have suggested specific destination branding processes, making a number of statements about the value of the branding concept for improving tourism destination marketing (Morgan, Pritchard and Piggott, 2003) or simply destination branding is a promise to the customer (Travis, 2000) [21]. Generally, destination branding is a combination of marketing products, services and the commoditization of people’s culture and environment (Boo, Busser and Baloglu, 2009).

2.2. Destination image

Nowadays, the terms brand and image are part and parcel of the business world. According to studies of customer-based brand equity (CBBE) for a destination, the destination image dimension plays an important role in CBBE for a destination, specifically regarding the evaluation and selection process (Konecnick and Gartner, 2007) [22]; Pike, 2007) that is a key factor to indicate destination brand equity (Cai, 2002) [23]. The research line of inquiry regarding destination image started in the early 70s and today remains a prolific area of study (Pike, 2002). It refers to a distinct set of associations linked to the brand that the consumer holds in memory and it is the most important dimension that explains the highest proportion of variance compare with other dimensions (Boo, Busser and Baloglu, 2009). It

means that, brand equity really appears and exists whenever consumers correctly generate the brand from memory. Brand equity can only occur if the consumer is familiar with and holds some favorable associations in memory. Practically, DMOs and marketers should be aware of how marketing activities affect consumers' learning. That is the way to promote destination brand in customers' minds and it will be recalled whenever they consider their trip.

According to Baloglu and McClellan (1999) [24] and Baloglu and Mangalolu (2001) [25], destination image represent a person's knowledge, feelings, and global impression about an object or destination. Perceptions about the destination are reflected by the associations held in the tourist's memory. Based on the perceptions of tourists, the image plays an important role in the behavior of tourists during the different moments which involve their experience or memory in the process that the organizations responsible for; include the decision process of choosing a destination; the process of comparison of expectations with experience, preceding the state of satisfaction and perceived quality; the process of revisiting and recommending the destination to other people who are willing to pay attention one more time (Bosque et. al., 2009) [26]. These processes are complex because a place or a destination is a composite product, its image includes multiple dimensions and multiple processes as well. Moreover, several current studies also confirmed that destination image is a factor that influences the consumer behavior during the pre-purchase time (decision-making process of destination choice), during the purchase (antecedent of satisfaction), and post-purchase (recommendation and intention to revisit) (Thi Bich Thuy Nguyen, 2012) [27].

2.3. *Tourist loyalty*

The concept of consumer loyalty has been extensively investigated in the marketing literature (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2000) [28¹]; with the underlying goal of understanding customers' needs and wants so as to secure the repeat purchase of particular brands and products. Customer loyalty is an important goal in the consumer marketing community as it is a key component for a company's long-term viability or sustainability. Although the loyalty concept has been extensively investigated in the marketing literature, destination loyalty has rarely been studied or there is a lack of published research related to destination loyalty. There were a lot of arguments that loyalty should not be neglected when examining destination brands and some studies partly introduce it (Oppermann, 2000) [29]; Bigne, Sanchez and Sanchez, 2001 [30]). Based on an operational perspective, destination loyalty is defined as the attachment a potential traveler has to a destination brand and it implies that previous experiential familiarity influences today's and tomorrow's tourism decisions, especially destination choice in the future (Aaker, 1991). Destination brand equity stems from travelers placing more confidence in one brand than they do in a competitor's brand. This translates into loyalty and a willingness to pay a premium even when lower priced options are available.

Generally, loyalty measurement translates into two distinct approaches (Oppermann, 2000; Russell-Bennett, McColl-Kennedy and Coote, 2007 [31]) with behavioral researchers emphasizing the observation actions of loyal customers (Ehrenberg and Goodhardt, 2000) [32] and attitudinal researchers investigating commitment to brands and repurchase intentions (Dorsch, Grove and Darden, 2000) [33]. Due to the complex characteristics of a destination, from travelers' perspective,

destination brand loyalty is the consequence of a multi-dimensional cognitive and affective attitude toward a specific destination brand. Destination loyalty should be investigated longitudinally, looking at lifelong visitation behavior. In this way behavioral loyalty can be used as a reasonable or good predictor of future destination choice, included behaviorally through word of mouth referrals and repeat purchase. Attitudinal loyalty considers a person's attitude (affective image component) of a destination's attributes, which can further influence their intention to visit or recommend a place to others (Opperman, 2000); Bigne et al, 2001; Pike, 2007; Yang and Peterson, 2004 [34]).

3. Conceptual model

The concept of perceived value or subject value evolved from early research. Rational choice theory holds that people weigh the possible benefits of their actions against the cost incurred. This study proposes that tourist's enduring travel involvement has a positive impact on their formation of destination brand equity, which is a combination of key factors that can derive the overall utility that tourists place in the destination brand. Studies also suggest that destination's image has a positive impact on tourists' loyalty (Kim et al., 2009) [35]. Therefore, the hypothesis that will be tested using data collected on international tourists in Hanoi is "*Destination brand image is positively related to tourists' loyalty*".

4. Methodology

4.1. Sample design

The sample was designed based on area, random and convenience sampling. Constructs

of interest were measured based on a review of previous studies and pre-tests for face validity and reliability, and then were integral to the final questionnaire sent out to the target sample. After being gathered, data was analyzed using structural equation modeling in which the issues of research are empirically answered. Its design was based on the combination of convenience sampling methods. Firstly, the population of the study needed to be chosen. The study draws a random sample of 160 respondents (international tourists) visiting some attractions in Hanoi.

4.2. Research methods

Based on the studies of (Koufteros et al, 2001) [36], the research steps and methods included instrument development, an exploratory analysis, a confirmatory factor analysis, and a test of a structural model. Item generation began with theory development and a literature review. Furthermore, the methods employed for the development and exploratory evaluation of the measurement scales for the latent variables in this study included corrected item-total correlations (CITC), exploratory factor analysis on entire set and reliability estimation Cronbach's Alpha. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to determine how many latent variables underlie the complete set of items. Cronbach's alpha is one of the most widely used metrics for reliability evaluation (Nunnally and Burnstein, 1994 [37]; Tho and Nguyen Trang, 2009) [38]. Several researchers have suggested the use of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with a multiple-indicator measurement model to assess unidimensionality. The overall fit of a hypothesized model can be tested by using the maximum likelihood Chi-square statistic provided in the Amos (a software package for

SEM, version 21) output and their fit indices such as the ratio of Chi-square to degrees of freedom, goodness-of-fit index (GFI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), and normed fit index (NFI) (Bentler & Bonett, 1980) [39]. Structural equation modeling (SEM) evaluates how well a conceptual model that includes observed variables and hypothetical constructs fits the obtained data (Steiger, 1990) [40].

4.3. Measures

Measurement of Destination Brand Image (DI)

The destination image has been developed over several studies. The analysis of the destination image's nature has been addressed in a cognitive perspective and, more recently, from the late 1990s, in a cognitive-affective approach. Although most studies agree that the image is a multidimensional global impression, there is no agreement on the dimensions that make up this same holistic impression (Bigné, Sánchez and Sanz, 2001). Several studies have also linked a behavioral component (Konecnik and Gartner, 2007). Brand image represents the perceptions attached to the destination. Tourism marketing experts (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Beerli and Martín, 2004 [41]) consider that destination image is a concept including two components, tangible and intangible. On the other hand, brand image can be defined as consumer perceptions of a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in the consumer's memory (Keller, 2003). Moreover, a lack of homogeneity, reliability and validity in the scales used for measuring the destination image is observed, since most of them are the result of exploratory studies on the identification of important and determined attributes for the

destination image formation (Beerli and Martín, 2004).

Although the loyalty concept has been extensively investigated in the marketing literature, destination loyalty has rarely been studied. Oppermann (2000) argued that loyalty should not be neglected when examining destination brands and some studies partly introduce it. However, these incorporate only a few measures that indirectly illuminate loyalty. It has been suggested that repeat visitation and intention to return are indicators of place loyalty.

Destination image		Sources
1.	In general Hanoi is a safe place to visit	Ferns and Walls, (2012) [42],
2.	Restful and relaxing place to visit	Baloglu and McCleary (1999)
3.	Prices are affordable	Beerli and Martín (2004)
4.	Good tourist accommodations is readily available	
5.	Hanoi has good museums and art galleries	
6.	The image that I have of Hanoi is as good or even better than other similar destinations	
7.	Good quality restaurant	
8.	Local people are friendly	
9.	Food is similar to mine	
10.	Overall Hanoi image is very positive	
Measure of tourist's loyalty		
Tourist's loyalty		Source
1.	I will visit Hanoi again in the future	Oppermann, 2000),
2.	I will recommend Hanoi positively after the trip	(Bigne et al, 2001)

Table 2: Descriptive statistics

Items	Mean	Corrected item-total correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted	Cronbach's Alpha	Factor loading	Total variance explained	KMO test
1.1	4.6188	.782	.891	.909	.841	61.452	.890
1.3	4.7875	.641	.903		.717		(Sig = .000)
1.4	4.7438	.788	.891		.851		
1.6	4.6875	.544	.910		.628		
1.7	4.6875	.744	.894		.814		
1.8	4.5500	.756	.893		.830		
1.9	4.5625	.747	.894		.818		
1.10	4.6000	.658	.901		.744		

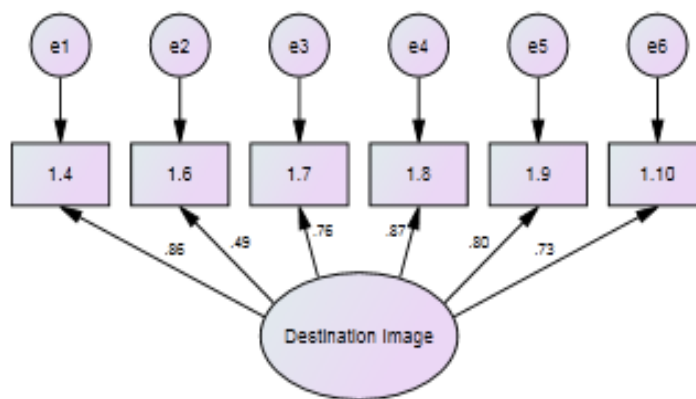
5.2.2. *Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) for destination image*

The construct of destination image was hypothesized as a unidimensional construct. Depending on the value of each item in CFA, the item 1.1 “In general Hanoi is a safe place to visit” and 1.3 “Prices are affordable” continue to be deleted. This means that international tourists have been facing safety problems such as traffic jams, air pollution, theft... Especially, the price of goods and service were not considered affordable and that is one of the reasons why the number of international tourists who want to revisit Hanoi is quite low.

Figure 1 presents the results of the confirmatory factor analysis for the destination

image, including factor loading, t-value, and fit statistics. All items for destination image had strong loadings, ranging from 0.49 to 0.87 with all t values being significant at $p < .001$ (all being above the acceptable factor loading > 0.35 (Hair et. al., 1995)).

The findings indicated that the P-value of 0.216 (> 0.05) is significant, χ^2/df of 1.328 (< 2) and RMSEA of 0.45 (< 0.5) are at a perfect level of fit (Carmines & McIverm, 1981; Steiger, 1990). All values of IFI, TLI, GFI, NFI, AGFI and CFI satisfied the condition to be more than 0.9 (Bentler & Bonett, 1980) and stands out to indicate that the model fits the data well. Therefore, the CFA model is viewed to fit the data.



- Model fit indexes:**
- $\chi^2/df = 1.328, p = .216$
 - GFI = .976
 - AGFI = .944
 - CFI = .994
 - NFI = .977
 - IFI = .994
 - TLI = .990
 - RMSEA = .045

Figure 1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Destination Image.

5.2.3. Full structural equation model and hypothesis testing

A full structural equation model is shown in Figure 2 where specification is done and parameters are estimated. The model’s overall fit with the data was evaluated using common model goodness-of-fit measures estimated by AMOS. Overall, the model exhibited a reasonable fit with the data collected. The findings indicated that the P-value of 0.086 (> 0.05) is significant, χ^2/df of 1.467(< 2) and RMSEA of 0.48 (< 0.5) are at a perfect level of fit (Steiger, 1990). All values of IFI, TLI, GFI, NFI, AGFI and CFI satisfied the condition that they must be more than 0.9 (Bentler and Bonett, 1980) and stand out to indicate that the model fits the data well. In short, the structural model is considered to fit the sample data reasonably.

In the study, since the sample is large (N = 160) and presumption of multiple normality is made for maximum likelihood estimation technique, the t-value (denoted by C.R in Amos output) is z-value. Thus a C.R value exceeding 1.96 represents a level of significance of 0.05.

In addition, the p-value helps identify to which extent the parameters are statistically significant. The assessment hypothesis is based on the results in Table 3 where standardized estimates and their significance level are provided. A positive sign of parameter estimate indicates a positive direct effect.

The results of the structural equation modeling showed that the standardized regression weight of the structural path between destination brand image and behavioral intention was positive and significant (0.68, SE = 0.126, p = 0.000), demonstrating that the hypothesis is supported by the data at a 0.001 level. This finding confirms a positive relationship between destination brand image and tourists’ loyalty. In other words, if the tourists are satisfied with the image of a destination and perceive this brand to provide good value for them, the positive image of the brand will be imprinted in their minds and 68.0 per cent respondents would like to revisit or recommend positively about the destination.

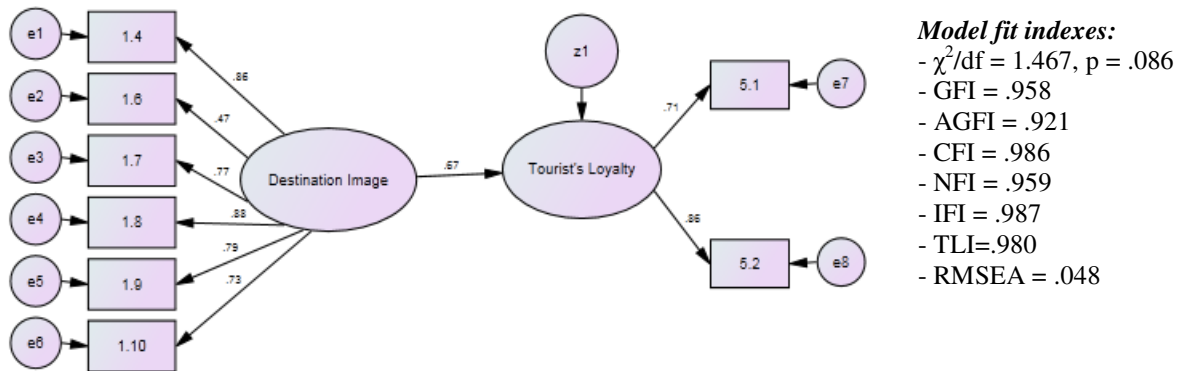


Figure 2: Full structural equation model

Table 3: Hypothesis testing

		Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Tourists’ loyalty	<--- Destination image	.68	.126	5.802	***

6. Conclusion

As a blessed location with an overwhelming beauty and rich natural resources, Hanoi clearly has a great potential for its tourism development to turn it into a spearhead economic sector. Not only does the city have many famous relics but it also has beautiful natural surroundings with numerous tree-lined boulevards. The challenge is how to effectively expand Hanoi tourism while supporting the preservation of the current natural wonders and how to encourage the current tourists to revisit Hanoi one more time or at least that they recommend Hanoi positively to other people by using destination branding methods.

Firstly, the Hanoi Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism should establish a close relationship with travel agencies and other local service providers in order to provide better products and services in Hanoi for its customers. Not only does the Hanoi Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism have a tight relationship with the private sector, but it also needs to cooperate with other departments and sectors such as the Department of Transportation, City Police Department, and the Department of Nature Resources and Environment, to have a better plan for improving Hanoi's image as a safe and friendly destination for tourists. The tourism services in Hanoi should cooperate and be connected to other areas to offer various options in terms of satisfying customers' needs. Hanoi's Image is the most important factor that affects tourists' loyalty. The authorities need to make improvements to make Hanoi an attractive destination for tourists as follows: having some specific strategies to improve the sanitation situation in Hanoi to reduce the air and dust pollution; strictly punishing scammers and

pickpockets; setting laws for food safety in the street food stalls and street vendors; establishing more public restrooms around the city; offering a means of transportation for tourists from place to place; offering attractive performances at each of the tourist sites for visitors to spend more time. The explanations for these strategies are derived from the interviewees responses about safety, the condition of accommodation, Hanoi being a restful and relaxing place, and about local food. When tourists recall the Hanoi brand image those things had a strong influence on their tourism intentions after the trip.

Secondly, Hanoi needs to focus on marketing activities, such as establishing its tourism logo and slogan to promote its brand to the international market through different media channels and world tourism trade fairs. These factors help to convey the sector's message as well as to bring a quick perception and positive feelings for visitors toward Hanoi tourism. All the Marketing tools can help promote dozens of sightseeing attractions in Hanoi to attract foreign tourists to visit the city.

Finally, the service attitude should be improved because it is the dominant element to decide the quality of services in a strategy to attract customers. Unsettled problems, the forcing of customers, the raising of prices or tourist scams have existed for many years in Hanoi. Although most travelers feel relatively safe, pick-pocketing and petty crimes do occur every day. The government should take strict action against these crimes to help create a "fresh environment" for the tourists to Hanoi and Vietnam as well.

Owing to this study's intention to initiate the development of theoretical foundations of the relationship between destination branding

and tourist behavior; it not only helped researchers test and develop a stable model in order to generate a more solid relationship among destination branding and tourist behavior, but also provided useful insights to local government and tour operators in better planning and managing tourism activities to maximize both visitors' satisfaction and profitability of tourism enterprises, and at the same time to sustain natural resources in the long term. Especially the study pointed out an effective way to promote its existing potential characteristics to be a key economic sector in Vietnam generally and in Hanoi particularly. All that contributes to attracting international tourists to Hanoi city through destination competitive strategies in order to ensure long-term relationships between tourists and their destinations, and to enhance the relationship management techniques and practices to build tourist loyalty within the context of destination branding.

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