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The Influence of Residents' Identification with a Tourism Destination Brand on Their Behavior

Choo and Park: The Influence of the Resident's Identification with a Tourism Destination Brand on Their Behavior

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Abstract

This study empirically tests the role of residents in branding tourism destinations, which has rarely been explored. Results from a survey of 371 residents in Hawaii show positive relationships between residents' identification with their destination brand and their behavior in three ways: 1) activities to help increase visitors' satisfaction with their experience; 2) intentions for positive word-of-mouth; and 3) participation in tourism and leisure activities. Results imply that destination marketing organizations and tourism service providers should understand the importance of the internal branding processes among residents, and should incorporate them into their destination branding strategy.

Keywords: destination branding, internal branding, residents, brand identification

INTRODUCTION

In the past decades, an increasing amount of researchers have examined the area of branding, especially of consumer goods and grocery products (Aaker, J. 1997, Aaker, D., 2002; Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000; de Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2001; Keller, 1998; Kapferer, 1997). Similarly, many tourism scholars (e.g., Cai, 2002; Hosany, Ekinci, & Uysal, 2006; Lee, Cai, & O'Leary, 2006; Morgan, Pritchard, & Piggott, 2003; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005) have widely applied branding to tourism products, despite the multidimensional nature of tourism destination branding (Cai, 2002; Hosany, et al., 2006). Destination brands pervade "almost all aspects of tourism products and services, tourist behavior, and destination images" (Cai, 2002, p. 736), which should be promoted via both internal and external marketing efforts (Crick, 2003; Yi & La, 2004; Chun & Davies, 2006; Yaniv & Farkas, 2005). Nonetheless, the role of residents in branding tourism destinations has rarely been explored in tourism research. Tourism is unique in that when visitors come to a tourism destination, they encounter not only service employees, but also the general local population (Crick, 2003). These local people are not paid directly for their role in enhancing the visitor's experience, but their appropriate behavior would be expected, because they play a critical role in the visitor's experience. Local people should be one of the primary beneficiaries from tourism by receiving economic assistance and participating in its activities, but they also have responsibilities to the destination. Destination marketing organizations (DMOs) and tourism service providers have generally focused on out-of-state and international visitors, but the current economic downturn and decreasing number of tourists resulting from the 9-11 event has turned their attention toward local people. Therefore, the local tourism segment has become a more salient market for many tourism destinations in the post 9-11 environment (Knopf & Andereck, 2006). Accordingly, internal branding for residents has become important in creating awareness and maximizing the benefits of tourism to destinations in the long-term. To develop internal branding strategies in association with external branding, it is essential to understand how residents recognize, understand, and identify with their destination as a brand, which can influence their attitudes and behavior toward visitors as the host. Thus, this study examines how residents' identification with their place influences their brand behavior and perceptions, testing hypotheses developed based on various literatures.

INTERNAL MARKETING/BRANDING IN TOURISM

Internal marketing is generally considered to be the application of the marketing philosophy and concept to employees of an organization to ensure that they are effectively carrying out desired programs and policies (Berry, 1981; Gronroos, 1985; Ahmed & Rafiq, 1995). According to the marketing literature, there are three perspectives about the internal marketing concept. First, the total quality management perspective views all employees as simultaneously being internal customers of the organizations (Lukas & Maignan, 1996), based on the assumption that quality is a progressive function of operations and organizations can positively influence the quality of service

delivery to external customers by enhancing the quality of service delivery to employees. The second perspective focuses on a human resource function, arguing that satisfied and customer-conscious employees make customers happy (Berry, 1981; Berry & Parasuraman, 1991). The third perspective views the role of employees as external customers who also purchase the offerings of the company they belong to (Lusch, Boyt, & Schuler, 1996; Dabholkar & Abston, 2007). Applied to the tourism destination context, the first two perspectives imply that the perceptions and behaviors of the tourism industry employees and residents towards visitors can influence visitors' experiences, while the third one suggests that the resident is another viable tourism market.

Recent research in branding has also begun to examine the internal face of the brand and how this is the key of the internal marketing process in the organization. Internal branding requires an internal marketing process to make branding strategy decisions consistent with employees' understanding of what their brand stands for (Vallaster, 2004). A more solid and consistent branding platform can be built by engaging employees deeply in the identification process (Brown, Barry, Dacin, & Gunst, 2005). The importance of the internal branding process is more evident in the service industries, because employees directly interact with customers for service, and they are also internal customers (Crick, 2003; Chun & Davies, 2006). In tourism destinations, visitors interact with residents as well as employees. Hence, the tourism industry also needs brand support from residents to retain brand consistency for their visitors (Hazara, 2006). This suggests that the tourism destination branding extends beyond the product brand and involves the entire place. The overall goal of branding to the internal market is parallel to that of external branding: to create an emotional link to the organization that transcends any one particular experience (Mitchell, 2002). Therefore, internal branding efforts can help tourism employees and residents of a destination to have consistent and shared brand visions and to consider making decisions supportive of the brand. To link internal and external branding strategies, researchers and practitioners have suggested creating a marketing campaign that targets both audiences (Mitchell, 2002). Tourism researchers have examined residents' attitudes and perceptions towards visitors and tourism (Ryan & Montgomery, 1994; Weaver & Lawton, 2001). Residents, who are supportive of tourism, tend to be receptive and friendly to tourists, and provide a positive experience for tourists (Fick & Ritchie, 1991; LeBlanc, 1992). In fact, the tourism industry is highly dependent on the goodwill and co-operation of residents (Murphy, 1985), since they are an integral part of the tourism experience (Cartmichael, 2006). As more and more tourism scholars have suggested that residents' needs should be integrated into the destination marketing process (Perdue, Long, & Kang, 1999), the friendliness of local residents and their input into local tourism development have been identified as critical components of a successful tourism destination (Murphy, Pritchard, & Smith, 2000). Therefore, tourism scholars and destination marketers can attain more desirable marketing outcomes from residents by understanding their role in destination marketing and branding.

Brand Identification

Since the relationship between a company and its customers is built primarily by the experience of consuming a branded product or service, understanding brand identification is crucial in building successful relationships between customers and the brands they use. Customers are attracted to a branded product or service that is connected to their social identity (Forehand, Deshpande, & Reed, 2002; Stayman & Deshpandé 1989), a linkage which may come about because a branded product or service is a symbol of the customer's own personality traits (Aaker, J., 1997), reflects a desirable self-image, or embodies the type of person that the customer aspires to think, feel and be like (Belk, Bahn, & Mayer 1982). Since people feel a sense of self-definition by using a brand and communicate it with others, they are more likely to identify themselves with a brand whose image is congruent with their self-concepts and use the brand. Brand identification is the extent to which the consumer sees one's own self-image as overlapping with the brand's image (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006). Brand identification has three components: cognitive, affective and evaluative aspects, which motivate behaviors to maintain identity (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Bagozzi & Lee, 2002; Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000; Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999). In the context of tourism, residents would identify themselves with the place they live in by considering oneself as a member of the place, feeling of belonging to the place, and/or liking the influence of the place on her/his sense of value. Therefore, it is hypothesized in this study that:

Hypothesis 1: Residents will identify with their tourism destination brand in three dimensions: cognitive, emotional and evaluative.

Brand Identification and Residents' Behavior

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As discussed, it is important to monitor and prevent residents' negative attitudes and perceptions towards tourism and visitors for the success of tourism destination. Studies in human resource management and marketing assert that identification with the group or organization has a positive effect on group cooperation (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994), their job satisfaction (Tracy, 1986), willingness to contribute to collective work (Shamir, 1990) and perceived efforts to exert activities (Specht, Fichtel, & Meyer, 2007; Yi & La, 2004) to increase customer satisfaction. In a similar vein, if residents in tourism destinations feel a sense of belonging and identify themselves with their own cities' destination brand, they will be likely to show hospitable attitudes and behaviors (e.g., eagerness to share their local knowledge and experience with visitors; being friendly to visitors and helping visitors when encountered). Therefore, it is hypothesized in this study that:

Hypothesis 2: As residents' identification with the destination brand increases, their behavior to satisfy visitors will increase.

Participation

Critics point out that inappropriate tourism development can lead to residents' loss of access to water, land and communal areas, and to generating tourist enclaves and social pollution (Butler, 1980). Despite numerous challenges, however, tourism can significantly contribute to destinations' economy and society as a whole, when domestic or regional tourism can be fostered, which are significant and growing worldwide (Seckelmann, 2001; Sindiga, 1996). Moreover, domestic or regional travel can give more stable statistics regardless of global patterns and events that happen elsewhere (Thaker, 2005). For instance, up to 60 percent of tourism is generated within a country worldwide except Africa (Sandbrook, 1998). The reason why domestic and regional tourism is significant to tourism destinations is because residents are internal customers for various tourism products and services including accommodation and transport, park and museum services, events and festivals, food and drinks, supplies to hotels, local transportation and attractions, and handcrafts and souvenirs. While there has been much discussion about external and foreign tourist arrivals, little has actually been said about domestic or regional tourism. In the past, the search for market niches (e.g. community tourism, ecotourism) has emphasized the role of residents. Strategies to enhance net benefits to residents need to be developed across the whole tourism industry, drawing on a range of expertise in local and domestic tourism growth. Benefits to residents from tourism depend on not only whether and how they can generate income through employment and financial gain from it but also how or to what degree they enjoy their local tourism and leisure services. Of those, this study particularly focuses on how local residents actually consume tourism products and services in terms of their brand-based identification with the destination they actually reside. As customers are likely to only attend to those social categories and activities that are especially self-relevant and linked to self-concept constituting a consumer's social identity (Bagozzi & Lee, 2002), residents who have more brand-based identification with the destination they live in are more likely to participate in tourism and leisure activities it provides with. Therefore, it is hypothesized in this study that:

Hypothesis 3: The more residents identify with the destination brand, the more they participate in tourism activities in the local area.

Word-of-Mouth (WOM)

It has been largely acknowledged that WOM communication plays a significant role in consumer attitudes and buying behaviors, and that satisfied customers become loyal customers (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993) and engage in positive WOM communication (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990). The common belief among researchers is that customers rely more on informal personal communication as a decision-making trigger than on traditional marketing efforts alone. WOM is more credible because the sender of the information generally has nothing to gain from the receiver's subsequent decision to buy (Bansal & Voyer, 2000). Visitors to tourism destinations may view residents as a credible and important source for products and services. Further, residents' willingness to recommend certain tourism products and services would depend on their level of identification with the destination. For example, saying positive things about a tourism brand of their own city to others may provide a means for expressing their own self-identity. In other words, the greater degree of overlap between the tourism brand of the city and residents themselves, the more likely that the individual will say positive things about the brand to others. They can be messengers to deliver their recommendations on specific tourism products and services found in the place they live in to their friends, relatives, acquaintances and others. However, the impact of residents' WOM in recommending tourism products and services to visitors has rarely been explored in the tourism literature. Thus, in this study, it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 4: As residents' identification with the destination brand increases, their intention for WOM will increase.

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In summary, this study tested four hypotheses: the dimensionality of tourism brand identification of residents (Hypothesis 1), the influence of residents' brand identification with the destination on activities for visitor satisfaction toward visitors (Hypothesis 2), the intention of WOM communication (Hypothesis 3), and their participation in tourism and leisure activities (Hypothesis 4), focusing particularly on local people involved in the internal branding of the tourism destination where they live. Results should reveal how tourism destination brands can move beyond a collection of features and how they can become deeply meaningful symbols to residents.

METHODS

A survey instrument included three parts: 1) six items for three brand identification dimensions (six items of Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk's (1999) social identity scale); 2) 22 items for three dependent variables (3 items of activities for visitor satisfaction, 6 items of WOM intention, Participation in 13 leisure/tourism activities); and 3) demographic information. Ellemers et al.'s (1999) scale consists of cognitive, affective and evaluative dimensions, and has been verified by Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006), Bagozzi and Lee (2002), and Bergami and Bagozzi (2000). In Section 1, respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which they identify with the brand of Hawaii, in terms of self-identity, self-image, attachment, feelings of belonging, being a valuable/important member of Hawaii. These were measured on a 7-point scale (1="not at all," 7= "very likely"). In Section 2, respondents were asked about their activities for visitor satisfaction, intention for positive WOM about Hawaii, and their participation in leisure/tourism activities (e.g., hiking, visiting museums, going to the beaches, etc.). These items were measured on a 7-point scale (1="not at all," 7= "very likely" or "very often"). In Section 3, respondents were asked about the length of residency in Hawaii, current employment status, education level, income level, ethnicity, age, marital status. An open-ended question was also provided to collect comments.

The survey was conducted online to residents of Oahu, Hawaii from October to December 2008. The majority of respondents were students, faculty and staff at University of Hawaii. Tourism's wide influences on residents' lives made Hawaii appropriate for this study, as tourism in Hawaii constitutes a large portion of the economy (approximately a quarter of gross state product), according to Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism of Hawaii (2005). Among various community groups that were contacted, 371 completed the survey and 346 were used for analysis (after removing missing values). The data were analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling in AMOS 7 program.

RESULTS

The majority of the sample (70.1%) has lived in Hawaii for more than 10 years. Their ages were 20-24 (56.1%) and over 25 (41.7%). The first hypothesis was supported: fit statistics results showed that the three-dimension model of brand identification fitted the data better than those of one- or two-dimension (Table 1). This indicates that residents identify with their tourism destination brand in three dimensions: cognitive, emotional and evaluative. Figure 1 presents items' factor loadings.

Table 1. Result of dimensionality tests for tourism brand identification

	One dimension	Two dimensions	Three dimensions
χ^2 statistic	154.7 (df=9, p<.00)	79.3 (df=8, p<.00)	7.1 (df=9, p<.309)
NFI	.857	.927	.993
CFI	.863	.933	.999
RMSEA	.209	.155	.023

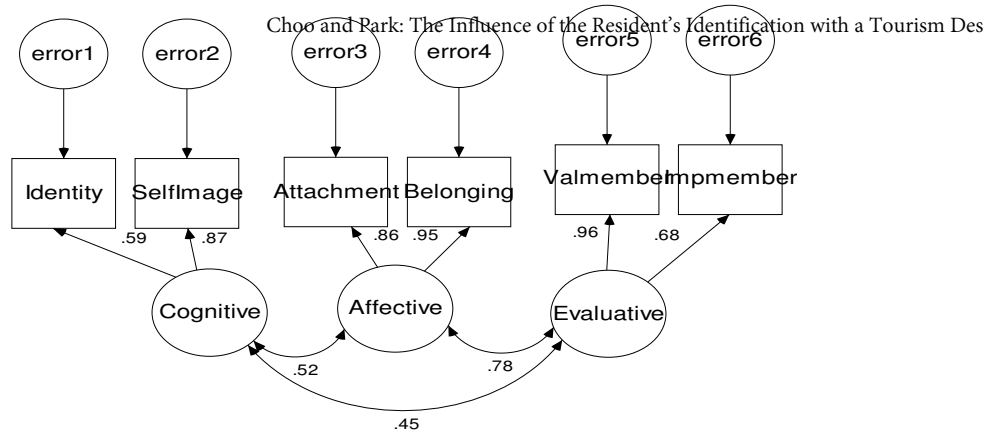


Figure 1. Result of three-dimensional tourism brand identification model

Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4 were supported, as the relationship between residents' brand identification and their activities for visitor satisfaction ($\beta=.29$, $p<.000$), WOM ($\beta=.46$ $p<.000$), and participation in leisure and tourism activities ($\beta=.29$, $p<.000$), were all positive and statistically significant (Table 2).

Table 2

Results of the relationship between brand identification and activities for visitor satisfaction, word-of-mouth, and tourism/leisure activities

	Activities for visitor satisfaction	Word-of-mouth intention	Participation in tourism/leisure activities
χ^2 statistic	218.54 (df=26, $p<.00$)	423.32 (df=53, $p<.00$)	853.48 (df=151, $p<.00$)
Beta (coefficient between brand identification)	.29*	.46*	.29*

* Significant at $p<.000$.

These indicate that the more the resident identify with their destination brand, the more they intend to spread positive words about their destination, act friendly and kindly toward visitors, and enjoy more tourism/leisure activities within their place.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This study examined and found statistically significant and positive influence of residents' tourism brand identification on their behavior. When residents positively identify with their destination brand, their activities for visitor satisfaction, their intention for positive WOM about the destination, and their participation in tourism and leisure activities also increase. These results imply the crucial role of internal branding, considering that residents play multiple roles in forming a tourism destination brand, because they not only share responsibility for it, but also consume its products and services. Therefore, it is important for tourism destination marketers to understand how local people are enjoined to develop self-images that are deemed congruent with strategically defined objectives. It is also suggested that tourism marketers should make sure that local people's identification with the destination brand is considered in their destination branding strategy in order to achieve collaborative efforts for effective branding from them. In addition, the alignment of both the external and internal perspectives of destination brand identification is necessary to ensure the successful brand-building process.

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