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Rethinking the Marketing of Rural Destinations: A Comprehensive Model and Case Study of

Gunnison County, Colorado

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures

Abstract

This paper explores the key differences between traditional marketing and destination marketing, particularly pertaining to rural destinations. Through an analysis of the distinct challenges rural destination marketing presents and a synthesis of current literature on the topic, a Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model has been developed. This model uniquely combines the heretofore disconnected practices of destination marketing organization establishment, asset identification, destination personality development, target market selection, destination branding, and destination promotion into a user-friendly, start-to-finish model that can be implemented by rural destination marketers. Finally, the model is applied to a case study of Gunnison County, Colorado to illustrate its usefulness.

Rethinking the Marketing of Rural Destinations: A Comprehensive Model and Case Study of

Gunnison County, Colorado

Tourism is a major industry in the United States, generating approximately $1.1 trillion in

economic output each year, and providing around 7.5 million U.S. jobs (Office of Travel and

Tourism Industries, 2010). In Colorado alone, 2010 tourism spending amounted to $14.6 billion,

generating $750 million in state and local taxes and supporting over 136,900 jobs (Dean Runyan

Associates, 2011). Many communities naturally want to reap the economic benefits tourism has

to offer, but often lack the framework necessary to do so. Moreover, although tourism may be an

alluring source of economic stimulus (Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993), convincing outsiders to

visit a destination is challenging, especially for eclectic rural communities that largely lack

recognition in the tourism marketplace.

Rural areas need not miss out on the economic and social payoffs tourism offers. Rather,

proper marketing efforts and the process of destination branding can elicit the positive impacts of

rural tourism and lead to increased visitation, customer satisfaction, and intention to return to the

destination or recommend it to others (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Murphy, Moscardo, &

Benckendorff, 2007). Although foundational marketing concepts such as target marketing,

branding, and the production of promotional materials are necessary in this endeavor, it should

be noted that destination marketing is distinctly different from product, service, or corporate

marketing, and therefore presents unique challenges and opportunities (Skinner, 2008). The

challenges and opportunities inherent in destination marketing are further amplified when

working specifically within a rural context; while world-famous cities are easily recognizable,

and planned, all-inclusive resorts can devise a market position and comprehensive marketing

plan to promote themselves, the authentic nature of existing small towns is more difficult to

capture and communicate to consumers. In response, the destination marketing model and case study of Gunnison County, Colorado presented in this paper aim to provide rural destination marketers with the knowledge and framework they need to be successful in the highly competitive tourism market.

<div align="center">**Importance of Paper**</div>

Because destination marketing is very different from typical marketing, it demands a framework of its own. Moreover, although extensive research has been conducted in the area of destination marketing, gaps in the research and a lack of comprehensive models makes it difficult to apply the theories being tested in the field. Therefore, the synthesized information and rural destination marketing model proposed in this paper aim to do three things to enhance the understanding and usefulness of current destination marketing research: (a) Explain the unique nature of destination marketing, (b) reconcile destinations' needs for authenticity and appeal in the tourism market, and (c) provide a comprehensive rural destination marketing model.

The Unique Nature of Destination Marketing

This paper will review basic marketing concepts, the challenges marketers face in using these concepts to market destinations, and ways in which the basic marketing techniques may be adapted to better suit the needs of destination marketers. Specifically, the generally uncontested marketing practices of market segmentation and target marketing (Cahill, 2006; Dolnicar, 2004; Oyewole, 2010; Weinstein, 1994), branding (Anderson & Carpenter, 2005; Murphy, Moscardo, & Benckendorff, 2007), brand personality (Aakers, 1997), and promotion (Keller, 2009) will be described, followed by an explanation of how they must be manipulated in order to face the

specific challenges that destination marketing presents (namely the nature of the place-product and the unavoidable fragmentation of the tourism industry). While the basic foundation that most marketers are trained in is critical in the destination marketing process, it is imperative that destination marketers understand that these general concepts must be adapted given the unique needs of their field.

Reconciling Needs for Authenticity and Appeal

Many studies on destination marketing have pointed out that maintaining the authentic nature of a place is of the utmost importance to local stakeholders (Anholt, 2009; Garrod, Wornell,& Youell, 2006; Lichrou, O'Malley, & Patterson, 2010; McClinchey & Carmichael, 2010). At the same time, unlike products or services that can be altered by marketers, destinations are more-or-less unchangeable (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). Unfortunately, if destinations seek to reap the benefits of tourism, they must be appealing to a sizeable group of consumers, which could potentially require alteration of the destination. The model proposed in this paper, on the other hand, attempts to show how the need for authenticity can be reconciled with the need to market for tourism, ultimately suggesting that through proper target marketing, places will not need to change in order to be attractive.

A Comprehensive Model

This document presents a case study to illustrate how various theories may be drawn together into a single, easily applied process for destination marketing. Although there has been a significant amount of primary research conducted on the topic of destination marketing, most studies have focused on only one aspect of the process. For example, research relating to stakeholder involvement (Briedenhann, 2004; Lichrou et al., 2010; Tsundoda & Mendlinger,

2009), the value of tourism assets (Freire, 2007; Garrod et al., 2006), identifying a destination personality (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Murphey, Moscardo & Benckendorff, 2007), and the application of the social identity theory in target marketing (Sirgy & Su, 2000; Stokburger-Saur, 2011; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011) has been undertaken, and provides an excellent foundation for the study of destination marketing. However, in order to use the theories developed in these various studies, they must be synthesized into a useable format. By providing a destination marketing model and illustrating its use from start to finish with a case study of Gunnison County, Colorado, it becomes easier to see how all of the various aspects of destination marketing fit together in actual practice.

Foundational Marketing Concepts

Before the destination marketing model proposed in this paper can be understood or applied, several basic marketing concepts must be explained. These foundational concepts, including (a) a definition of the marketing process, (b) market segmentation and target marketing, (c) branding, (d) brand personality, and (e) the promotional mix are integral to any marketing endeavor, and therefore require attention. Next, the unique challenges these concepts present when used to market destinations will be addressed, followed by the presentation of a new rural destination marketing model that may be used to successfully overcome these challenges.

The Marketing Process

When people hear the term "marketing" they typically think of the advertisements they see on TV or of suave sales schemes. As those working within the field know, however, marketing goes way beyond designing catchy promotional materials (though this is a big *part* of the marketing process). Rather, the breadth of common marketing activities are regularly referred

to as the "4 Ps": Product (designing a product or service to meet customer needs), Price (devising a pricing scheme for the product or service), Place (determining where the product or service will be sold and which distribution channels will be utilized), and Promotion (encouraging consumers to purchase the product or service through various means). Throughout this process, consideration is given to the market of customers and competitors. Furthermore, the overall goal of marketing is not simply to make a sale, but to build a relationship with customers to encourage repeat patronization (Perreault, Cannon, & McCarthy, 2008). To meet this goal, it is critical that marketers have a very thorough understanding of their customers, which can only be gained through the process of market segmentation and target marketing.

Market Segmentation and Target Marketing

As defined by Perreault et al. (2008), "Marketing is the performance of activities that seek to accomplish an organization's objectives by anticipating customer or client needs and directing a flow of need-satisfying goods and services from producer to consumer or client" (p.6). Because end consumers drive the entire marketing processes, one of the first steps is to engage in market segmentation and target marketing. Through market segmentation, the entire populous of potential customers is broken down into segments of people exhibiting similar characteristics and having similar needs. Grouping consumers in this way is beneficial to businesses because people with similar characteristics and needs tend to also engage in similar purchasing behaviors (Weinstein, 1994). Dividing people into segments correctly is crucial for marketing success because doing so allows businesses to design products or services to meet the specific needs of a selected segment (called a target market), and also direct promotional materials effectively and efficiently to appeal to that target market (Oyewole, 2010; Weinstein, 1994). Target market selection is important, in other words, because it prevents companies from

wasting resources by attempting to convince uninterested groups to purchase their product or service.

Effective segmentation begins by *precisely* defining the parameters of each segment based on criteria such as location, demographics, lifestyle, or psychographics (Cahill, 2006; Dolnicar, 2004). More specifically, psychographic segmentation may be conducted based on consumers' activities, interests, opinions, personalities, values, and/or the trends they follow (Weinstein, 1994). By segmenting the market into groups and then designing a product or service that best meets the target market(s)'s needs, businesses may gain a competitive advantage (Cahill, 2006). Again, because it would be impossible to understand large groups of consumers on such a deep level, and therefore to meet all of their needs, marketers engage in target marketing to narrow the scope of consumers to a more manageable, understandable, and reachable level, thereby saving both time and money. Once a target market is established and well understood, specific branding components may be developed to speak specifically to the needs of that audience.

Branding

One of the main goals of marketing is to project an appealing value proposition to the target market to entice them to purchase the product or service being sold. In essence, the value proposition is a concise statement made about the product or service that describes how it is different from its competitors in a way that is appealing and meaningful to the target market. Furthermore, value is determined by research regarding the target market's needs and wants. Overall, the value proposition should answer the question, "'Why should I do business with your firm and not your competitor?'" (Anderson & Carpenter, 2005, p.173).

Communicating the value of a product or service can be accomplished through the use of branding, which aims to capture and simplify the value proposition into a recognizable and relatable image. This brand should be devised to specifically appeal to the selected target market, and should essentially tell members of that target marker that the branded product or service will meet their needs better than any other. As Murphy, Moscardo, and Benckendorff (2007) explain, branding is also invaluable because it makes the value proposition stand out in consumers' minds (increasing the likelihood of subsequent purchases) and expands the range of prices consumers would be willing to pay for the product or service.

Because branding is really about capturing and communicating value, it is clearly more than a superficial logo, design, or slogan. While these are helpful ways to communicate the brand to consumers, their use comes into play long after the value proposition has been discerned and enveloped in the brand. By incorporating the value proposition, brands not only help consumers recognize products and their characteristics, but they may also bring certain feelings, memories, or associations to mind. Marketers believe that these types of cognitive and emotive recognitions that brands help to elicit are valuable because they can set products or services apart from their competitors. In this way, branding makes the consumer decision-making process easier, especially when brand recognition turns to brand loyalty (when a consumer will purchase a certain brand, as opposed to a competitor's brand, with less sensitivity to price).

All in all, the brand design should be a manifestation of the position the product or service will occupy in the customer's mind relative to competitors' products or services. This position is related directly to the type of target market and the need that is being met with the product or service. When promoting this brand and its inherent value proposition, marketers should seek to truly resonate with the target market. One way to do this is to personify the

brand, creating what can be called the 'brand personality,' which makes the brand more relatable and meaningful for the target market.

Brand Personality

One of the seminal works in the area of brand personality is by Aakers (1997) who took the "Big 5 Personality Traits" (previously used to distinguish human personalities) and applied them to marketable brand names. The study essentially analyzed how people think about, and associate with, brands through the process of anthropomorphism and developed a brand personality framework highlighting the most common human characteristics that people attach to brands. These include "Sincerity (down-to-earth, honest, wholesome, cheerful), Excitement (daring, spirited, imaginative, up-to-date), Competence (reliable, intelligent, successful), Sophistication (upper-class, charming), and Ruggedness (outdoorsy, tough)" (p.352). The brand personality theory holds that different people may seek certain attributes when buying certain products; for instance, the purchase and use of a Rolex™ may take place not only because the watch itself is of a high quality, but because the Rolex™ brand emits a certain element of competence and certainly of sophistication to which certain buyers can relate and wish to be identified. Conversely, a Garmin™ GPS watch may be purchased by a runner not only because it will keep track of distance and speed, but because Garmin™ portrays itself as both exciting and rugged.

Similarly, a certain type of personality should be embodied by a destination brand (to be discussed later) that captures what is valuable and appealing to the identified target market in a relatable, personified form. The brand and its personality may then be utilized in promotional materials to help communicate the value proposition of the branded product or service to the target market(s).

Promotion

The ultimate purpose of a destination brand is to communicate the value proposition to consumers. In order for this to be accomplished, the brand should be used consistently in communicating with the target market in the form of promotion. According to Keller (2009), "Marketing communications are the means by which firms attempt to inform, persuade and remind consumers –directly or indirectly – about the products and brands they sell" (p.141); in the tourism context this involves making consumers aware of the location, enticing them to visit, and reminding them to come again through various mediums. Promotional decisions are typically informed by the research conducted regarding the target market, and reflect the target market's determined preferences related to various elements of the promotional mix. It is common practice to utilize several different media types and advertizing content to ensure that target markets are adequately reached, at the same time keeping the underlying message of all marketing communications consistent (Keller, 2009).

The basic concepts described above are generally uncontested for typical marketing purposes, and serve as the basis for destination marketing as well. However, destination marketing has specific needs that are not met by simple implementation of these concepts, and instead they must be adjusted to meet the unique challenges destination marketing presents.

<center>**Destination Marketing Challenges**</center>

Destination marketing involves several unique challenges that must be addressed. While producers of products and services as well as tourist resorts are able to start from the ground up and cohesively define a target market, design a product to meet its needs, and create a brand and personality that projects its value, actual towns are unavoidably less flexible in what their

<center>9</center>

marketers can do to enhance tourism. The specific challenges derived from the rural tourism

product, to be discussed below are (a) the place-product, and (b) fragmentation.

The Place-Product

Destination marketing, though appealing and useful in many ways, is not accomplished

without significant challenges, many of which are related to the nature of the place-product that

is being sold. A place-product is the bundle of products and services that tourists receive when

they visit a location, including lodging, activities, restaurants, entertainment, landscape, and

human interactions, among others. Because place-products encompass a broad variety of

products and services, it is often difficult to identify a unified value proposition. Furthermore,

although places can slowly be developed to increase their tourism industry's capabilities and

appeal, the place-product is more or less an unalterable given that exists, *as is*, regardless of

marketing efforts (Anholt, 2009). Thus, the product design stage of marketing is completely

different than it is with marketing other products, services, or planned resorts. In other words, a

destination's location, climate, history, inhabitants, culture, and many activities and industries

are inherited by marketers and cannot be changed just to meet certain target market needs.

Moreover, marketing a place-product does not allow for the alteration of the inherent

personality or assets an area possesses, and instead must encompass and communicate what's

actually present in its value package in a positive manner. It is possible, of course, to add

additional services and infrastructure to an area to augment the naturally occurring place-

product, but marketers must be careful to protect the authentic experience that consumers are

looking for when visiting a rural destination. For instance, it would not make sense to tout a rural

destination as being upscale, sophisticated, and culturally diverse when this isn't true, and, as

noted by Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005), making such claims would be pointless since "Places

do not suddenly acquire a new identity thanks to a slogan and a memorable logo" (p. 508). Rather, it makes more sense for rural destination marketers to get a grasp of what their unique place-product *really is* and promote that product authentically.

Therefore, while part of a marketer's job is usually to identify a customer need and then design a product or service to satisfy that need, the order of the marketing process for destinations is somewhat inverted. As such, the particular traits or attractions an area possesses must be recognized *first*, followed by the identification of a target market for which those traits and attractions would be appealing. Then, as with other products and services, individualized promotional mixes and place-product improvements can be implemented to help the destination stand out for the suitable target market(s). In order to ensure a unified portrayal of the brand personality, however, none of this should be carried out without first consulting the stakeholders present in the rural tourism industry.

Fragmentation

In addition to the fact that product design is highly limited or even impossible for place-products, the presence of diverse stakeholders in the selling of the place-product is also problematic. For most products and services, marketing is carried out by a single marketing team that aims to project a certain, planned image to the public through the careful management of the product's or service's design, brand, price, promotion, placement etc. Selling a tourist destination, on the other hand, presents an interesting challenge in that a single business, organization, team, or person is *not* in charge of marketing the entire area. Instead, the tourism industry is highly fragmented and is comprised of numerous independent businesses, organizations, and individuals, all with their own ideas, goals, and marketing plans. The independent nature of the tourism industry is beneficial in many ways, but unfortunately makes it

extremely difficult to project a cohesive and consistent message about, or image of, the destination to the public (Garrod, Wornell, & Youell, 2006; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005; Kay & Wang, 2010). Moreover, as Florian and Pradeep (2011) note, tourists tend to think of a destination as a single product, not as a bunch of individual tourism-related businesses and activities, so the coordination among all members of the tourism value chain is imperative. However, there are typically various, often dissonant pictures of a location painted by the inhabitants, business owners, and other stakeholders in an area, causing consumers to lack a clear conception of the place; without a clear conception, the place may not come to consumers' minds when they are deciding on a vacation destination to visit.

Another concern, or perhaps opportunity, for destination marketers is that places have multiple user groups with varying characteristics and needs. This being the case, destination marketers may need to adopt a multiple target market approach: "segmenting the market and choosing two or more segments, then treating each as a separate target market needing a different marketing mix" (Perreault et al., 2008, p.67). While maintaining multiple target markets is not in itself problematic, marketers will need to be careful to project a consistent message about the place to all target markets (Garrod et al., 2006), even if the ways the message is delivered differ. In other words, it is important that destination marketers identify a single brand (and therefore a single value proposition) even though they may be communicating with various target markets. In so doing, the problem of contradicting messages may be avoided.

Because marketers have relatively little control over the place-product itself, and because they must satisfy a large and diverse group of stakeholders through their marketing efforts, it would appear that they are very limited in what they can do to promote tourism through normal

marketing practices. Although the task may seem daunting, altering the traditional methods of marketing for these unique conditions is both useful and necessary.

Solution for Marketing Rural Destinations: A Comprehensive Model

While the limitations of a place-product, combined with the difficulties of fragmentation, make rural destination marketing complicated, it is certainly not impossible. Destination marketing does not possess the same well-accepted foundation as that of marketing for products, services, or planned resorts; instead, much of the current literature relating to destination marketing either tests a single new theory, or simply observes and evaluates the marketing techniques already implemented by various destination marketers. Both types of research are invaluable to the study of destination marketing, as they either call attention to available new techniques or point out best-practices and pitfalls occurring in the field. However, the destination marketing process would likely be more effective and efficient for communities if the disparate research and findings of case studies were synthesized into a single, useable model. In response, Figure 1 (below) illustrates a Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model in which several various lines of thought regarding destination marketing are combined and streamlined. This new model provides a user-friendly process that destination marketers can adapt to their own projects.

Figure 1. Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model
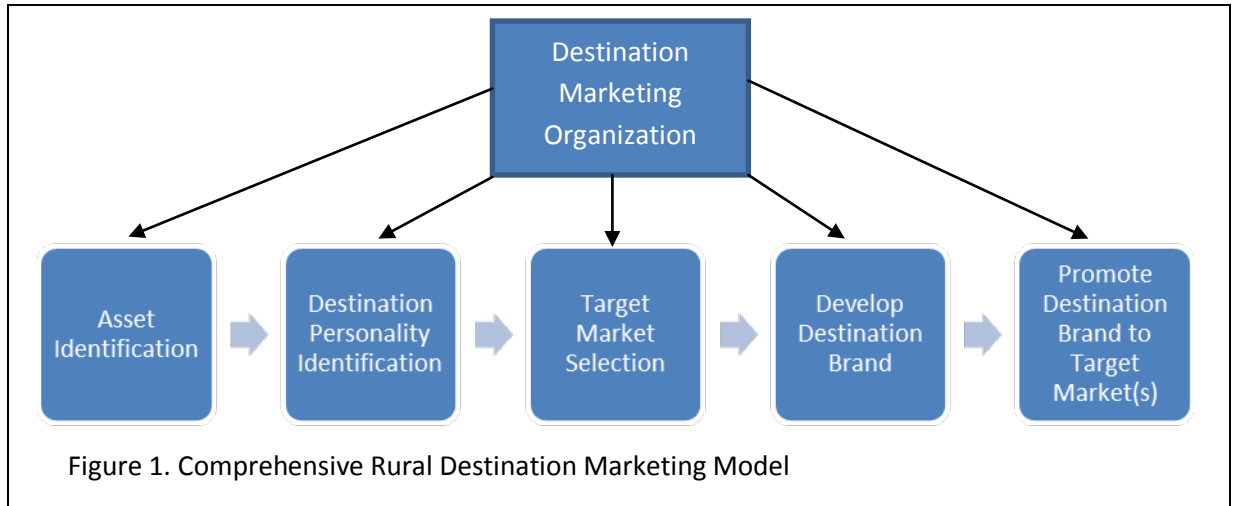
Essential to the application of this model is the establishment of a destination marketing organization (DMO), which is an effective way to centralize marketing efforts and overcome the challenge of fragmentation. Once established, DMOs may follow the step-by-step model proposed in this paper as they progress through the destination marketing process. Specifically, as seen in Figure 1, successive attention must be paid to five distinct areas when marketing a destination: (a) asset identification, (b) destination personality identification, (c) target market selection, (d) destination brand development, and (e) promotion of the destination brand. Following a discussion of DMOs in general, these stages of the destination marketing process will be described and illustrated through a case study of Gunnison County, Colorado.

Destination Marketing Organizations

To overcome the challenges posed by the fragmented nature of the tourism product, many destinations have developed umbrella destination marketing organizations (DMOs) which attempt to capture the essence of a place and promote its various aspects under one brand name (Cai, 2002). As depicted in Figure 2, an established DMO is charged with orchestrating all destination marketing functions proposed in the model.

Figure 2. Destination Marketing Organization
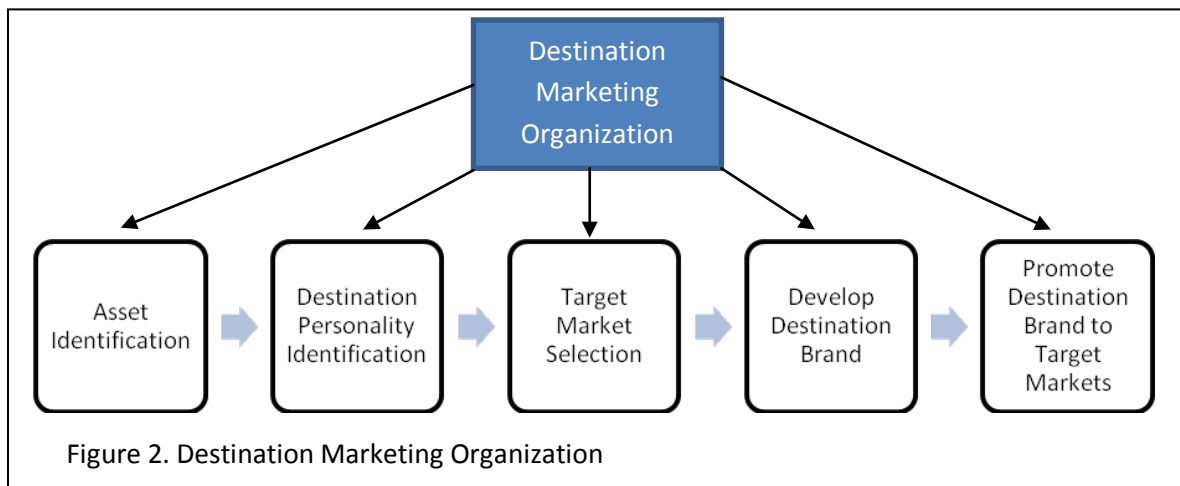
Though these organizations can take many forms and play many different roles, their general tasks include gaining an understanding of the tourism industry and business environment, gaining an understanding of the needs and behaviors of internal and external stakeholders (such as local residents, business owners, and governmental organizations), developing a vision for the place, developing a plan to attain this vision, and evaluating progress throughout the process (Kotler et al., 1993). The establishment of a destination marketing organization additionally adds value to the place-product because it makes the decision-making process easier for consumers; instead of searching an array of sources to find (potentially conflicting) information about a destination, DMOs organize information about those stakeholders in one place, and summarize their attributes with one overarching value proposition.

Due to the complex composition of the tourism industry, a top-down marketing plan implemented by a disconnected umbrella marketing organization is probably not going to be accepted by many critical stakeholders who have individual agendas and concerns regarding tourism. Instead, such organizations need to make a concerted effort to heed the needs of locals and to preserve the genuine character of the place when developing marketing plans (Tsundoda & Mundlinger, 2009). This notion of attaining community input and cooperation is referred to as

the "community approach" to destination marketing, a method claiming that crucial stakeholders should have a direct say in the marketing plan's direction and implementation (Hankinson, 2009; McClinchey & Carmichael, 2010). Thus, umbrella marketing organizations are often funded and managed by the public sector under the agreement that input from, and cooperation with, the private sector will always be of primary importance (Briedenhann, 2004).

Although a complete consensus about the proper way to market a destination may never be reached, even when utilizing the community approach, DMOs are still invaluable liaisons between an area's stakeholders and potential customers. These DMOs must do all that they can to reduce fragmentation within the tourism industry so that a clear, consistent, and positive message about the destination is communicated to the public. To reach this goal, DMOs may follow this paper's new, Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model, beginning with the task of asset identification.

Asset Identification

Once a destination marketing organization has been established, the first step it should take is to identify its destination's assets, in so doing gaining a deep understanding of the place-product it is charged with selling to potential tourists. The particular assets possessed by an individual town or region may be broken up into two broad categories: tangible assets and intangible assets. Figure 3 highlights the importance of asset identification; it is imperative that DMOs take their unique assets into consideration, as they are the foundation of the destination's image in consumers' minds, which in turn may be represented as relatable destination personalities.

Figure 3. Asset identification
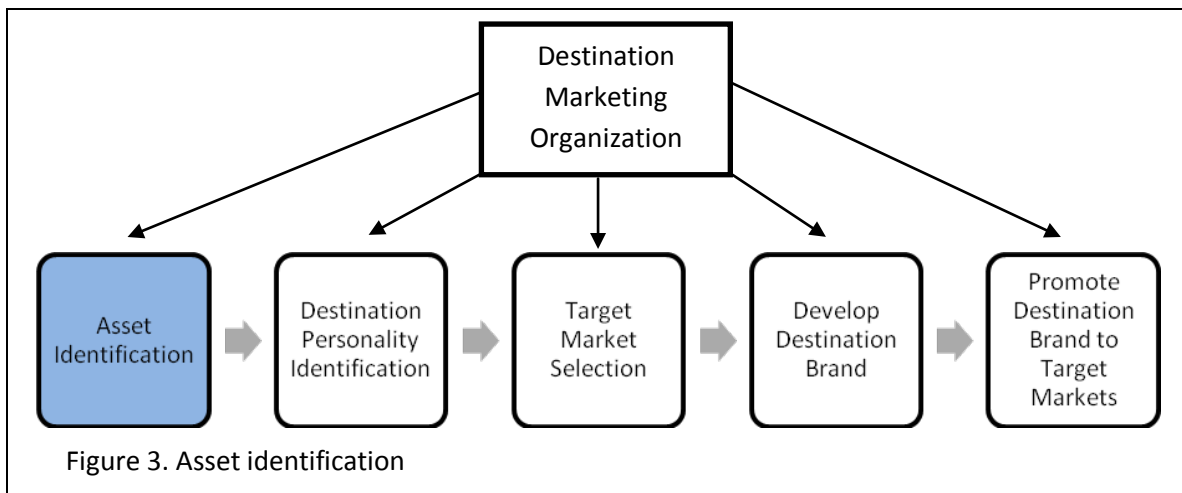
Tangible assets. Some of the greatest, most easily identifiable, and valuable assets a rural region possesses are those that are tangible. In most cases, tangible assets such as landscape, biodiversity, and historical buildings or sites (Garrod et al., 2006) are preexisting and already appealing in and of themselves. To some degree, the value and possession of marketable tangible assets is incontrollable, but manipulating and properly utilizing tangible resources is a common-sense way to increase tourism and economic diversity in rural areas (Cai, 2002; Kay & Wang, 2010).

The most obvious way that tangible elements such as geography, interesting buildings, and historical sites contribute to an area's appeal is through their provision of functional place-product attributes (Sirgy & Su, 2000). In other words, these types of tangible assets make the activities tourists seek possible; pleasant weather and beautiful surroundings, for example, are necessary for enjoyable outdoor recreation, structures and points of interest enable sight-seeing, and historical sites allow for heritage tours. In addition to the utility value tangible assets possess, their ability to engage tourists' senses and excite their imaginations is also valuable in that it contributes to the overall tourist experience (Rickly-Boyd, 2009). That said, it is unwise

for a rural destination to rely solely on tangible assets when marketing to tourists; innumerable places exist with beautiful scenery, but unless the landscape is extremely distinctive, all rural areas become more or less substitutable (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). Thus, both tangible *and* intangible assets must be given equal weight when determining the destination personality.

Intangible assets. While tangible assets directly make up the place-product tourist destinations aim to sell, it is often the intangible assets an area possesses that set it apart from geographically similar locales. Much like their tangible counterparts, intangible assets are largely uncontrollable (Kay & Wang, 2010; Kotler & Gartner, 2002), and although destination marketers cannot choose or artificially create intangible assets, they can determine which pieces are the most appealing for selected target markets and promote those aspects appropriately to encourage tourism. In essence, the more tangible marketers can make intangible assets in consumers' minds, the easier it is for consumers to think about and appreciate those assets. Especially in a rural context where retaining and bolstering the rustic charm of the countryside is often lucrative, marketers should focus on "promoting traditions, lifestyles and arts that are supposed to be locally rooted… [and have] an 'authentic quality'…" (Philo & Kearns, 1993, p.3). Some of the most prominent and authentic intangible assets, the identification of which may assist in the development of an area's destination personality, include (a) history, (b) festivals, and (c) locals.

History. Many rural destinations have successfully promoted their unique history and resultant culture to a niche market of heritage tourists who desire to relive the past (Bonn et al., 2007). By consciously promoting the past or retaining some traditional practices, rural destinations may meet many tourists' needs for a nostalgic or historical experience (Rickly-Boyd, 2009).

Festivals. Even though lifestyles have modernized in rural towns, bursts of historical charm may still prove appealing to tourists. Festivals and historical events remind locals and tourists alike of a places' history and heritage (Philo & Kearns, 1993) and the recurrence of such events may lead to the development of positive memories in tourists' minds, drawing them back again and again (Keller, 1993). Perhaps more importantly, festivals and events help preserve a destinations' meaningful, characteristic culture and history which is not only a good way to differentiate in the tourism market, but is also beneficial for the well-being of the local community (Lichrou, O'Malley, & Patterson, 2010).

Locals. In addition to history, culture, and festivals, the characteristics of local people are also very significant intangible assets. The attitudes and behavior of the local population may be used as differentiating factors when rural destinations are substitutable in terms of tangible assets and available activities (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). While all people in a community contribute in some way to its projected image, employees in the service sector have an especially significant influence over tourists' perceptions of a place (Freire, 2007). Not only do service employees provide practical services for tourists, but their behaviors and attitudes also actively communicate a community's values to consumers (Hankinson, 2009).

After identifying the tangible and intangible assets present in a destination, marketers can garner a better understanding of the nature of their place-product. From here, the next step in the model is to carefully discern the destination personality that is emitted when considering that place-product.

Destination Personalities

When thinking about a destination's tangible and intangible assets together, a lasting image of that place may form in consumers' minds. This destination image captures the essence

of the place's assets (Garrod et al., 2006), and also incorporates a person's individual set of

beliefs about that place (Kotler et al., 1993). Because consumers think about places through

imagery – and ultimately select a destination based on the perceived value of that imagery – it is

imperative that it is actively managed and publicized by destination marketers (Kavaratzis &

Ashworth, 2005). To make multiple, somewhat ambiguous destination images more relatable

and memorable, it is often helpful to couch them in terms of human personality traits. As

depicted in Figure 4, identifying a destination personality is a crucial step that must be

undertaken before target market selection and subsequent marketing activities can begin.

Figure 4. Destination personality development
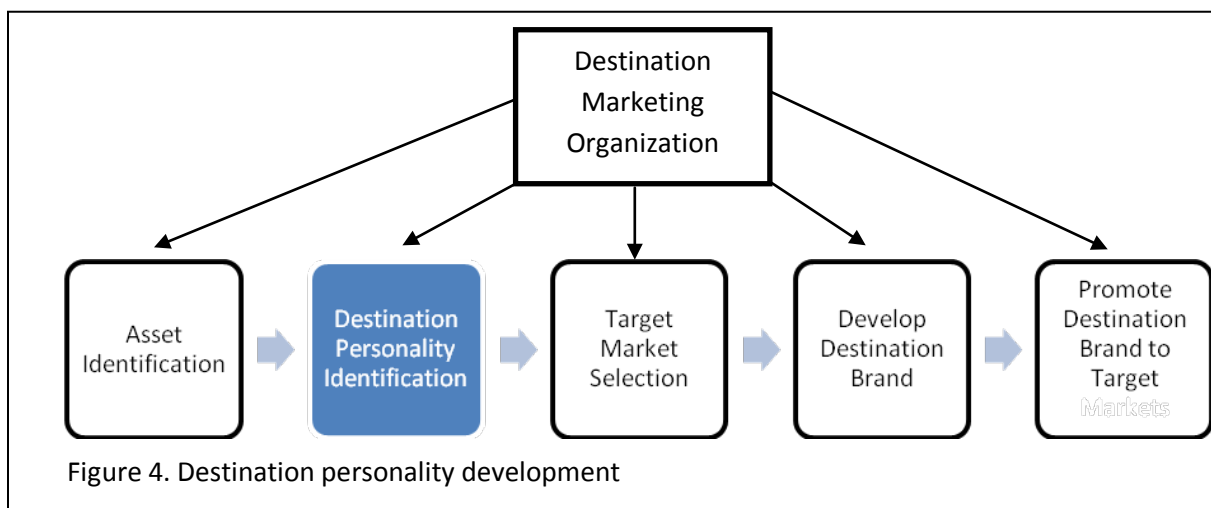
Making use of personality traits has been undertaken time and again by marketers of

other products when they attempt to infuse their brands with so-called "geographic personality"

characteristics. Geographic personalities arise by thinking about a destination's image and the

fact that, much like products or brand names, "we commonly speak about cities as if they are

capable of human feelings and qualities…" (Koch & Aiken, 2010, p.2). Indeed, locals and

tourists alike can attest to the fact that every place has its own unique atmosphere, which is

commonly personified. These personalities can then be used in the branding of other, not

necessarily related items. For example, products such as Philadelphia Cream Cheese™ and Arizona Iced Tea™ which have no attributes directly related to their namesakes retain their geographic brand names because the locations hold certain, equitable connotations in consumers' minds. Consumers can relate to these traits, and are apparently more willing to buy products that remind them, for instance, of patriotism (in the case of Philadelphia Cream Cheese™) or other likeable personality traits (Koch & Aiken, 2010).

Though it is common to use geographic personalities to differentiate product brands, the practice is, ironically, used less often in the realm of destination marketing. However, it seems that the same ideas are applicable in this context, simply using a destination's personality (derived from its various imagery) to brand the destination itself. This may be very useful because even though rural areas may be similar in terms of their attractions, destination marketers can still make their location stand out by identifying the overall, unique personality that its image embodies (Usaki & Baloglu, 2011).

Current literature suggests that physical elements in rural areas, which are likely different from what many disparate (and especially urban) tourists experience in their hometowns, contribute directly to an area's destination personality. Specifically, Koch and Aiken (2010) suggest that individuals who are not familiar with an area (such as tourists) may at first describe areas and their personalities in terms of physical elements and images. In fact, their research illustrates that "a great number of subjects described cities in terms of the weather or other physical characteristics…" (p.8). One example of the direct connection between physical elements and abstract personalities can be seen through the description of Seattle's personality as "gloomy" due to its large amount of rainfall. It is also possible that physical elements of an area can indirectly impact its personality as well, for instance by influencing the types of activities

that residents can partake in (more open space may enable a more "active" community and resultant personality etc.).

In much the same way as people develop an internal relationship with product or service brands based on their humanistic traits (whether they consciously realize it or not), consumers may be influenced by a destination's personification as well. To that end, Ekinci and Hosany (2006) indicate that appealing or attractive destination personalities may influence prospective tourists as they make travel decisions. In other words, attraction to certain destination personalities has an impact on consumers' decision making relating to the destinations they ultimately choose to visit, the extent of their satisfaction during their visit, and their intention to return to the destination or recommend it to others. In any case, the identification of a destination personality will certainly help marketers identify potentially lucrative target markets. These target markets will more easily relate to and remember the destination in question if its personality is projected to them through promotion of and experience with the place-product.

Target Market Selection

Given the partially inverted process of destination marketing, it is essential that the place-product's unique assets and resultant personality are well-identified and understood before attempting to segment the market of potential tourists. Again, this inversion results from the fact that the place-product is mostly given and unalterable, and rather than attempting to design the place-product to meet a specific target market's needs, the target market should rather be selected based on what the place-product has to offer. Figure 5 highlights that once it is established, the destination personality may be invaluable in its role in target market selection, and the following design of specialized branding and promotional materials.

Figure 5. Target market selection
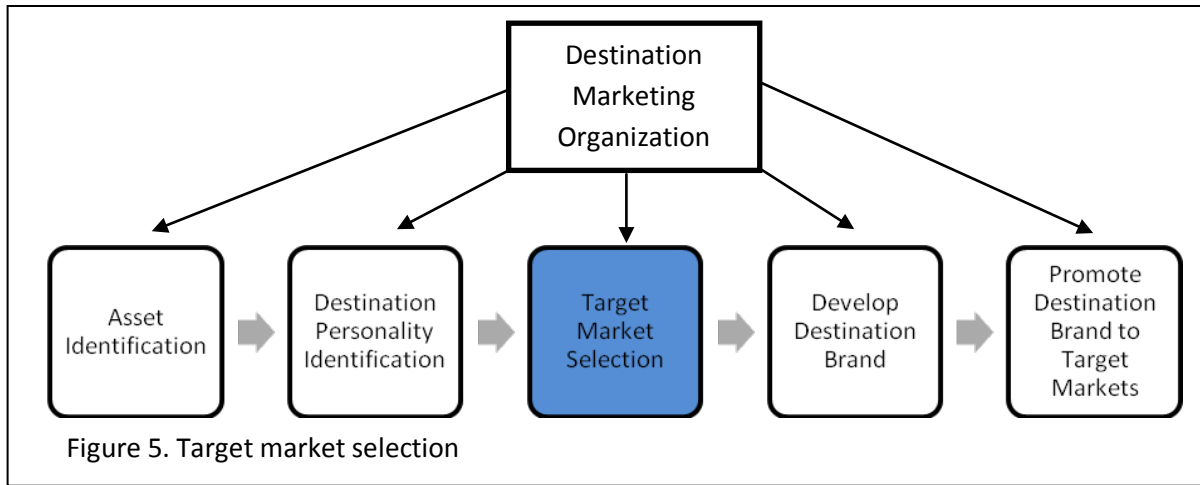
To illustrate the application of the destination personality in the target market selection process, the Social Identity Theory and Customer-Brand Identification will be discussed, followed by an elaboration on the market segmentation process for rural tourist destinations.

Social Identity Theory. The application of destination personality should be carried out in light of the Social Identity Theory. This is the idea that individuals tend to define their self-concepts based on the social groups with whom they associate. In other words, people may choose to include themselves in certain social groups not only because of shared interests, but because they see themselves (or want others to see them) as having the same values and traits as members of that group. However, human personalities are complex and variable, and Sirgy and Su (2000) outline four "selves" that people may maintain: the actual self (who they really are), the ideal self (who they would like to be), the social self (how they believe others see them), and the ideal-social self (how they would like others to see them). Thus, people may identify with various groups depending on which aspect of their personality (or which "self") they are aiming to appease. The premise of the Social Identity Theory is adapted to the practice of marketing through Customer-Brand Identification.

Customer-Brand Identification (CBI). Interestingly, research suggests that people can become attached to brands, as well as to other individuals, in such a way that they define their self-concepts by that brand (Lam, Ahearne, Hu, & Schillewaert, 2010). Lam et al.(2010) define this strong relationship as "customer-brand identification… a customer's psychological state of perceiving, feeling, and valuing his or her belongingness with a brand" (p.129). What's more, the different "selves" described by Sirgy and Su (2000) not only influence human-to-human relationships, but also customer-brand relationships. In other words, consumers may relate to brand personalities (and make purchase decisions) based off of these modes of self-perception. For example, people are often drawn to brands with perceived personalities similar to their own (Stokburger-Saur, 2011) because these brands seem familiar and already fit into the lifestyles individuals carry out and are therefore easy to relate to; these relationships are based off of the consumer's actual self. The same consumer may also purchase a brand with a different personality that is more consistent with how they would like to be seen by others, thus developing a customer-brand relationship based on the ideal-social self.

The Social Identity Theory and CBI in destination marketing. Varying aspects of the human personality may also be congruent with destinations and their related destination personalities. For example, under the self-consistency motive, consumers would seek a destination with a personality most similar to their actual self, while the social approval motive would entice consumers to seek a vacation destination with a personality that matches how they would like others to see them (Sirgy & Su, 2000). Moreover, if one's actual personality is congruent with a destination's personality, the functional assets present in that destination are typically seen as having a high value (Sirgy & Su, 2000). Actual personality congruence not only leads to a higher evaluation of assets and higher customer-destination identification, but also

results in increased visit intentions (Stokburger-Saur, 2011). Additionally, actual personality congruence is associated with a higher tourist intention to return to a destination again after having visited (Sirgy & Su, 2000). Finally, research also indicates that attitude towards a place will ultimately affect travel behavior and decision making, and attitude is in turn affected by how well the tourist's personality meshes with the personality of the destination (Jalivand et al., 2010). These studies suggest that if marketers in rural locales are able to identify, single-out, and amplify the destination's personality traits that the target market can most acutely connect with or be attracted to, visitation numbers and other positive tourism-related outcomes may be increased.

While it has been demonstrated that actual personality congruence with a destination is associated with higher rates of intention to visit or return, not all tourists desire to visit a location that is too similar to them or too familiar. Rather, many tourists wish for an element of novelty in their travels and want to experience something new (Kastenholz, 2010). At the same time, general familiarity with an area's culture and personality allows tourists to remain comfortable and therefore more willing and able to truly experience what the place has to offer (Kastenholz, 2010). These observations suggest that destination marketers may be most successful in securing return customers by reaching out to target markets that are similar in personality, but with enough personality variance to make the vacation unique and exciting.

Selecting the target market. After gaining an understanding of a destination's inherent personality and the implications of the Social Identity Theory and CBI in relation to tourist satisfaction, the target market selection process may ensue. As discussed earlier, the tourism product unavoidably exists prior to the identification and study of a target market. While this fact does limit marketers in terms of what they may offer to consumers, they are not entirely

bound by the place-product they are given to work with. What destination marketers have the most control over, in fact, is the message about that given place (or its value proposition) that is ultimately projected, and to whom that proposition will be communicated. Thus, while the product itself may be difficult to alter for the appeasement of a target market, the message, as expressed through the destination brand (in turn based off of the destination personality), may and should be manipulated for that purpose. When marketing a place it is therefore imperative that the unique wants and needs of the target market(s) drive the creation of the destination brand (Kotler and Gertner, 2002). To better identify these needs, marketers should first narrowly define the parameters of their target market(s). When undertaking this segmentation process, possible considerations include the typical vacation duration and level of spending individuals carry out (Kotler et al., 1993), the types of attractions individuals are seeking (Kotler and Gertner, 2002), and tourists' values or interests (Dolnicar, 2004).

The Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model proposed in this paper also suggests that suitable target markets may be identified based on personality traits. Because actual personality congruence is closely associated with positive tourist behaviors, target markets should be sought that are very similar in personality to the destination itself. At the same time, since an aspect of novelty is a significant motivator for travel in the first place, the target market's personality need not be identical to that of the destination, but merely close enough to elicit a level of comfort and CBI. Based off of the target market(s) that are ultimately selected, the specific value propositions that those target markets can relate to should be captured by the destination brand.

Destination Branding

With target markets selected and the place's destination personality well understood, marketers

can finally focus on branding the destination. Place branding is essentially a means of promoting

the destination to the target market(s) through various communication channels (Skinner, 2008).

Because the tourism industry is fragmented, the destination brand is unavoidably difficult for

DMOs to completely control (Hankinson, 2009). Never the less, as seen in Figure 6, branding

must occur prior to undertaking promotional activities.

Figure 6. Develop destination brand
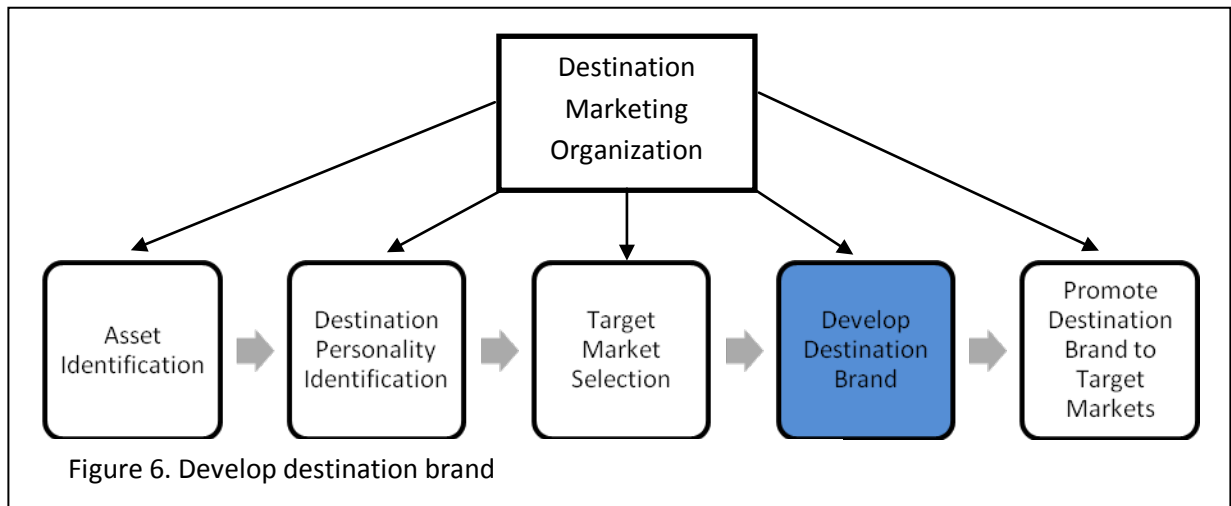
Destination branding is beneficial in multiple ways; through the promotion of a

destination brand, towns may be differentiated from their competitors, experience more loyalty

from prior tourists, and draw in more first-time visitors (Pike, 2009).   At the same time,

potential travelers can benefit from a destination brand because it aids in decision-making,

reduces risk, and increases the brag-value of the vacation (Pike, 2009).

The benefits destination branding can elicit are achieved through brand equity and brand

resonance. Brand equity increases as consumers gain more brand awareness through exposure;

contact with the brand will first bring consciousness of the destination, then form associations

with the destination, affect the consumer's attitude about the destination, help the consumer attach to the brand (CBI), and eventually take action (book a vacation, recommend the area to others etc.) (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Brand resonance, on the other hand, is how well a consumer feels attached to or in-sync with the destination brand as seen through behavioral loyalty, attitudinal attachment, a sense of community (with locals and other tourists), and active engagement with the destination (Keller, 2009). For a destination brand to resonate with the target market(s), and thus be equitable for the place, there are several characteristics it must possess, as described by Keller and Lehmann (2006). First and foremost, the destination brand should be memorable and meaningful, and logos etc. must be aesthetically appealing. Additionally, a good brand should be transferable so that it may be adapted to communications with various target markets. Because much of the value of a destination brand comes from its ability to capture an individual's attachment or identification (Murphy et al., 2007), a successful brand should also embody and project the destination's personality characteristics most compatible with the target market's personality.

Promotion of Destination Brand to Target Market(s)

Since destination personality has a great impact on brand equity, brand resonance, and ultimately tourist satisfaction, it must serve as the basis for promotional materials. Destination marketers should carefully select the message about and the aspects of the destination personality that are highlighted by promotions to be specifically appealing to the identified target markets. In fact, as depicted in Figure 7, promotion should only be pursued after all other stages of the Conceptual Rural Destination Marketing Model have been completed. Undertaking such extensive leg work before developing a promotional mix will ultimately enable the DMO to save

time and resources, since brand promotions will only be directed towards the most compatible

and viable target markets.

Figure 7. Promotion of destination brand to target markets
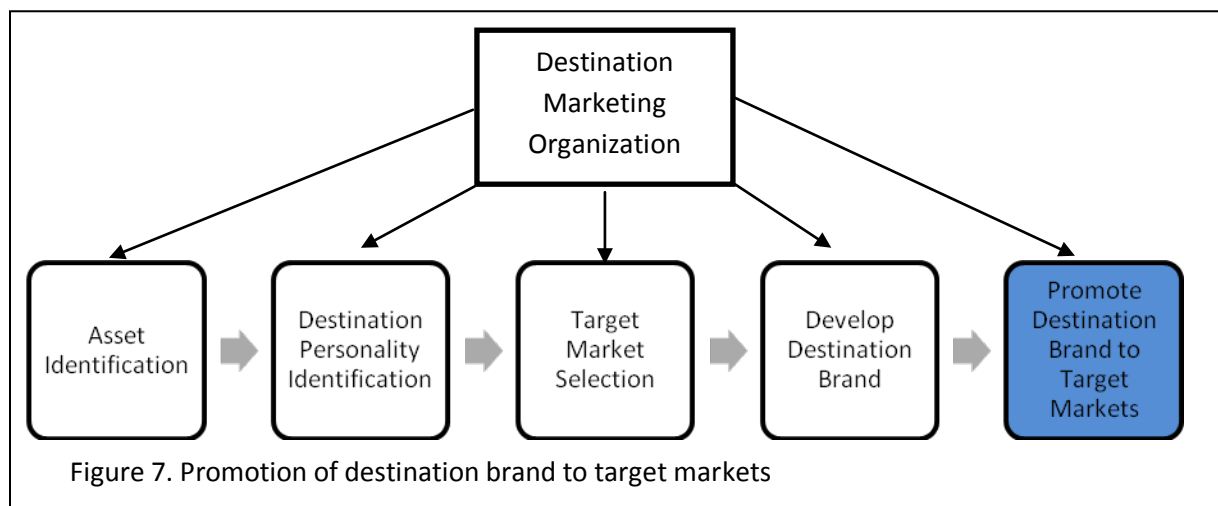
Destination personality characteristics can generally be communicated through the

destination brand with slogans and word choice, the graphics found on logos, and the visual

images associated with the brand. For example, a brand's slogan may include words such as

"friendly" or "relaxed", the logo could include outdoor images that coincide with active or

natural personality traits, and/or photographs used in advertisements could show friendly looking

people amidst the area's tangible assets. Personality traits that are complementary with those of

the target markets should be shared through promotional media conducive to destination

marketing including (a) advertisements, (b) public relations, (c) the Internet, and (d)

interactive/social media. When selecting the promotional mix, it should also be remembered that

different media types will reach some groups more effectively than others and, as such, the

specific target market should also dictate the variety of media used to convey the promotions.

Advertisements. Advertisements are relatively concise promotions designed by

marketers to increase brand awareness and communicate the value proposition to members of the

target market(s). Such advertisements can serve to remind members of the target market about

an area, thus maintaining the destination's position in the consumers consideration set, or may provide enticing information about specific aspects of the destination or the destination brand. Advertisement is controlled by the DMOs, and have been found to wield less influence over tourist decision-making than other outlets (Wang, Wu, & Yuan, 2009), perhaps because consumers are skeptical of persuasive information provided by invested parties. Nevertheless, advertisements are readily used by destination marketers, and are often placed in print publications, or on the radio, television, and Internet (Wang et al., 2009).

Public relations. As described by Wang et al. (2009), public relations are those communications found in a variety of channels (print, television news and programming, and the Internet, for example) that is not produced directly by the DMO. This variety of promotion shares exciting stories or interesting news about places, and can convey either a positive or a negative message. Overall, public relations demand active management because they are challenging to control and are risky for destinations aiming to deliver a specific value proposition to target markets. However, public relations may relay compelling stories about a destination or a destination brand, and are more effective at reaching prospective tourists, especially in younger age ranges (Wang et al., 2009). Therefore, if the public relation is positive, it can be highly beneficial for destination marketers.

The Internet. Today, it is crucial for DMOs to have a large presence on the Internet, and they should place particular emphasis on maintaining their destination's website. Singh and Formica (2006) explain that the Internet is increasingly used by prospective tourists because it is interactive, fast and flexible. What's more, destination marketers can control their own web content, ensuring that accurate information about the destination is given, and that the desired value proposition is communicated through branding techniques.

Interactive/social media. By interacting with the brand, consumers are better able to define the destination personality and therefore experience it and relate to it (Keller, 2009). Examples of interactive marketing communications include a presence on social media sites, blogs, or online bulletins, the use of which enables members of the target market(s) to identify with the projected personality as well as build community with, and attachment to, other users (Grappi & Montanari, 2011). The use of social media and other interactive forms of communication is especially attractive to DMOs given the significant impact word of mouth has on travel decision making. As Anholt (2009) puts it, "destination marketing, in addition to its primary purpose of encouraging visits, can play in important secondary role in helping visitors to form a compelling personal narrative about the country, which enhances their power as 'viral agents' or informal advocates for the country's brand once they return home" (p.89). Hearing about the nature of a place and its personality also has a direct impact on the social image of the place held in consumers' minds (Koch & Aiken, 2010). However, social media sites are largely used by younger generations, and destination marketers should consider their target market before expelling too much effort on social media related promotional initiatives.

Because different promotional channels each have their own strengths and weaknesses, destination marketers should attempt to utilize several different options (Kim, Hwang, & Fesenmaier, 2005). Again, even if there is variety in the content of advertisements, public relations, web content, social media, and other promotional channels, DMOs should take every precaution to avoid contradicting themselves or the overall value of the brand. Thus, to be effective, destination promotion should be thorough, memorable, and also consistent.

The Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model just described takes many facets of current destination marketing research into consideration, and organizes its findings and

suggestions into an easily implemented destination marketing process. To further illustrate the usefulness of this new model, a case study of Gunnison County, Colorado will subsequently be conducted. By working through the steps discussed in the model, readers may gain a better understanding of how theoretical marketing concepts can be applied in a real-life situation.

Case Study: Gunnison County, Colorado

The following case study of Gunnison County, Colorado, is included to demonstrate the value and usefulness of the proposed comprehensive rural destination marketing model. To begin, the area will be generally described and the marketing efforts undertaken by the Gunnison-Crested Butte Tourism Association will be evaluated in light of the concepts inherent in the model. Then, suggestions will be made regarding how destination marketers for Gunnison County can effectively utilize research on destination personalities, the Social Identity Theory, and Customer-Brand Identification when segmenting the market and communicating with potential tourists. These methods may be generalized for use by other rural destinations that wish to reevaluate their current marketing practices or to design an entirely new marketing plan.

Area Overview

According to its website, Gunnison County covers a swath of land in Southwest Colorado of approximately 3,239 square miles in area and is anchored by the county seat of Gunnison in the south and the vibrant village of Crested Butte 30 miles north. These mountain towns rest at elevations of 7,703 feet (Gunnison) and 8,885 feet (Crested Butte), with populations around 5,300 people and 1,530 people, respectfully. Located 201 miles southwest of Denver, 126 miles southeast of Grand Junction, and with 78% of the land publicly owned, Gunnison County is the epitome of a rural destination.

Colorado.com describes Gunnison as "a home on the range surrounded by ski areas and a national park… you don't feel like a tourist so much as somebody visiting the folks," and the small town truly does provide access to innumerable recreational, historical, and cultural attractions. Crested Butte, on the other hand, has been described as "big, open and free of crowds… [this] quaint 1880s historic mining town and Registered National Historic District, is often called 'Colorado's last great ski town.'" (Colorado, 2012). In fact, Crested Butte is best known for nearby Crested Butte Mountain Resort ski area, which draws both beginners and athletes seeking extreme terrain. When the snow melts, Crested Butte has been hailed as the "Wildflower Capital of Colorado," lending to its natural, pristine beauty.

Because tourism is a major source of economic input and essentially supports the existence of the two towns, it is imperative that destination marketers are successful in promoting the area in an appealing way to the correct target market(s). The Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model proposed in this paper provides a framework to make this task easier and more beneficial.

The DMO: The Gunnison-Crested Butte Tourism Association

As described by the Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model, there are several challenges related to destination marketing that can be best addressed through the use of a DMO. Recall that these groups should aim to capture the essence of diverse stakeholders when creating a marketing plan for the rural area by considering the competing agendas of those stakeholders. This attention will help to ensure authenticity, cooperation, and receptiveness of the destination brand among significant parties. With fragmentation of the rural tourism industry making cohesive marketing remarkably difficult, the establishment of a destination marketing

organization to take on broad marketing responsibilities is essential in the contemporary tourism industry.

For Gunnison County, the functional role of the GMO was assumed by the Gunnison Crested Butte Tourism Association (GCBTA), created in 2004. This non-profit organization is a contractor for the Local Marketing District governed by the Gunnison County Board of Commissioners, and is entirely funded by a single grant and a Local Marketing District 4% tax on overnight lodging (Gunnison Crested Butte Tourism Association, 2012). This organization employs two full-time staff members overseen by a volunteer board of directors and advisory board of directors. These directors and staff members are local stakeholders themselves, representing important aspects of the tourism industry and other industries.

As previously discussed, one of the primary goals of a DMO should be to diminish the negative effects of fragmentation in the tourism industry. The GCBTA partially meets this goal, with the involvement of both private and public sector representatives in the governance of the organization indicating that the concerns of many various stakeholders are being heard and addressed. This is not to say, however, that fragmentation is not still an acute problem for the Gunnison County tourism industry. In their evaluation of the GCBTA's work, the Radcliffe Company (2011) noted a palpable dissonance and competitiveness between the north and south ends of the valley (Crested Butte and Gunnison, respectfully). In their own words:

> There appears to be some skepticism from stakeholders on both ends of the Gunnison
> Valley that somehow the efforts of the GCBTA are oriented for the betterment of the
> other and vice versa. For the long range competitive success in Gunnison County,
> industry stakeholders must recognize that the real competition is not 'down' or 'up' the

valley, rather it is the other mountain resort areas of Colorado and Utah. (Radcliffe

Company, 2011)

So, while the towns within the county naturally seek to promote themselves and their interests,

exclusively, the GCBTA must be vigilant in combating inbred fragmentation. To accomplish

this, the GCBTA must continue to treat the county as *one destination*, building its brand as such.

The GCBTA may find that using the Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model will

help them identify that singular identity.

Identifying Assets

Part of Gunnison County's underlying fragmentation can be attributed to the diverse

array of assets present in the valley and the variety of activities and stakeholders associated with

those assets. However, these seemingly disassociated assets, considered as a whole, create the

area's perceived destination personality. Thus, one major area where the Comprehensive Rural

Destination Marketing Model could assist the GCBTA in overcoming unproductive

fragmentation is its emphasis on identifying and studying all of the assets, both tangible and

intangible, at the marketers' disposal. By carefully listing and analyzing Gunnison County's

assets, the GCBTA may uncover common traits that link them together and create an

overarching image that may be appealing to certain target markets. In carrying out this process,

destination marketers gain the understanding they need to capture the underlying essence, or

personality, their place-product emits, which is then used in target market segmentation,

destination branding, and destination promotion.

Tangible assets. As proposed by the Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing

Model, tangible assets include naturally occurring geography, weather, and wildlife, as well as

notable built structures and institutions. In this regard, Gunnison County is well-endowed at

both the north and south ends of the valley. The tangible assets found here fall into two

subcategories: (a) naturally occurring tangible assets, and (b) structural tangible assets.

Natural occurring tangible assets. Gunnison County is home to several varieties of

naturally occurring tangible assets, which help differentiate the area from other, particularly

urban, areas of the world. These natural assets, including (a) weather, (b) land and geography,

(c) water, and (d) wildlife are appealing place-product attributes for many target market groups,

and undoubtedly contribute to the area's overall destination personality.

Weather. Weather, in addition to being one of the first things tourists notice and talk

about, is a vital component of the destination personality. While rainy weather coincides with a

gloomy personality, the opposite is likely true for Gunnison County, as the weather is truly an

attractive quality for the area. In fact, although Gunnison is often touted as the coldest town in

the continental United States (Gunnison Country Times, 2011), the County's weather is quite

conducive to comfortable outdoor recreation as seen by the average seasonal high and low

temperatures:

- Average January range, Gunnison: -7°F – 25°F

- Average July range, Gunnison: 43°F – 79°F

- Average January range, Crested Butte: -8°F – 26°F

- Average July range, Crested Butte: 39°F – 75°F. (The Weather Channel, 2012)

Though admittedly chilly in the winter, the area is noted for its dry, mild summers and year-

round sunshine. The yearly average levels of precipitation speak to these pleasant conditions:

- Average yearly precipitation, Gunnison: 10.6 in

- Average yearly precipitation, Crested Butte: 24.55 in (The Weather Channel, 2012)

These favorable weather conditions are valuable to tourists seeking an outdoor vacation.

Land and geography. Gunnison County's gorgeous weather is complemented by a stunning environment in which to enjoy it. The GCBTA's 2011 Vacation Planner (a document published yearly in both an online and print version to assist prospective tourists as they make their travel plans) notes that 85% of Gunnison County is public land, providing plenty of space for tourists and locals alike to spread out and enjoy nature. Immersed in the Rocky Mountains, the Gunnison Valley is surrounded by innumerable areas of interest including:

- The Gunnison National Forest,

- The West Elk Wilderness Area,

- The Saguache Range,

- Mt. Crested Butte,

- Hartman Rocks Recreation Area,

- The Black Canyon of the Gunnison,

- Taylor Canyon, and

- The Dillon Pinnacles (Gunnisoncrestedbutte.com, 2012)

Not only do these areas offer spectacular visual interest, but they also allow for activities ranging from cross-country and downhill skiing, to mountain biking, to hiking, to rock climbing, to four-wheeling and beyond.

The landscape of a rural destination is certainly important, but it would be far less valuable to the tourism industry if it was inaccessible. Thus, the presence of well-maintained parks and trials seems to be a crucial component of the rural place-product, linking tourists to the

places they wish to see and the activities they wish to partake in. Gunnison County has, according to the GCBTA's 2011 Vacation Planner, "too many trails and too varied to mention" (p.3) and this likely is no exaggeration given the vast sprawl of publicly accessible land and wilderness areas. If the rugged, isolated, and pristine nature of the land and geographic points of interest present in Gunnison County are appropriately captured, as through the development of a destination personality, and communicated to interested target markets, competitive advantage may be achieved.

Water. Equally as significant as the land assets are the water assets found in Gunnison County. The GCBTA (2011) reports that there are 20,000 acres of fishable waters in the country, as well as 3,900 miles of fishable streams. The combination of fast-moving mountain streams and rivers with Colorado's largest body of water (Blue Mesa Reservoir) and Taylor Reservoir provides for both world-class fly fishing as well as boat fishing. These waters encourage activity in other areas as well, such as:

- kayaking,
- rafting,
- windsailing,
- waterskiing,
- ice skating, and
- ice fishing

Again, as with the land, the water in Gunnison County is an asset to the tourism industry not only for its aesthetic value, but for the variety of active outlets it supports that are of interest to a variety of target markets as well.

Wildlife. For many outdoor-oriented tourists, the presence of wildlife is an important and exciting aspect of a rural vacation. Gunnison County fulfills this desire with big game species such as moose, Rocky Mountain goats, bighorn sheep, pronghorn antelope, elk, and deer abundant in the area (Gunnison Crested Butte Tourism Association, 2011). Additionally, the region is home to innumerable species of smaller mammals, insects, reptiles, amphibians, fish, and birds, including the threatened Gunnison Sage-Grouse. Beyond the animal populations, the mountainous habitat supports verdant sagebrush, aspen, cottonwood, and spruce growth, as well as a wide variety of both desert and mountain plants and fungi. In fact, Crested Butte is heralded as "The Wildflower Capital of Colorado." The distinct biomes of Gunnison and Crested Butte, and the unique life forms they support, are conducive to wildlife related activities such as hunting, fishing, photography, and foraging. Once more, the ability to support such activities is highly valuable, and adds to the area's personality.

Structural tangible assets. In addition to naturally occurring tangible assets, structural tangible assets also contribute to the destination personality and serve to enhance the value proposition of the place-product. These man-made assets allow for different varieties of vacation activities, and the institutions they house contribute to the community in many ways.   In the case of Gunnison, a few of these structural assets include (a) Western State College, and (b) Crested Butte Mountain Resort.

Western State College. Founded in 1901 and located in Gunnison, Western State College of Colorado maintains a large presence in the county, both physically and otherwise. Western's enrollment is regularly around 2,400 students which, in a town of about 5,000 citizens, represents a large proportion of the population (Western State College of Colorado, 2012). The College provides facilities and programs for public use, including its track and playing fields, trail

system, and swimming pool, as well as cultural outlets such as a movie theater, auditorium, outdoor stage, and Shakespearian theater. The presence of an institution of higher education is valuable to the tourism industry, specifically, because it draws families and individuals to the area as they take college tours, participate in athletic or artistic camps, and/or attend events at the college.

Crested Butte Mountain Resort. The undisputed driver of winter tourism in Gunnison County is Crested Butte Mountain Resort (CBMR), located just north of Crested Butte in the town of Mt. Crested Butte. While an entity in and of itself, CBMR is a major asset to the county's tourism industry, drawing in tourists that spend time and money on other activities and businesses when they aren't skiing. This ski area includes both easy and extreme terrain, appealing to skiers and boarders of all levels. While beginners can experience the same mountain as world class athletes, the slopes are not crowded due to the relatively remote location of the resort (Crested Butte Mountain Resort, 2012). The GCBTA should note the appeal of an uncrowded and unpretentious ski area, especially since this image is consistent with the area's other open, uncrowded spaces.

The tangible assets described above are a small sampling of what Gunnison County has to offer to tourists. Obviously, the grand majority of the assets are geared towards outdoor recreation and adventure; this fact enables a high activity level for both tourists and locals, and seems to lend itself well to a laid-back, rugged, and exciting destination personality. In addition, the area provides plentiful structural indoor and outdoor attractions that enhance the destination personality and value package. However, the tangible assets possessed by an area are only half of the story; a region's intangible assets provide additional value and can act as the glue that cements the overall destination personality together.

Intangible assets. Because the tangible assets found in rural communities are often somewhat interchangeable (especially within competitive sets, such as the mountain resort towns in Colorado and Utah), destination marketers must give attention to their locale's intangible assets if they aim to differentiate themselves. Indeed, the intangible assets in an area are truly what give it its unique flavor. In the case of Gunnison County, three major types of intangible assets have been identified: (a) history and heritage, (b) festivals and events, and (c) locals.

History and heritage. Like many Colorado mountain towns, Gunnison and Crested Butte have their roots in the mining booms of the 1860s-1880s. While the area was originally inhabited by Ute Indians, miners and ranchers rapidly settled the area, especially after the arrival of the railroads (Gunnison Country Chamber of Commerce, 2012). Although a mining bust in 1883 virtually eradicated that industry from Gunnison, ranching quickly filled the void. Thus, the Gunnison cattle ranching and hay production industry was born, and it remains a key component of the economy and culture to this day. Consequentially, unlike many other areas that have been developed purely as "resort" destinations, ranching is still a way of life in Gunnison, and "provides open space that is being gobbled up in many other mountain valleys at an astronomical rate, threatening the very existence of the West" (Oberosler, n.d., p.19). The continuation of ranching in the Gunnison Valley not only connects the area to its past and protects open space from cookie-cutter development, but is also lends to a hard-working, no-fuss, pragmatic personality.

As with Gunnison, Crested Butte was established on a foundation of mining, and the addition of the railroad enabled the coal industry to rapidly develop. A true melting-pot, Crested Butte became home to Scottish, German, Irish, Greek, Italian, Eastern European, and Slavic immigrants, who were able to continue mining high-demand coal when other silver-based

mountain towns crashed. When the coal mine finally did close in 1952, Crested Butte experienced a drastic change in its economy and culture; Crested Butte Mountain was first opened as a ski area in 1962, propelling the entire county into the tourism industry (Crested Butte, 2012). Crested Butte's historic roots remain prominent, and with a well-maintained, authentic historic downtown, and a population that remembers – and talks about – its ancestors, visiting Crested Butte is almost like stepping back in time. Perhaps more importantly is the long-standing openness Crested Butte emits; while there were undoubtedly clashes along the way, Crested Butte began as a very small community comprised of dozens of distinct ethnicities, cultures, and traditions. Crested Butte's diverse composition surely led to its notable eclectic, bold, and willing-to-try-anything personality.

Festivals and events. One of the most memorable ways a community can express its heritage and its culture is through the organization of festivals and events. These endeavors bring locals and tourists together and allow for the expression of inherent destination personality traits. In Gunnison, the most notable event is Cattlemen's Days, a week-long summer festival dedicated to rodeos, 4-H projects, animal auctions, a carnival, cowboy poetry, a parade, western dances, and all things "cowboy." While such an event could verge on cliché, Cattlemen's Days is actually an authentic experience, occurring yearly since 1900, and showcases local livestock, local rodeo athletes, local art and entertainment, and local children's projects. In other words, Cattlemen's Days is a reflection of a real, not a manufactured, culture.

Another growing event in Gunnison is the Rage in the Sage Weekend taking place in late May. This is a weekend dedicated to daring super-athletes, and consists of the Half-Growler and Full-Growler mountain bike races, the 24 Hours of Gunnison Glory rock climbing marathon, The Pedal to Paradise Gran Fondo bike ride, and the Sageburner 25k and 50k trial running races.

These events culminate in a downtown after party featuring food prepared by local chefs and local entertainment. While catering to two entirely different demographic groups, both Cattlemen's Days and The Rage in the Sage emphasize similar underlying characteristics: energy, ruggedness, adventurousness, and strength.

Crested Butte also has its fair share of festivals and events, this time closely tied to the turning of the seasons. Flaushink is a town-wide celebration (accompanied by quite a bit of revelry) taking place in spring to "flush out" winter and say good-bye to a great ski season. Summer is jam-packed with zany activities such as Fat Tire Bike Week (featuring serious bike races, laid-back townie-bike races, and, of course, beer), an old-fashioned Fourth of July Parade, and an annual Wildflower Festival. Bringing in the next ski season, Vinotok is a vibrant fall celebration. What's notable about Crested Butte's events is that they are off-beat and unexpected. Crested Butte welcomes visitors to partake, as long as they are willing to get a little crazy and act a little silly. As such, Crested Butte's festivals impart a care-free and fun-loving attitude like no other.

Locals. History and festivals are surely significant intangible assets, but the people living in an area are obviously the most direct contributors to its overall destination personality. After all, it is the people who maintain and use the tangible assets, remember and preserve their heritage, and establish and participate in the festivals. Moreover, locals unavoidably interact with tourists, serving as their hosts, wait staff, guides, shop clerks, and co-participants in many activities. The locals, in short, put a face to the destination personality, and project it in the most easily recognizable way.

Because demographics often relate to psychodemographics and personality, marketers should consider population statistics when honing Gunnison County's destination personality. According the 2010 U.S. Census, Gunnison County's relative composition is as follows:

- 8.8% of Gunnison County's population is over 65 compared to the 10.9% state average.

- 92.4% of Gunnison County's population is white vs. 81.3% state average

- 93.1% of Gunnison County's citizens over 25 graduated from high school compared to 89.3% state wide

- 45.8% of Gunnison County's population over 25 earned a bachelor's degree or higher compared to Colorado's average of 35.9%.

- The median household income is $49,365 in Gunnison County and $56,456 in Colorado as a whole.

Demographics can only go so far, however, and it's more important to look at the lifestyle of its people. When asked what their perfect days spent in the Gunnison Valley would entail, local interviewees responded fairly consistently: recreating (mountain biking and skiing most prominently, but also hiking, trail-running, snowboarding, Nordic skiing, rafting, and rock climbing), spending time with friends and family, and enjoying food and drinks at local restaurants. Many of the respondents characterized the community as warm, welcoming, friendly and laid-back with a definite "small town" feel (Gunnison Crested Butte Tourism Association, 2012). These responses paint a picture of Gunnison County locals that may differ from those living in its competitors' towns; they are all about exerting themselves and definitely work-to-live, though are at the same time relaxed and open-minded.

The intangible assets in Gunnison and Crested Butte are noteworthy in many ways and help the County to stand apart from its competitors. The combination of a unique history, one-of-a-kind festivals, and active and friendly locals may help convince tourists to choose Gunnison County over other mountain towns and ski resorts. More importantly, though, exploring the nature of these naturally occurring intangible assets illuminates the personality characteristics that can be used in target market selection, branding, and promotion.

Destination Personality

After evaluating a selection of the tangible and intangible assets possessed by Gunnison and Crested Butte, some dichotomies become evident. Overall, the county's population values active and healthy lifestyles, as well as spending time outdoors and with their family and friends, but the general outlooks on life are somewhat different between the north and south ends of the valley. In short, Gunnison and Crested Butte, despite having access to similar tangible assets and being located a mere 30 miles apart, appear to have diverging destination personalities. Gunnison, it seems, has a stronger focus on pragmatism and getting down to work before having fun, while Crested Butte displays a more happy-go-lucky attitude. These distinct personalities further contribute to the problems of fragmentation within the tourism industry, and make destination marketing even more challenging. However, it is the GCBTA's charge to identify county-wide personality traits, match these traits with appropriate target market populations, and effectively promote the Gunnison-Crested Butte brand, *as a whole*, to these groups.

Continuing to follow the Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model provides direction for meeting this goal. According to the model, the GCBTA must narrow down the broad range of personality traits found in Gunnison County and come up with a concise underlying destination personality for the entire area. With two primary destination

personalities, finding the common thread is no easy task. However, after taking a careful look at the tangible and intangible assets, a few commonalities do emerge. Most obviously, both communities are highly active due to the presence of vast public open spaces, pleasant weather, and strong heritage industries (ranching, mining, and skiing). Whether ranching or recreating, locals do not sit still for long, and tourists are drawn to the area in hopes of experiencing these activities for themselves. Both communities are also known for their friendliness and openness; again this idea is not only supported by caring locals, but by the inclusive festivals and even the recreation outlets that are available for individuals with all levels of experience. Finally, and most importantly, both communities are *real* in their own ways. Gunnison and Crested Butte are home to families who have inhabited the area for generations, and historical relationships, industries, celebrations, and ways of life remain strong. In essence, neither the infrastructure nor the culture is contrived in Gunnison County, and tourists will certainly recognize the difference as compared to more planned destinations.

The GCBTA did do some leg work in the area of determining Gunnison County's destination personality. However, the processes they used lacked several important steps identified in the Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model, leading them to miss important aspects of the destination personality. On their website, for instance, the GCBTA alludes to Gunnison County's personality with key words including: unpretentious, friendly, authentic, unspoiled, genuine, charming, homey, colorful, warm, welcoming, and laid-back. While these terms recognize the realness of Gunnison County as well as the friendly attitude of its population, there is little mention of the third key personality trait: active. Ignoring this trait may have resulted from failing to compile a complete list of the tangible and intangible assets in Gunnison County, or from actively ignoring certain assets in their evaluation of the area. For

example, there seems to be little consideration given to more challenging or active assets such as the expansive extreme skiing available at CBMR, the intense mountain bike trails at Hartman Rocks, or the rambunctious spirit of Crested Butte's seasonal festivals.

Although the active trait is perhaps implied through the activities the GCBTA provides information about and some of the prominent images used throughout the website and other marketing materials, its significance should be highlighted, not downplayed, in the personality of Gunnison County. In other words, if Gunnison County was a person, (s)he would be an athlete, without a doubt, and being a true athlete is as much about attitude as it is about activity. Using the Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model, the GCBTA would be able to see that the active/rugged/adventurous portion of Gunnison County's destination personality is obviously derived from a large portion of the area's assets and therefore deserves at least as much emphasis as the friendly and authentic aspects of the personality.

Target Market Selection

As depicted in the Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model, after accurately defining Gunnison County's destination personality (active, friendly, and real), destination marketers can begin segmenting the market of potential customers and defining the parameters of the target market(s). Following the concepts described by the Social Identity Theory and Customer-Brand Identification, the target market(s) selected by the GCBTA should be similar in personality to the Gunnison County personality. Ultimately, the GCBTA needs to select target market(s) that are big enough to be viable and worth expending effort and resources on, that are able and willing to travel, that will appreciate the given place-product that Gunnison County has to offer, and that display personalities congruent with that of the destination.

Current Gunnison-Crested Butte markets. In a branding study conducted by Strategy First Partners for Gunnison County (2003), current visitors were interviewed to help the County establish a profile for the kinds of tourists that find the Gunnison Valley attractive and worthy of visiting. This study chose to segment the tourism market into summer and winter travelers, a tactic that makes sense considering that the accessibility to certain tangible and intangible assets changes with the seasons. However, these segments (discussed below) are very broad and do not identify specific target markets as the Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model suggests. As such, it seems that the GCBTA could save resources and find more success by following the proposed model and directing its marketing activities to more narrowly defined target markets.

Current winter markets. In the winter, two main user groups were identified by Strategy First Partners (2003): Colorado residents and non-Colorado residents. These groups were then evaluated based on education level, income, age, marital status, children, the number of winter mountain trips taken per year, and who the tourists were currently traveling with. Overall, the study indicated that visitors from within Colorado were younger, had lower incomes, and took several short winter mountain trips per year. Conversely, out-of-state travelers formed a slightly older population with higher incomes; they also were more likely to travel with their families and to take a single winter mountain trip per year.

In addition to researching the demographics of current travelers, the study also asked questions pertaining to attitudes and behaviors related to winter mountain vacations. It was found that tourists from Colorado agreed more with statements such as "I like to work hard and play hard," "I like to push myself physically when I'm on vacation," and "I like to be in a ski/snowboarding area with a youthful attitude and high energy atmosphere" than their out-of-

state counterparts. What's more, the out-of-state tourists related more closely to the phrases "I believe that ski/boarding vacations are an important time to reconnect with family and loved ones," "I'm an intermediate skier/boarder and I want to ski/board in a place that caters to my needs, not just the experts," and "When I go on a winter vacation it's all about relaxation to me." Even though both of these user groups were drawn to the same tangible asset (Crested Butte Mountain Resort), the two user groups clearly had dissimilar views of what that vacation should look like and the things they would do while there; in short, the destination personalities that they were looking for were as different as their own personalities appeared to be.

Current summer markets. The Strategy First Partners study (2003) also evaluated summer tourists in a similar fashion, by further segmenting the group into Colorado tourists and out-of-state tourists. Overall, both groups were less educated than their winter counterparts. Interestingly, other than income levels (higher for out of state than in-state), the demographics for both groups were very similar. Also, while winter Colorado tourists took several mountain vacations each season, both Colorado and out-of-state tourists tended to take a single, longer mountain trip during the summer months. Additionally, the study indicates that the factors that were least important, on average, when the consumers considered summer mountain vacations included physically demanding hikes, demanding mountain biking terrain, and pushing themselves vigorously. These findings point to an apparent disconnect between the current markets and Gunnison County's tangible and intangible assets and their resultant active, friendly, and real personality. Such disconnect suggests that other, more congruent target markets should be identified.

While this tourist analysis conducted by Strategy First Partners (2003) provides information about traveler groups who already choose to visit Gunnison County, the GCBTA

should not limit itself solely to these broad segments when developing its marketing plan. Rather, more specific target marketing must occur, in light of the identified destination personality; although the types of broad tourist segments the GCBTA already identified are a good starting point, the Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model suggests that more effective branding and promotions can only occur if target markets are narrowly defined and relate directly to the identified destination personality.

Target market selection. Following the Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model, it is imperative that narrow target markets are selected based on their levels of compatibility with the destination personality and other typical target market selection criteria. Thus, while the target market(s) eventually selected must be large enough, have enough economic power to provide the County with profits, this target market selection process also utilizes personality traits to more closely define the most viable target markets. By more closely adhering to the Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model, the GCBTA would be able to clearly see what types of personality traits they should look for, helping them to narrow the parameters of the target markets.

Because one of the main components of Gunnison County's personality is athleticism and activeness, target markets exhibiting similar tendencies should be identified. During the winter, this appears to be taking place, as Colorado residents are drawn to the area to partake in extreme skiing (as well as other winter recreational activities) in a laid-back and vibrant atmosphere. Thus, the GCBTA should continue pursuing its current target market of Colorado skiers/boarders, though the parameters of this group could be further refined to describe young Colorado singles or couples with intermediate to advanced skiing/boarding abilities. Since the personalities of this target market correlate well with the personality of the place-product that is

being sold, members are more likely to pay attention to communications from the GCBTA, actually visit Gunnison County, and have an enjoyable experience while there. This customer satisfaction is essential in order to ensure return travel; additionally, satisfied customers are more likely to recommend the area to others, thereby providing free marketing for the County.

The current winter target market of out-of-state families is significant, but as illuminated through the use of the Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model, this group's personality does not correlate with that of Gunnison County's quite as well as the Colorado skier/boarder target market. While they are likely satisfied with some of the tangible assets the County has to offer (since some beginner to intermediate-level activities are available),the study indicated that they do not generally wish to engage in recreation beyond skiing/boarding and would rather prefer shopping while on vacation; though Gunnison County has much to offer in the way of recreation, its shopping is somewhat limited and lacks sophistication, therefore probably not meeting the standards of this target market.   Furthermore, even though these families appreciate the friendliness that the area projects when they are attempting to relax and reconnect with their families, this user group is less likely to appreciate the athleticism or the authentic culture (which may be too rowdy for a family vacation) of Gunnison County. While it would be unfair and unwise to turn away members of this target market, resources may be better spent on attracting other user groups. As such, the GCBTA should focus less of its attention on the current out-of-state winter family vacation market, instead putting more of its effort towards attracting a greater percentage of the refined Colorado skier/boarder target market previously discussed.

The summer season represents a great opportunity for Gunnison County to expand its tourism industry. In order to fully take advantage of this opportunity, the GCBTA should closely

examine the current summer user groups and compare their personalities to the Gunnison County personality. Discrepancies between the personalities could then point to other possible markets that may be explored.

Much like the out-of-state winter family vacation target market, both the summer Colorado user group and the summer out-of-state user groups generally appreciated the friendly atmosphere and some of the easier assets and activities available in Gunnison County, but they were not drawn to the athletic or real aspects of the destination personality. Again, while these groups should not be *discouraged* from visiting Gunnison, the GCBTA may find more success by reaching out to other target markets for the summer season.

Following the Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model, the GCBTA should therefore look for target markets that are athletic, friendly, and real themselves. To that end, the GCBTA should identify another group that takes full advantage of all three aspects of Gunnison County's personality, this time being avid summer athletes rather than skiers/boarders. This target market, displaying active, real, and friendly personalities themselves should participate in summer recreation such as mountain biking, camping, hiking, rafting, fishing, kayaking, trail running etc. Representing a younger population and typically traveling as couples or with friends, this target market would also be more apt to enjoy the off-beat summer festivals that Gunnison County has to offer than the current summer travelers. While young recreational athletes from out-of-state may also be a compatible summer target market according to the Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model, it may be more difficult and costly to reach such a widespread group. At least to begin, therefore, the GCBTA should focus its efforts on Colorado residents; they may even find that there is significant overlap between the summer and

winter target markets (since many avid recreational athletes participate in both summer and winter activities), and efforts could be made to entice return visits during opposite seasons.

While there may be other viable target markets that the GCBTA could explore, beginning with a near-home target markets of young, recreational athletes from Colorado may be less costly and easier to access than other groups. What's more, efforts should be made to ensure that all visitors to the County, whether or not they fall into the target market, have as valuable of a vacation experience as possible, since new prospective tourists often hear about a destination by previous travelers to that area. However, even though other tourists should not be disrespected, the GCBTA does not need to dedicate resources to actively marketing towards them since they are less viable than the target markets identified with the Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model.

Moving forward with the model, it is essential that a single, comprehensive destination brand is developed that communicates the value of Gunnison County and its personality, regardless of the variety of promotion that is eventually used. This brand must speak to what the members of the target market commonly value, should accurately reflect the personality that the destination and the target market shares, and should be consistent in all communications.

The Gunnison-Crested Butte Brand

The Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model makes clear that only after compatible and viable target markets are identified can a destination brand be created. To create a brand, destination marketers take the value proposition, capture its essence, and project it to the target market through the use of imagery, language, logos, slogans, and graphics. Each of these elements should speak directly to the identified target markets and, according to the

Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model, should incorporate aspects of the destination personality.

As elaborated on above, Gunnison County's identified target markets value not only a chance to recreate in physically challenging conditions, but also a friendly, authentic environment and experience. To successfully attract the attention of the target markets, and eventually persuade them to visit the destination, the brand must encompass all of these elements in an appealing and memorable way. As part of the destination marketing process, the current Gunnison-Crested Butte brand will be evaluated based on these criteria, followed by recommendation as to how the brand could better communicate value to the target markets

Evaluating the Gunnison-Crested Butte brand. According to the GCBTA's website, Gunnison County's value proposition is as follows: "Through life-enriching adventures and inspirational, authentic experiences, Gunnison County delivers lasting memories unlike any other vacation destination." This statement appeals to the current tourist segments' desires to reconnect with their family and friends while partaking in outdoor activities and experiencing a different, genuine culture. However, because Gunnison County's destination personality is athletic, friendly, and real, and personality congruence is an important factor in target marketing, the target markets of young recreational athletes and the values *they* hold should be addressed in the branding instead.

These markets are not currently being reached, since the personality trait of athleticism is downplayed in the GCBTA's value proposition and subsequent Gunnison-Crested Butte brand. Therefore, the value proposition should be altered to align more closely with what these people care about. Using the GCBTA's current value proposition as a starting point, a revised value proposition could read: "Through *invigorating* adventures and *lively*, authentic experiences,

Gunnison County delivers lasting memories unlike any other vacation destination." By altering a few words, the value proposition takes on more youthful, less family-oriented values, and emphasizes Gunnison County's ability to physically challenge visitors in an upbeat atmosphere. As with the value proposition itself, the imagery, language, logo, slogan, and graphics used in branding the altered value proposition must also be readdressed.

Imagery. As the rural destination marketing model proposed in this paper suggests, much of a rural destination's value comes from its tangible assets, which not only enable various activities, but also indirectly contribute to the marketable destination personality. The GCBTA makes good use of imagery related to its tangible assets to communicate the value inherent in the Gunnison-Crested Butte brand. For example, all of their promotional collateral utilizes bold, high quality photos of area assets. Such images make it clear that Gunnison County not only has many of the activities the target markets are looking for, but also speak directly to the adventure, inspiration, and authenticity the GCBTA aims to project.

Had the Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model been used in the development of the Gunnison-Crested Butte brand, the imagery used to convey brand value would be slightly different. Because the place-product does not change in light of the change in target markets, the imagery used to communicate the value proposition could remain largely the same as that which is currently used by the GCBTA. In other words, bold, high-quality photos of the area's tangible assets should still be used, since they already communicate the possibilities for adventure. However, an even greater emphasis could be placed on the rugged and eccentric nature of the area. For example, photos of young adults taking on a challenging mountain bike trail could replace the picture of children biking on a flat path, and more pictures of noteworthy festivals such as the Rage in the Sage and Fat Tire Bike Week could be incorporated into

promotional materials. These types of images would still capture the beauty of the area and the opportunities that it provides, but would align more closely with a faster-paced, more invigorating destination brand and vacation experience.

Language. Even though a picture may be worth a thousand words, the language used to describe a brand is still significant, and more concretely communicates the value proposition to the target markets. The GCBTA regularly utilizes key words in its marketing efforts, as seen in a slideshow showcased on its website. This slideshow overlays key words (such as "unpretentious" and "pristine") the GCBTA wishes to associate with its brand on top of the types of imagery described above. These words, especially when viewed in combination with vivid imagery, clearly relate to the value proposition and distinctly tell the target market that Gunnison County is a good place to reconnect with family in a beautiful and authentic environment.

As with the imagery, not all of the language currently used by the GCBTA to describe the Gunnison-Crested Butte brand would have to be changed to express the value proposition that was arrived at using the Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model. After all, two of the personality traits (friendly and authentic) that appeal to the current target markets are also closely associated with the new target markets. Thus, words such as "Pristine," "Unpretentious," "Friendly," and "Rejuvenating" can still be incorporated into marketing materials. At the same time, the GCBTA should emphasize the athleticism that is integral to its new value proposition, with words like "Invigorating," "Revitalize," and "Physical." Active language such as this may help the target markets identify the Gunnison-Crested Butte brand as being more exciting and challenging than competitor destinations.

Logo. When people think of brands they typically imagine the logos that marketers design to concisely capture the essence of the value proposition in an easily recognizable format.

The GCBTA has created such a logo wherein "Gunnison" and "Crested Butte" are typed above the outline of a mountain ridge, with a bright orange and yellow sun between the two town names. In the center of the sun is a snowflake, and below the mountains the slogan (discussed below) appears. Logos cannot be extremely elaborate, yet the GCBTA's logo is still able to communicate a few things about the value proposition to the target markets: the morphing of the sun with the snowflake indicates that Gunnison County is a year-round vacation destination, and the mountain outline alludes to adventure and inspirational scenery. Additionally, the bright orange and yellow coloration is eye-catching and memorable, and the use of "Gunnison" and "Crested Butte" in the logo makes it clear that the County as a whole is a single, united destination. In this case, the logo focuses primarily on the tangible assets present in Gunnison County, and does not say much about the other aspects of the value proposition or the destination personality.

Because the Gunnison-Crested Butte brand is currently appealing to market segments that value outdoor recreation in much the same way that the new target markets identified with the Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model do (albeit for different reasons and at different levels), the GCBTA's present logo, which incorporates mountain imagery and alludes to year-round recreation possibilities, remains viable under the new value proposition.

Slogan. As seen on the Gunnison-Crested Butte brand's logo, the trade-marked slogan, "Colorado – Pure & Simple," is a short statement that aims to capture the essence of the overall value proposition. While the phrase initially seems fairly basic, there is actually much more to the slogan than meets the eye. For example, by using "Colorado" in the slogan, the GCBTA calls on what people already know or think about the state as a whole, even if they have never heard of Gunnison County. Because Colorado is known for its great outdoor spaces, pleasant

weather, and recreational opportunities, people who hear this slogan can instantly assume that these attributes will be present in Gunnison County as well, appealing to the value the target markets place on adventure. When taken as a whole, "Colorado – Pure & Simple" seems to say that the Gunnison-Crested Butte brand possesses all of the typical, Colorado features (primarily tangible assets and the activities they provide for), but in a *more* beautiful, *more* authentic manner.

Using the Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model makes it clear that different values should be captured in the Gunnison-Crested Butte brand's slogan that are more directly related to athleticism. This new slogan should aim to better capture Gunnison County's opportunities for challenging, unique adventures, and should take the values and culture of the target markets into consideration. Because the primary target markets already live in Colorado, that term should be eliminated from the slogan; Colorado residents already know what Colorado is about, and instead of telling them that Gunnison County is more of what they already experience in their home state, the slogan should instead differentiate the destination brand from other, competing Colorado mountain towns.

Graphics. A final way that the GCBTA communicates its value proposition with branding is through the use of recognizable graphics. Beginning in 2009, the GCBTA adopted the Legs advertising campaign, which incorporates sketched human characters that, though varied, always have very long legs and no faces. The characters appear on various promotional materials, and are always engaging in some recreational activity, such as hiking, fly fishing, mountain biking, or skiing. The characters project the value proposition by illustrating the types of adventures the target market could have if only they made the trip to Gunnison County.

Once again, the use of the Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model indicates that graphics should be rugged and athletic to communicate the values held by the newly identified target markets. Because the target markets still appreciate friendliness, it is not necessary for the GCBTA to completely eliminate its friendly cartoon Legs campaign. However, the characters themselves should be less family-oriented and should rather depict more extreme athletic activities.

The combination of memorable imagery, language, and a logo, slogan and graphics says a lot about the Gunnison-Crested Butte brand and its underlying value proposition. The GCBTA has done well to use these methods as a means of telling the current target markets that Gunnison County is a family-friendly environment where real adventures in a beautiful setting may be had. However, if the GCBTA considers its destination personality as being very athletic, and bases its target markets off of this personality as the Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model suggests, the current branding structure would have to be altered to better address the values held by the new target markets.

Promotion

Through the use of promotional materials, destination marketers are able to share the brand and its underlying values with target markets. While the brand itself should remain consistent, and its values should never be contradicted or compromised, the promotional materials themselves can be highly varied to appeal specifically to each target market. The GCBTA has made use of a diverse promotional mix to cater to very general market segments, including maintenance of its website, GunnisonCrestedButte.com, targeted print advertising, and social media marketing. Even though using multiple promotional media is generally accepted and allows for greater saturation of the market, the GCBTA would be better off focusing its

promotional efforts and budget on only those media that its target market, as identified by the

Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model, are most likely to utilize when making

travel decisions. In other words, if the GCBTA wishes to promote the adjusted, more rugged and

adventurous Gunnison-Crested Butte brand to the new target markets, it can still utilize its

website, targeted print advertising, and social media, but in different ways than are currently

employed.

Website. According to the GCBTA's 2010 Annual Report, the DMO has recently

focused on enhancing the destination's primary website, GunnisonCrestedButte.com, with a

"new look." This overhaul attempted to highlight the value of the Gunnison-Crested Butte brand

by showcasing more photos, videos, and interactive maps of the area, all of which speak to the

destination's tangible assets and adventurous, inspirational nature. At the same time, the

GCBTA included a "Meet the Locals" page, which allows prospective tourists to take a short

quiz about their travel behavior and desires and be matched, based on their answers, to a local

with similar preferences. This website is not tailored specifically to any one target market, but

rather aims to ease the information-search and decision-making processes for all potential

visitors, while projecting the general values of the Gunnison-Crested Butte brand through the

imagery, language, logo, slogan, and graphics described above.

Under the Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model, however, the website

should be tailored to directly communicate brand value to the target markets. As such, the

website could include a page dedicated to the numerous extreme sporting events and

competitions that take place in the area, and feature information about many of the super-athletes

that reside and train there. This addition would enhance the adventurous and authentic aspects of

the brand personality.

Targeted advertising. As discussed under branding, the GCBTA makes use of the Legs advertising campaign to communicate the possibility of adventure to target markets. While these images are shown on the Gunnison-Crested Butte website, they are more prominent in print advertisements.   In addition to placing its ads in targeted lifestyle magazines, the GCBTA also utilizes direct mail in its promotional efforts. These mailings communicate the brand value, and aim to remind the target markets that Gunnison County is a year-round destination worthy of visiting.

Because the Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model seeks young recreational athletes from Colorado, targeted advertising should be directed specifically to this narrow group. Therefore, the revised Legs campaign could be run in Colorado-specific publications such as Colorado Runner Magazine, The Denver Post, or 5280 Magazine. Direct mailings could also still be used, since these are highly targeted promotions.

Social media marketing. Some of the more recent promotional outlets are social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Social media is often useful for marketing purposes because it is more interactive, allows for community to be built around a brand, and feels more natural (less internally manipulated) than other forms of promotion. The GCBTA has not missed the great promotional opportunities social media provides, and has in fact made its presence prominent on all three of the above-mentioned websites. Unfortunately, the GCBTA's presence on these sites is not targeted, convoluting the brand's personality and value. Overall, the Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model could be better carried out if the social media promotions spoke directly to the target markets, as by posting pictures of rugged activities, stories about lively events and athletic competitions, and information about special deals catering specifically to the young Colorado recreational athletes.

Results

It is easy to get caught up in the details of destination marketing, whether or not the Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model was followed. DMOs, however, must keep the ultimate goals of a destination marketing campaign in mind as they carry out their tasks: to increase tourism numbers, tourist satisfaction, and the local tourism industry's profitability. Because tourism is a major component of many rural economies, its success is all the more important. As such, DMOs should have systems in place to evaluate their performance and identify deficits in the implemented marketing plan.

The GCBTA thoughtfully hired the Radcliffe Company (2011) to evaluate its performance through a study of the organizational structure and local tourism trends. The study indicates that GCBTA utilizes an unusually high percentage of its funding for marketing efforts (rather than for staff salaries and other administrative expenses). Unfortunately, while the GCBTA is judicious in its allocation of funding to marketing, there has not been an ideal return on investment in terms of increases in positive tourism behaviors. For example, the GCBTA's 2010 Annual Report indicates that 2010 Local Marketing District tax collections were down 8.7% since 2009, despite increased web traffic on the Gunnison-Crested Butte website. Additionally, while the tourism market share (among the competitive set of other Colorado and Utah mountain towns) increased slightly in 2009, this growth was preceded by four consecutive years of decreasing relative market share. These patterns indicate that the GCBTA wasted valuable resources on ineffective marketing activities.

Undoubtedly there are numerous factors that influence tourism market trends, many of which cannot be controlled by a DMO such as the GCBTA. At the same time, better results may be achieved if the GCBTA would adhere to the Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing

Model, since it entails a more thorough target market selection process, thereby enabling better brand building (because values of the target market are better understood) and more effective and efficient promotion (since promotions will be narrowly directed towards target markets that are most apt to be interested in the destination, given their compatible personalities). If the GCBTA were to follow the model proposed in this paper, targeting young recreational athletes in Colorado, they might be able to re-capture some of Gunnison County's lost market share.

Conclusions

Destination marketing is clearly a challenging and exciting area of marketing. Unlike many products and services, destination marketing requires marketers to rethink several of the processes and methodologies commonly used in the field due to the complications of fragmentation and the nature of the place-products being sold. Although destination marketing demands a somewhat different way of thinking, its mastery is of the utmost importance for many rural communities, whose economies depend on the success of their tourism industries as other, traditional industries begin to fade in the modern world.

While destination marketing has recently received an abundance of attention in marketing literature, the topic remains largely convoluted and disconnected. As such, making the leap from traditional marketing to destination marketing is very difficult and attempts to do so are often unsuccessful. Without clear direction, it is all too easy for DMOs to miss important steps in the marketing process, as when the GCBTA failed to consider the full range of its tangible and intangible assets, thereby incorrectly identifying its destination personality and potential target markets. The proposed Comprehensive Rural Destination Marketing Model uniquely contributes to the current literature by providing a much-needed framework for destination marketing. At the same time, this model aims to simplify the process for DMOs so that destination marketing may

be approached in a more appropriate and thorough manner. Importantly, this model synthesizes

disparate research and techniques, illustrating a start-to-finish process that can be easily

implemented by rural DMOs.

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