

Exploring the brand image of Shenzhen Happy Valley and Chimelong Paradise

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Abstract

Adopting Aaker's(1996) framework, this study explored the effect of Micro-blogging marketing in brand image, with the cases of two popular theme parks in Guangdong province, namely Shenzhen Happy Valley and Chimelong Paradise. Brand image is an overall perception about the brand or the product from customer's perspective. Most scholars and pioneers in marketing consider the success of certain product or service relies more on the brand image, rather than the physical characteristics or specific functions (Aaker, 1991). Brand identity is the one way to achieve company's expectation, on the basis of which, the brand image could be built. This study applied the brand assessment model, and revealed the brand images of these two theme parks on the basis of brand identity model. Results of analysis indicated that both theme parks' promotion messages emphasized their brand images. However, Happy Valley's public relations efforts were more successful than Chimelong Paradise in transferring projected brand image to its Micro-blogging fans.

Keywords: Brand image, Brand identity, Theme park, Micro-blogging

1. Introduction

Tourist attractions are one of the most important parts of tourism industry. With the development of "attention economy", tourist attractions are facing with more challenges, and "only those tourism destination with an intensive and wonderful brand image could attract tourists from far away"(Li L.L.,1999). Nowadays, theme parks have occupied an increasing portion of tourist attractions, which is also followed by the fierce competition. However, a strong brand can differentiate a product from its competitors. In order to attract more tourists, the managers of theme parks pay great effort to build unique brand images, while the operators are trying to transfer more encouraging information through new media.

Destination image plays an important role in creating tourist loyalty, and relationships with tourists must be handled proactively if they are to become lasting ones (Bigné, Sánchez, & Sánchez, 2001). Destination image is defined as the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a tourist holds about a destination (Crompton, 1979). Brand identity is defined as a unique set of brand associations that firms aim to create or maintain, whereas brand image is defined as consumer perceptions regarding a brand(Keller 2003). Brand identity and brand image are conceptualized as containing several subcomponents, with brand identity consisting of brand awareness, purpose, differentiation, and offerings (de Chernatony 1999). The purpose of brand identity is to establish a relationship between the customer and a brand which, in turn, expresses the brand's aspirations (Aaker and Keller 1996).

This study applied Aaker's(1996) brand identity model to the context of tourism promotion and theme park brand image. More specifically, this study focused on two popular theme parks selected from Guangdong province, which are similar in both geographical position and administrative background. Located in Pearl River Deltaw, these two parks only have a-100 kilometers-distance from each other. Shenzhen Happy Valley belongs to Overseas Chinese Town Group, while Chimelong Paradise subordinates to Chimelong Group. These two groups play key role in tourism industry in mainland China and provide strong backing for the parks. In terms of the facilities, they both have exciting and thrilling equipments, however, Shenzhen Happy Valley intends to build "a piece of happyland in the busy city" and Chimelong Paradise emphasizes on "to boldly go". Last but not least, these two theme parks showed equal attention in building brand image through social media. Especially in Sina Micro-blogging, both of them have hundred thousand of fans. Therefore, posts on the theme parks' official micro-blogging from "fans" were analyzed for salience of brand image in this study.

2 Review of literature

2.1 Public relations in tourism promotion

Nowadays, media products are omnipresent and impact people in many ways. As media pervades the society, it also plays a major role in tourism industry. An increasing number of public relations practitioners are using various Internet technologies to better communicate with journalists and to enhance their media relations. Besides, a good number of previous studies have found that media plays a significant role in destination image formation and travelers' intentions to visit (Govers, Go, & Kumar, 2007). Media plays an important role in

increasing awareness of a destination as well as in building the destination brand image. Therefore, media relations should be concerned in tourism industry to build positive destination brand images.

Social media, as one of most powerful online networking tools, has been integrated into social and life in nowadays. Advances in the Internet and social media are changing the ways that information about travel and its experiences are disseminated, so it plays an increasingly important role in many aspects of tourism, especially in tourism promotion (Bradbury, 2011; SoMeTourism, 2011; Think Social Media, 2012; VTIC, 2012). Many countries regard social media as an important tool to promote their tourism industries. Understanding the effects of various social media support systems is regarded as a top-priority tourism research topic (Williams, Stewart, & Larsen, 2011).

Social media platforms permit tourists to digitize and share many things, including related knowledge and real experiences about their journey far more widely and timely than in the past (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Volo, 2010; Jacobsen & Munar, 2012), from which their perception about the destination, also the destination's brand image could be found directly.

2.2 Brand image and brand identity

Tourism attraction is an important part of tourism destination. A strong brand can differentiate a product from its competitors (Lim and O'Cass, 2001) Thus, tourism attraction's brand image also has an effect on the destination's competitiveness. Brands are among the most important intangible assets possessed by firms, contributing to greater value and market success (Beil, 1993; De Asis 2001; Shankar, Azar, and Fuller 2008). From customers' perspective, brand includes six aspects, namely attribute, benefit, value, culture, characteristic and end user. Once delivered to the customers, the brand would be built from these six aspects, followed by customers' association (Biel, 1993; Keller, 1998).

In 1950s, David Ogilvy came up with the concept of brand image from brand positioning perspective.

Brand identity is defined as a unique set of brand associations that firms aim to create or maintain, whereas brand image is defined as consumer perceptions regarding a brand (Keller 2003). The essence of brand identity is to find the answer to the brand's value position, characteristic, long-term objectives, ultimate goal, constancy, as well as its identity symbol (Fan X.C. & Cheng J., 2002).

As to brand identity models, there are two popular ones by now. One is the hexagonal prisms model, which divides brand identity into physique, characteristic, culture, relationship, reflection and self image. The other is brand identity system model (Aaker David, 1996), in which each brand has an identity, and the image is how the customer are perceived, the identity is how the customer aspires to be perceived. This model is comprehensive in reflecting the construction of brand identity (Fan X.C. & Cheng J., 2002). In order to study the theme parks' brand images, brand identity system and modified indexes, which are raised by Fan and Cheng, are applied.

2.3 Relationship between brand image and brand identity

Brand identity and brand image are conceptualized as containing several subcomponents (Shankar, Azar & Fuller, 2008). Brand image are accepted by customers through products, services and dissemination, while brand identity relies more on the transmitter in explaining the brand's mission and vision. Rather, consumers interpret the firm's identity and translate it into an image (Keller, 2003). In a theme park, its brand identity is the status expected by the managers, and the brand image is constructed by the tourists.

Brand identity and brand image could be considered as two sides of one thing (Fan X.C. & Cheng J., 2002): brand identity consisting of brand awareness, purpose, differentiation, and offerings (de Chernatony 1999), and brand image pertaining to brand credibility, brand character, consumers' overall attitude towards the brand, and consumers' feelings for the brand (de Chernatony 1999). And in theme parks, it helps to narrow the gap between expectation and reality, by taking brand identity system as a reference to build brand image (Fan X.C. & Cheng J., 2002).

Therefore, both Shenzhen Happy Valley and Chimelong Paradise should realized their brand images and not be dragged down by tourists, since tourists perception may not be coincident with the parks positioning, and passive operation would happen when they follow the customers blindly. Besides, most tourists could not accurately tell the differences between these two parks. Therefore, Shenzhen Happy Valley and Chimelong Paradise should proactively build their brand identities to lead the customers, on the basis of correct brand image recognition.

2.4 Tourism promotion efforts of Shenzhen Happy Valley and Chimelong Paradise

Opened in 1998, Shenzhen Happy Valley is the first of the Happy Valley theme park chain, and the most famous national touring theme park during the construction of the Oversea Chinese Town. Covering an area of 350,000 square meters (86 acres), the park is composed of nine themed areas and encompasses nearly 100 exciting games for adults and children. The park combines modern fallow concept with high-tech entertainment way and creates new style travel brand firstly. Every day in the park, there are excellent performances in different styles, such as magic, acrobatics and extreme sports (source from official website).

With the brand positioning of "a piece of happyland in the busy city", Happy Valley creates a "dynamic, fashionable, and passionate" brand image to resonate with the tourists. When choosing the media, Happy Valley selects newspapers, magazines, outdoor media, internet and television. In 2003, Happy Valley built the first

experiential website with colorful pictures and attractive videos, which got highly recognition from both the visitors and the industry. The promotion activities were broadcast by cooperation with search engine Baidu, ChinaGames and the other portal websites (Xiao B., 2006). Besides official website (<http://sz.happyvalley.cn/>), the information about Happy Valley could be seen from every popular social media, such as Sina micro-blogging (<http://weibo.com/706290125>), Tencent micro-blogging (<http://e.t.qq.com/chinahappyvalley>), Q-Zone (<http://user.qzone.qq.com/706290125>), WeChat (WeChat ID:szhappyvalley), etc..

Chime-Long Paradise is a major amusement park in Panyu District, Guangzhou. Opened on April 12, 2006, Chime-Long Paradise is the largest amusement park in China. Chime-Long Paradise is classified as a AAAAA scenic area by the China National Tourism Administration, and is operated by the Chime-Long Group, a Chinese tourism company that also operates numerous other attractions, including the Chime-Long Circus and Panyu Xiangjiang Safari Park. With almost 60 different attractions, Chimelong Paradise really deserves its name and is proud to be the amusement park whose rides are the richest in China. Many rides, such as the Ten-looped roller coaster, rank as the best in Asia and second in the world. Besides, the paradise provides its visitors with all sorts of performances such as magic tricks, songs and dances, acrobatics and fancy car parades. The international super theater and the most advanced IWERK 4-D Theater supply a new experience in watching films (source from official website).

In order to promote the brand positioning ,“to boldly go”, Chimelong Paradise makes full use of all kinds of social medias in China, including Sina micro-blogging, with 265000 fans(<http://weibo.com/chparadise>), and Tencent micro-blogging, with more than eighty thousands of fans(<http://t.qq.com/CLkaka>). What’s more, Chimelong gave prompt attention to the developing social media, which could be seen from its WeChat account(WeChat ID: happy_ Chimelong). By launching a full range of social media advertising promotion, Chimelong Paradise built and spread its brand image to both the audience and the tourists, which helps to increase its public cognition.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research design

On the basis of Aaker’s(1996) brand identity system and Fan and Cheng’s (2002) modified indexes, the brand image assessment model is built to the context of tourism promotion and theme park brand image(Figure 1). Four dimensions are raised, namely brand personality, symbol, enterprises and product.

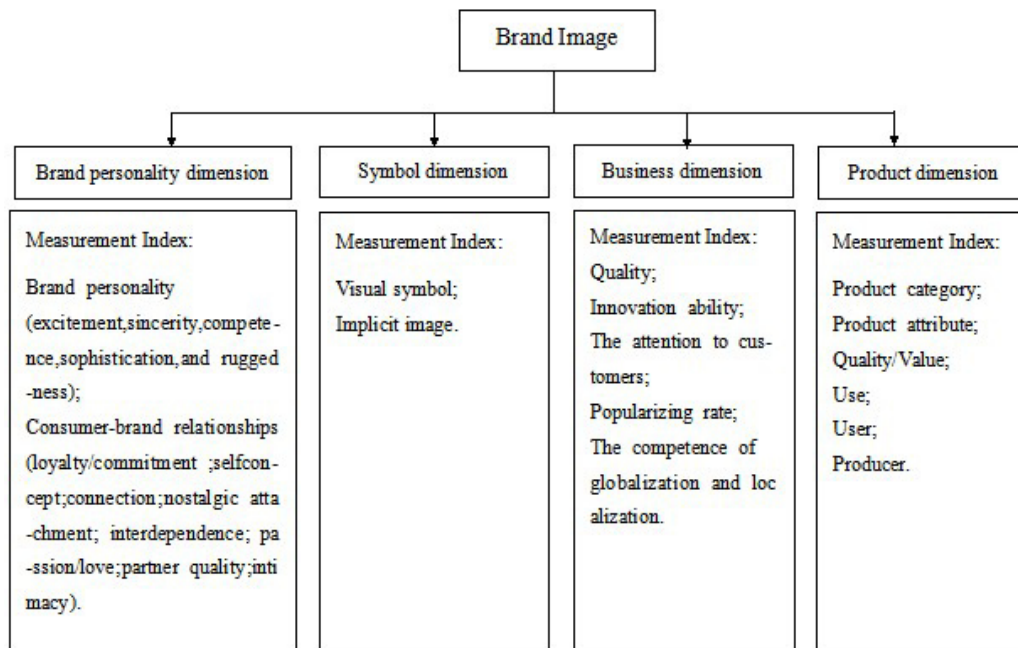


Figure 1:Brand image integrated measurement model

1. Brand personality dimension. A well-established can lead consumers to develop strong emotional ties with it(Fournier,1998). Like consumers who establish relationships with brands(Thomson, McInnis, & Park, 2005), tourists are believed to form strong emotional relationships with certain places, given the human trait-like features of destination personality (Ekinci & Hosany,2006; Hosany et al.,2006; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). Aaker Jennifer L. has constructed a Brand Personality Scale (BPS), which categorized brands in five dimensions: excitement, sincerity, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. Aaker’s(1997) brand personality framework has been used in recent research exploring brand personalities. Fournier, Susan constructed the framework of

consumer-brand relationships, and found seven dimensions reflecting the relationship between brand and customers, (1) loyalty/commitment; (2) self-concept connection; (3) nostalgic attachment; (4) interdependence; (5) passion/love; (6) partner quality; (7) intimacy. These two studies provide references to brand personality.

2. Symbol dimension, is also one of the brand identity elements for tourism enterprises, which means the physical identifiers including pictures, colors, languages, etc.. For example, the main colors of McDonald (red and yellow) and KFC (red and white) have been widely around. Customers would connect the symbol with certain brand value; therefore, accurate symbol system is necessary to show the brand core value. Both visual symbol and implicit image are important, the former could create an intense impression while the latter present the brand function and spread the brand "emotion" at the same time (Fan X.C. & Cheng J., 2002).

3. Business dimension, of which the evaluation indicators are (1) quality; (2) innovation ability; (3) the attention to customers; (4) popularizing rate; and (5) the competence of globalization and localization.

4. Product dimension. A tour could not be stored or tried out, so tourist consumption happens on the basis of customers positive perception about the products or services. The function of tourism products or services is to meet tourists needs, which is also the most basic part constructing the brand image.

3.2 Sampling

The survey was carried out among the fans from Sina micro-blogging of Shenzhen Happy Valley and Chimelong Paradise, since these two theme parks are entertaining and exciting, attracting the young people who are also the main force in using social media. Besides, taking the influences of these two parks' media platform into consideration, both of them have the most quantity of fans on Sina micro-blogging, which is easier to target in those who had played in Shenzhen Happy Valley and Chimelong Paradise, and more convenient to do the on-line survey. A total of 450 questionnaires would be distributed.

3.3 Data collection procedure

The procedure was conducted in three stages.

Firstly, a group of 50 Micro-blogging fans of the two brands were invited to participate in the brand association investigation. Subjects were asked to think of Happy Valley and Chimelong Paradise once it came to mind and imagine that it was a person, and then to describe their feelings.

Secondly, the questionnaire was designed on the basis of investigation outcome and the brand image assessment model.

Thirdly, the respondents were invited to modify the draft questionnaire by selecting those choices which were useful and reasonable.

3.4 Questionnaire design

This study gets data through questionnaire survey. The questionnaire includes mainly two parts, one of which is semantic differences scale, the other is a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from "strongly disagree(=1)" to "strongly agree(=5)".

According to the characteristics of theme park, this study arranged 30 variables as follows.

Table 1. Selected Variables

1. Frequency of Micro-blogging advertising changes	16. The degree that you trust this brand
2. Discount frequency	17. The taste that the brand be given
3. Advertising density	18. The degree that you know about this theme park
4. Frequency of renewing facilities	19. The degree that you do have a clear impression about this theme park
5. Fashionable	20. The degree that you are impressed by the theme park's logo
6. Dynamic	21. The degree that you are familiar with this theme park
7. Exciting	22. The speed of the theme park's product upgrading
8. Brave	23. The new product of the theme park
9. Happy	24. The stability of the products' quality in the theme park
10. The role of this brand in entertainment industry	25. The safety and reliability of the theme park's product
11. The influence degree of this brand's disappearance	26. The degree that the theme park's products could be easily obtained
12. The degree that you are loyal to this brand	27. Price
13. The possibility that this brand could be replaced by the others	28. Entertaining function
14. The disappointing degree when you cannot reach (buy/experience) this brand	29. Relaxing function
15. The satisfaction degree that this brand creates in relaxing and entertaining	30. Quality

Note1: Question 1~18 stand for Brand personality dimension (1~9 refer to brand personality dimension, and 10~18 refer to brand-customer relationship dimension); Question 19~20 belong to Symbol dimension; Question 21~26 explain Business dimension; and Question 27~30 present Product dimension.

3.5 Data analysis

In this study, the data from questionnaires would be encoded and analyzed by SPSS 17.0.

4 Findings

4.1 General response

In the first stage, namely applying brand association investigation in 50-person-group, the results showed that, 90% of the respondents would associate Shenzhen Happy Valley and Chimelong Paradise with those words such as exciting, relaxing, rich experience, adventurous, trendy, happy, innovative, price and quality.

In the whole process, the fans showed a high level of interest and willingness to participate in the study. Applying the convenience sampling technique, a total of 450 questionnaires were distributed and 397 usable responses were obtained, yielding a response rate of 88.2%.

4.2 Questionnaire result analysis

Table 2 to Table 6 present the average scores of Shenzhen Happy Valley and Chimelong Paradise in these 30 variables. The higher the scores are, the better the theme park is. Those variables with significant differences in the two theme parks are noted, and ** stands for $p < 0.01$, * stands for $p < 0.05$.

Table 2. The comparison in Brand personality dimension

Variable Brand	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Happy Valley	3.19	2.27	3.28	2.93	3.21	3.09	2.89	2.93	3.42
Chimelong Paradise	3.17	2.19	2.93**	3.42**	3.57**	3.46**	2.75**	2.21**	3.23

From the data in Table 2, among the 9 variables reflecting brand personality, there are 6 variables from Shenzhen Happy Valley and Chimelong Paradise existing significant differences. Shenzhen Happy Valley updated its facilities more frequently, and did better in being fashionable and dynamic than Chimelong Paradise. However, Chimelong Paradise had higher frequency in advertising, and further emphasized on those dimensions such as “exciting” and “brave”.

Table 3. The comparison in Brand-customer relationship dimension

Variable Brand	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Happy Valley	3.05	3.28	2.28	2.33	3.08	3.76	3.13	2.87	3.42
Chimelong Paradise	3.05	3.52**	3.13**	2.97**	3.09	3.74	3.97**	2.75	3.89**

In total, Shenzhen Happy Valley and Chimelong Paradise have relatively close customer relationships. However, their loyalty is lower than some theme parks in the other provinces, which could result from the high density of theme parks in the Pearl River Delta. Compare with the parks in the same area, Shenzhen Happy Valley and Chimelong Paradise achieved great revisit ratio, with the average score of 2.28.

Among the 9 variables, there are 5 variables existing significant differences. Tourists of Shenzhen Happy Valley have higher loyalty, which may be caused by the level of similarity with surrounding scenic area. Shenzhen Happy Valley is surrounded by some sightseeing-guided scenic spots, which strengthen its uniqueness as an experience-guided theme parks. While the tourists to around Chimelong Paradise could be shunted by nearby Chimelong Water Park.

Table 4. The comparison in Symbol dimension

Variable Brand	19	20
Happy Valley	2.51	2.93
Chimelong Paradise	2.53	3.76**

From the data from Table 4, it could be seen that tourists from both two theme parks do not have deep impression about the park, which shows the gap with Disneyland, and creates certain obstacle in further development. Therefore, both parks should pay efforts in improving and strengthening their brand symbols.

In the aspect of the impression about theme park’s logo, tourists have relatively deeper memory with those from Chimelong Paradise, for example, once mentioned Chimelong Paradise, they would think of the white tiger

Table 5. The comparison in Business dimension

Variable Brand	21	22	23	24	25	26
Happy Valley	3.01	4.12	4.06	4.11	4.09	2.92
Chimelong Paradise	4.02**	4.10	4.03	4.13	4.01	3.56**

Based on the investigation's results, there are significant differences between these two parks in the fans' familiarity with the company, and the degree that the theme park's products could be easily obtained. This could be owned to the construction of Happy Valley chain in China. The spatial system covering several major cities helps to improve the company's reliability, and gets more trusts from the fans.

Table 6. The comparison in Product dimension

Variable Brand	27	29	29	30
Happy Valley	2.63	3.95	4.07	3.88
Chimelong Paradise	3.51**	3.95	4.08	3.79

From Table 6, it could be found that significant difference exists in these two theme parks' prices. In fact, the ticket prices of Shenzhen Happy Valley and Chimelong Paradise are almost the same. This result could be due to the independent inside ticket. The ticket of Shenzhen Happy Valley covers all the facilities and Playa Maya Water Park, while Chimelong Paradise needs independent ticket for the Water Park, which creates a psychological gap to tourists between them. Besides, as entertaining theme parks, both Shenzhen Happy Valley and Chimelong Paradise get high score in entertaining function and relaxing function.

5 Conclusions and limitations

5.1 Conclusions

The findings indicated that Shenzhen Happy Valley and Chimelong Paradise do indeed communicate distinctive brand images and brand identities on each official Micro-blogging page. Though theme parks mainly offer intangible experience other than tangible products, customers' thinking mode as are nearly the same. They prefer those parks with higher reputation and better image, then broadcast the park's image and brand after experiencing.

Both being popular and potential theme parks in China, Shenzhen Happy Valley and Chimelong Paradise should optimize their brand images, and improve their brand personalities with the reference of Aaker's(1997) brand personality traits. Besides, they could build better brand-customer relationship to enhance the brand loyalty, by taking full advantage of social media, such as Wechat, Micro-blogging, blog, Qzone, etc. What's more, to leave a deep impression in tourists' mind, these theme parks should do better in symbol system design. Chimelong Paradise may take building chain parks into consideration, to make the brand obtained more easily by customers. This study not only contributed to the scholarly efforts in examining brand image(destination image) and public relations tourism promotion via social media, but also give suggestion for the theme parks by connecting brand image with brand identify, which could be referenced in further development .

5.2 Limitations

This study has several limitations need to be acknowledged. Firstly, we only focus on two theme parks, namely Shenzhen Happy Valley and Chimelong Paradise, which may limit the generalizing of the findings. Research in future could expand more theme parks as well as other scenic-spots.

Secondly, the respondents were all selected from Micro-blogging, therefore, the sample may not reflect the entire population of tourists to the research site.

Thirdly, this study applied Aaker's(1996) brand identity scale and Fan & Cheng's brand image scale(2002) to the theme park images, it may not fully represent the brand image associated with the other theme parks. Therefore, future research could work to develop a more comprehensive and reliable brand image scale.

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