

Relationship between Destination Image and Loyalty: Developing Cooperative Branding for Rural Destinations

Duk-Byeong Park
Department of Rural Tourism
National Academy of Agricultural Science
Rural Development Administration
Suwon 441-707
Republic of Korea
Tel: (+82) 31-290-0272
parkdb@korea.kr

Robin Nunkoo
Department of Management
Faculty of Law and Management
University of Mauritius
Reduit
Mauritius
r.nunkoo@uom.ac.mu

Abstract

Destination image has been extensively studied, yet literature on the cooperative branding is limited. A cooperative branding model that represents the important determinants of destination loyalty was developed based on previous studies in a number of fields. Seven distinct image constructs were identified, three of which are affective based and four cognitive based. This study noted that idyllic (among affective image) and entertaining and quality service (among cognitive image) had a direct impact on overall destination image and indirect impact on destination loyalty through overall image. The results of this investigation provide important implications for strategic image management and can aid in designing and implementing marketing programs for creating and enhancing tourism destination images.

Introduction

A destination brand is a place's competitive identity. It makes the destination distinctive and differentiates it from all others (Anholt, 2009). Consumers often do not buy a product, rather they buy the images associated with the product. Thus, cooperative branding is the single most important objective of marketing today. Marketing agencies at all levels have a vested interest in building strong and positive images for their destinations. However, while brands are found in many categories of tourism goods and services and permeate almost all facets of tourist activities, the concept for the cooperative branding has not been studied as vigorously in rural destination marketing as in the general field. More specifically, research on cooperative branding for rural destination is limited in the literature (Cai, 2002). This is despite the fact that rural tourism accounts for an important component of tourism trade in several destinations. Thus, it is important to develop proper destination image and cooperative branding for the overall success of a destination (Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). A review of existing studies reveals existing approaches to studying image are cocooned within a limited domain and have yet to be extended to the realm of destination branding in contemporary marketing terms.

Rural tourism communities can especially benefit from cooperative branding for collective marketing (Cai, 2002). A common challenge for tourism development in a single rural community is its limited drawing power because individual rural destinations are often too small to form the critical mass required. In order to make the most of rural tourism resources, rural destinations must approach their marketing activities from a cooperative perspective. In particular, building cooperative destination image is critical for rural destinations because individual community has limitation for marketing and branding (Cai, 2002).

In an attempt to fill the literature gaps identified above, an empirical test was conducted to develop and test a theoretical model of attribute and affective image, overall image, and destination loyalty. The model incorporates both cognitive and affective destination image because tourists usually evaluate each image separately. It is hoped that this study will assist tourism scholars and destination practitioners in enhancing their understanding of destination image and brand association formation, so that more suitable marketing strategies will be launched in the hope of facilitating rural tourism trade.

Image Association and Destination Brand

Tourists' behavior is expected to be partly conditioned by the image that they have of destinations. The choice set of travelers contains several destinations that provide similar features such as quality accommodations, beautiful scenic view, and friendly people. Destination image influences the pre-visitation choice process. Image also plays an important role in post-visitation because it serves as basis against which a traveler's initial perception and actual experience are compared, and thereupon determines tourist satisfaction, repeat visit intention, and word-of-mouth communication. The dual functions of destination image and its impact on pre-visitation and post-visitation behaviors have been widely accepted by researchers (e.g. Beerli & Martin, 2004a; Pike & Ryan, 2004). Indeed, several researchers found destination image to influence perceived quality (Bigne et al., 2001), satisfaction (Kim, Kim, & Park, 2013), and loyalty (e.g. Liu, Lin, & Wang, 2012; Ramkissoon, Uysal, & Brown, 2011).

In the tourism literature, it is widely accepted that overall image of a destination is influenced by affective and cognitive image (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011; Wang & Hsu, 2010). Cognitive image refers to beliefs and knowledge about an object whereas affective image refers to feelings about

the object (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997). Based on the knowledge that destination image is a total impression of cognitive and affective image, it is suggested that cognitive and affective images are widely accepted as influential indicators of destination image (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). For example, Cai, Wu, and Bai (2003) identified four distinct image constructs, three of which are attribute based and one affective and attitude based. Lin, Morais, Kerstetter, and Hou (2007) indicated that cognitive and affective components of overall destination image influence tourists' destination preferences and that cognitive image impacts affective image. Thus, based on the above theoretical and empirical discussion, the following hypotheses that express the relationships between affective image and overall image and between cognitive image and overall image are developed:

Affective image-overall image

H1: Dynamic image will positively affect the overall image of a destination.

H2: Traditional image will positively affect the overall image of a destination.

H3: Relax image will positively affect the overall image of a destination.

Cognitive image-overall image

H4: Attractions will positively affect the overall image of a destination.

H5: Natural landscape will positively affect the overall image of a destination.

H6: Service will positively affect the overall image of a destination.

H7: Healing will positively affect the overall image of a destination.

Overall Image and Destination Loyalty

One of the main challenges for tourism managers and destination marketers attempting to promote tourism trade is to understand the patterns of travelers' behavior. If repetitive patterns of behavior can be established, this can create informal channels of relationships whereby potential tourists can be attracted to specific destinations. Therefore, researchers have conducted considerable studies in an attempt to identify repeat behaviors among travelers. One argument is that identifying the antecedents of tourists' destination loyalty enables managers to develop strategies that will increase loyalty. Research on destination loyalty is framed conceptually within the broader literature on product and service loyalty. However, despite such research, the degree of loyalty and the underlying likelihood of tourists ever becoming loyal are still being debated.

Proponents of loyalty behaviors identify destination image as a factor that influences loyalty directly and indirectly (Bowen & Shoemaker, 2003; Chen & Gursoy, 2001; Chi & Qu, 2008; Gallarza, Saura, & García, 2002; Jang & Feng, 2007; Lee, Graefe, & Burns, 2007; Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2007). The intentions to revisit a destination and to spread a positive word-of-mouth have been the two most important behavioral consequences in destination image and post-consumption behavior studies. The general conclusion is that overall image of a destination is influential not only on the destination selection process, but also on tourist behaviors in general (Bigne et al., 2001; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). Based on the above arguments, the following hypothesis is developed:

H8: Overall image will positively affect the destination loyalty of a destination.

Research Model

This study attempts to investigate the influence of different image dimensions on overall destination image. The model also proposes that overall destination image positively influence destination loyalty. Figure 1 shows the structural model of the study.

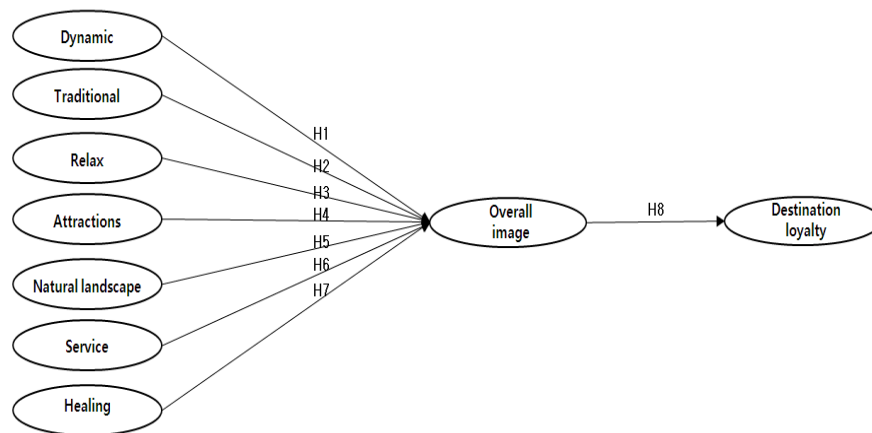


Fig. 1 Research model

Methodology

Sampling and Survey Method

The target population of this study was rural tourists who visited rural tourism villages in South Korea during a two-month period in September and October 2011. These villages, funded by the Rural Traditional Theme Village (RTTV) and Green Rural Experience Village (GREV) programs to stimulate rural tourism, were chosen nationwide to ascertain general rural visitors' behavior. A two-staged sampling approach was used in this study: proportionate stratified sampling and systematic random sampling. Twelve rural tourism villages out of 525 were selected by a stratified sampling method to avoid site-specific bias. Such selection was based on the location and carrying capacity of rural tourism visitors. The subsample size of each village was then stratified proportionately. The next step was to select the interval of the samples (nth)

by using a systematic random sampling. The interval of the sample (n th) was determined by dividing the previous total visitor number. Every n th tourist who visited the 12 rural tourism villages was approached to participate in the survey. Targets were visitors aged 18 years and above. The selected villages are comparatively well developed and provided similar rural tourism resources and activities for rural visitors. In cases where village leaders agreed to collect the data for the study, the survey questionnaires were distributed to the survey sites, and respondents freely participated in answering the survey questionnaire after they had stayed in the village for at least one day. Then, researchers visited and collected the survey questionnaires from each village.

To ensure a representative sample of the whole area, graduate students and village leaders who were trained and monitored by the researchers, were positioned in key points of the rural tourism villages visited by the tourists. Data were collected by using a four-page self-administered questionnaire primarily designed to gather information on the subjects' destination image and destination loyalty. From the 400 self-administered questionnaires distributed in the villages, a total of 339 usable questionnaires were obtained. After they completed the survey questionnaire, a gift set was provided to them as a reward.

Measurement of Variables

The survey questionnaire included questions relating to the respondent's cognitive, affective, and perceptions of overall image of rural tourism villages as travel destinations. Additional two questions were included to determine the respondent's intention to revisit and recommend the rural tourism village as a favorable destination to others. The final section was devoted to collect socio-demographic information about the respondents. Destination image have been described

as consisting of both affective and cognitive components. Affective and cognitive destination image was measured by using affective and cognitive image scale developed by prior researchers (Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004a, 2004b; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Kim & Richardson, 2003; Martín & Bosque, 2008; Pike, 2009). Finally 27 items relating to affective destination image and 29 items of cognitive destination image were selected and respondent were asked to rate rural tourism village as a travel destination on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree (SD), and 5 = strongly agree (SA).

A number of studies have used a summative overall measure of image (*e.g.* Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martín, 2004a, 2004b; Qu, Kim & Im, 2011). A single overall measure of image was used in this study for its ease of use and empirical support. The respondents were asked to rate their overall image with the overall traveling experience on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 being extremely unfavorable and 5 extremely favorable.

In the marketing literature, repeat purchases or recommendation to others are usually referred to as consumer loyalty (Bodet, 2008; Deng, Lu, Wei, & Zhang, 2010; Suh & Yi, 2006). Tourists' positive experiences with tourism destination tend to produce repeat visit and to cause positive recommendations of the tourism destination (Chi & Qu, 2008; Oppermann, 2000; Qu, Kim & Im, 2011; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Based on these studies, two single-item measures were used for assessing tourist destination loyalty as the ultimate dependent construct: tourists' intention to revisit and their willingness to recommend as a favorable destination to others, with 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).

Data analysis

Principle component analyses were used to determine the underlying dimensions of the destination image component of rural tourism village. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were utilized to test the theoretical model that examined the antecedents of destination loyalty. The data were processed with the statistical package SPSS 18.0 and LISREL 8.8.

Results

Measurement model

Through principal component analyses, three underlying dimensions of affective image and four dimensions of cognitive image were identified. The measurement model provides meaning to the constructs in the model. Proper evaluation of the measurement model is a pre-requisite to evaluate the structural model. Overall measurement quality was assessed using CFA (Anderson & Gerbing, 1992). CFA of the measurement model, which specifies the posited relationships with the observed indicators to the latent constructs, was used to examine convergent and discriminant validity. In this analysis, we dropped items that did not adequately represent the one-dimensional of construct based on modification indices (Hair et al., 2009). The convergent validity of the measurement scale was examined by analyzing the *t*-value associated with each of the loadings, all of which was significant at the 0.01 level. The results indicated that all variables were significantly related to their constructs, verifying the posited relationship among indicators and constructs. The construct reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) were also computed for the latent constructs. For both CR and AVE, all five constructs surpassed the threshold value of .80 and .60 respectively (Table 1). Therefore, it can be concluded that indicators for all seven constructs were sufficient in terms of how the measurement model was

specified. The above tests indicated that the discriminant validity was upheld for the measurement model.

Table 1 LISREL results for measurement model

Variables	Std. loadings	SMC	CR	AVE
<i>Dynamic</i>			.92	.60
Fancy	0.80	0.65		
Dynamic	0.93	0.87		
Innovative	0.93	0.87		
Passionate	0.79	0.63		
<i>Warm and familiarity</i>			.90	.70
Warm	0.87	0.75		
Familiarity	0.90	0.81		
Comfortable	0.83	0.70		
Interesting	0.73	0.53		
<i>Relax</i>			.91	.67
Relax	0.77	0.59		
Romantic	0.76	0.58		
Beautiful	0.78	0.61		
Cleanliness	0.88	0.77		
Pleasant	0.89	0.78		
<i>Entertainment and convenience</i>			.89	.61
Wide variety of entertainment	0.83	0.68		
Good nightlife and entertainment	0.82	0.67		
Variety of convenience facilities	0.79	0.62		
Gentle facilities or building	0.80	0.63		
Gentle of the building	0.68	0.47		
<i>Natural landscape</i>			.85	.66
Fabulous scenic drive	0.78	0.60		
Gorgeous gardens and springs	0.91	0.83		
Picturesque park/lakes/rivers	0.77	0.59		
Scenic mountain and valleys	0.79	0.63		
<i>Quality service</i>			.86	.61
Clean and tidy village	0.87	0.75		
Clean facilities	0.75	0.56		
Tranquil and restful atmosphere	0.80	0.64		
Friendly and helpful local people	0.78	0.60		
Cleanliness of accommodation	0.70	0.49		
<i>Healing</i>			.80	.71
Healing and meditation	0.76	0.57		
Great place for soothing the mind and refreshing the body	0.92	0.841		

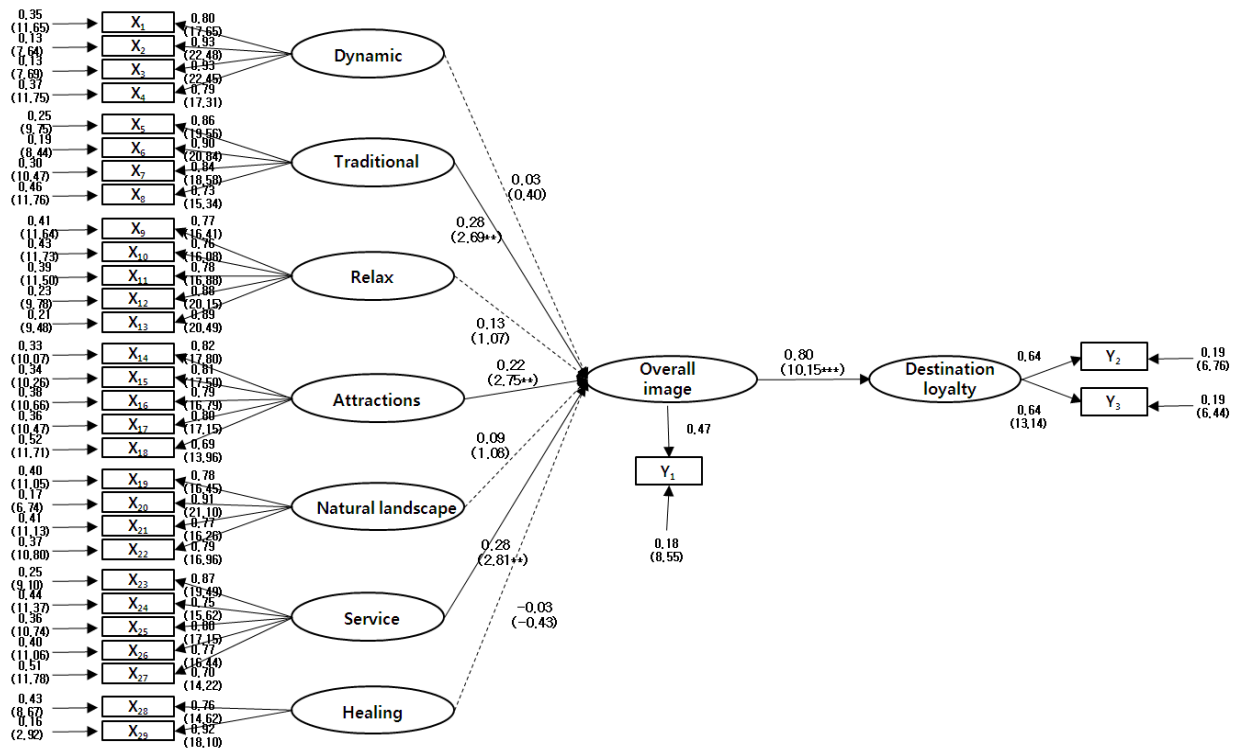
In the results of CFA analysis, the items having a coefficient alpha below 0.3 are unacceptable, so they should be deleted for further analysis. Three types of overall model fit measures were utilized in the study. An absolute fit index is used to directly evaluate how well the a priori theoretical model fits the sample data, and incremental fit index assesses the proportionate fit by comparing a target model with a more restricted, nested baseline model and a parsimonious fit measure is used to diagnose whether model fit has been achieved by over-fitting the data too many coefficients. Overall model fit depicts the degree to which the specified indicators represent the hypothesized constructs.

The χ^2 value (1711.54 with 356 degree of freedom) has a statistical significance level of 0.0. This statistic failed to support that the differences of the predicted and actual models were non-significant. However, it is generally agreed that the χ^2 value should be used as a guide rather than an absolute index of fit due to its sensitivity for the sample size and model complexity. The overall fit index displays an acceptable level of fit : goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = .74, root mean square residual (RMSR) = .076, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .11, adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) = .68, non-normed fit index (NNFI) = .95, parsimonious normed fit index (PNFI) = .82, comparative fit index (CFI) = .95, incremental fit index (IFI) = .95 and relative fit index (RFI) = .93.

Structural model

In this study, data were analyzed using LISREL 8.8. The maximum-likelihood estimates for the various parameters of the overall fit of the model are given in Fig. 2. The statistical analysis of the overall model indicated that χ^2 was 1820.35, with 435 degrees of freedom ($p < 0.001$). The goodness-of-fit index (GFI) was 0.75, the root mean square residual (RMSR) was 0.070, the root

mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was 0.097, the adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) was 0.69, non-normed fit index (NNFI) was 0.95, parsimonious normed fit index (PNFI) was 0.83, the comparative fit index (CFI) was 0.96, the incremental fit index (IFI) was 0.96, and the relative fit index (RFI) was 0.94.



* X₁..... X₂₉ : fancy, dynamic, innovative, passionate, warm, familiarity, comfortable, interesting, relax, romantic, beautiful, cleanliness, pleasant, wide variety of entertainment, good nightlife and entertainment, variety of convenience facilities, gentle facilities or building, gentle of the building, fabulous scenic drive, gorgeous garden and springs, picturesque park/lakes/rivers, scenic mountain and valleys, clean and tidy village, clean facilities, tranquil and restful atmosphere, friendly and helpful local people, cleanliness of accommodation, healing and meditation, great place for soothing the mind and refreshing the body
 * Y₁..... Y₂ : overall image, intention to revisit, intention to recommend; * Values in parenthesis are t-statistics (t critical value at 0.05 level = 1.96)

Figure 2 Results of destination loyalty model

Within the overall model, the estimates of the structural coefficients provide the basis for testing the proposed hypotheses. The conceptual model, Fig. 2, shows the results of the hypotheses regarding the relationships among rural tourists' destination image and destination

loyalty. The path coefficients from 'traditional image' to 'overall image' ($\beta = 0.28, t = 2.69$) was statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. The path coefficient from the 'attractions' to 'overall image' was statistically significant at $p < 0.001$ ($\beta = 0.22, t = 2.75$); and the path coefficient from the 'service' to 'overall image' was statistically significant at $p < 0.001$ ($\beta = 0.28, t = 2.81$). These result indicate that traditional image, attractions and service had a positively affect on overall image. In addition, overall image was found to positively influence destination loyalty ($\beta = 0.80, t = 10.15$)

Conclusions and Implications

The study proposed a theoretical model of destination image and loyalty. The model was tested from data collected from rural tourists in South Korean. The model was extended from Gartner's framework of destination image formation process. The model facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the role of destination image in the overall scheme of destination branding. It was posited cooperative branding across multiple rural communities builds a stronger destination identity than an individual community. It was proposed that overall destination image (i.e., brand image) is a multi-dimensional construct, influenced by the idyllic component (among affective image) and entertaining and quality service component (among cognitive image) that collectively affect tourist behavior. Overall, the results showed destination image exerts a mediating role between the three image components as the brand associations and destination loyalty. Results of this study indicated that strong and distinctive destination image should not only be a goal of branding practices in capturing consumer's minds but also as a mediator to influence consumer behaviors.

Therefore, for destinations to be successful and effective in promoting rural tourism trade, they must establish a positive and strong brand image, derived from the idyllic component

among affective image and entertaining and quality service component among cognitive image, to increase repeat visitors and to attract new tourists to the rural destination. The results were basically consistent with previous argument that the image of a rural destination directly influences destination loyalty (Liu, Lin, & Wang, 2012; Loureiro & González, 2008). These studies considered destination image as an aggregated image or affective and cognitive image. Thus, tourism destinations need to provide favorable experiences to tourists which will create a positive image and recommend the place to others, in turn helping potential tourists develop a favorable image that affects destination choice.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that it would be worthwhile for rural destination managers to make greater investments in their tourism destination resources in order to continue to enhance tourists' experiences. Applications of the proposed model are expected to assist destination marketing organizations in aligning important marketing strategies with its image and identity building. An important practical contribution of the study is the proposition of cooperative branding. First of all, the exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses revealed that destination image consisted of seven factors which are decorative, warm and familiarity, and relax among affective image and entertainment, natural landscape, quality service, and healing among cognitive image. These results could help rural tourism destination marketers better understand the factors contributing to destination loyalty so that they are able to carefully deliver appropriate products and services that accommodate tourists' needs and wants.

Thus, it is suggested that destination suppliers and managers consider the practical implications of these image factors, which may be fundamental elements in increasing tourists' satisfaction and loyalty. This study shows that some factors such as affective image and

functional quality are key to promoting the destination image of rural places in South Korea. Therefore, destination managers must strive to improve such images if they are to compete successfully in the competitive holiday market. Adding to the fact that once an image is formed, it is difficult to be changed, it becomes more important for destinations to present the right image to potential travelers.

Findings also reveal that destination image influences tourists' future behavior. Because the effective image that tourists hold of a destination will affect word of mouth communication that take place after the trips, destination marketers should take a serious approach to manage affective image. Although it is not possible to control all the elements contributing to the shaping of affective image of a destination, it is possible to manipulate some of them by advertising and promoting tourist attractions, organizing cultural event in rural villages that appeal to tourists, administering service quality provided by tourism infrastructure such as farm stay, direct farm market, rural restaurants, café, and tourist centers. The results of this investigation provide important implications for strategic image management and can aid in designing and implementing marketing programs for creating and enhancing tourism destination images. To conclude, rural destinations must take special care of affective image that they attempt to convey and the quality of the services and products that they offer, as all these will affect functional quality satisfaction and their intentions for future behavior.

Destination marketers need a better understanding of how an image affects destination loyalty and what determines the process. From a practical standpoint, this study provides important implications for strategic image management and development efforts. Because of the positive contribution of the warm and familiarity, entertainment and convenience, and quality

service to overall image and destination loyalty, rural destinations spend considerable time and money to create and enhance a favorable image. Overall, the study facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the role of destination image in the overall scheme of destination branding. The results of this investigation provide important implications for strategic image management and can aid in designing and implementing marketing programs for creating and enhancing tourism destination images.

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