**The Role of Brand Destination Experience in Determining Revisit Intention**

**Abstract**

Destination branding has developed considerably as a topic area in the last decade with numerous conceptualizations focusing on different aspects of the brand. However, a unified view has not yet emerged. This paper examines destination branding via a new conceptualization, brand destination experience, which provides a more holistic and unified view of the brand destination. The research uses a logistic regression model to determine the role of satisfaction and brand experience in determining revisit intentions. The study also examines differences among subgroups and four brand experience sub-constructs. The findings suggest that brand experience is an important determinant of revisit intentions, but that there is variation among respondent groups. The paper rounds off with conclusions and implications for research and practice.

**Introduction**

A brand can provide an importance means of differentiation and thus competitive advantage for products and services (Aaker, 1991; 1996; Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000; Gardner and Levy, 1955; Keller, 2003). This is important whether the product or service is a razor, breakfast cereal, insurance, or more recently a tourist destination. While branded consumer products have a longstanding academic literature, the literature on destination branding is a relatively recent phenomenon. The destination is also a complex product, not least because it is an amalgam of different tourist products and is “also a perceptual concept, which can be interpreted subjectively by consumers, depending on their travel itinerary, cultural background, purpose of visit, …” (Buhalis, 2000, p. 97). For the purposes of this study, destinations are considered as “a defined geographical region which is understood by its visitors as a unique entity, with a political and legislative framework for tourism marketing and planning.” (ibid, p. 98)

To understand, explain and predict consumer behavior with respect to brand destinations, many mainstream marketing concepts, theories and frameworks have been applied. These have included, most prominently, those on destination image (Stepchenkova and Mills, 2010), customer-based brand equity (Boo et al., 2009, Konecnik and Gartner, 2007) and brand personality (Ekenci and Hosany, 2006). However, these brand conceptualizations have been criticized for being fragmented, incomplete and generalized (Bracus et al., 2009). Recently, a new conceptualization has emerged, brand experience, which provides a more unified view based on sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioral dimensions of the brand (Bracus et al., 2009). This conceptualization has yet to be applied to tourism research. In this paper we apply this new theory to brand destinations to focus on the concept of brand destination experience.

The purpose of this study is to determine whether brand experience is a significant determinant of tourists’ intentions to revisit a destination. A secondary aim is to assess whether brand destination experience varies by respondent group. The study focuses on a region in Denmark for data collection and utilizes logistic regression for its analysis. In the next section we examine the underpinning literature and argue for the need to incorporate more experiential brand measures into understanding consumer evaluations and recommendations. This is followed by a description of the methodology used in the study. Results are provided followed by conclusions and implications for research and practice.

**Literature and Hypotheses**

Within the burgeoning literature on tourism marketing, numerous conceptualizations have been applied to understand and explain tourist behavior, most of them adapted from the mainstream marketing literature (e.g. Aaker, 1997; Keller, 1993). Within this developing literature base, one key strand of literature is that on destination branding. Much of this has focused on destination image, but not necessarily full-on branding. This has developed substantially over the past decade and a half and has provided significant implications for travel destination management (Blain et al, 2005; Boo et al., 2009; Buhalis, 2000; d’Hauteserre, 2001; Konecnik and Gartner, 2007).

The marketing literature contains a number of models which authors suggest cover the essential characteristics of brands such as customer-based brand equity (Keller, 1993; Yoo and Donthu, 2001), brand personality (Aaker, 1997) and brand value (Barnes and Mattsson 2011). These models have different foci. Whereas customer-based brand equity attempts assess the differential effects of brand knowledge to the marketing of the brand, via sub-constructs such as brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality of the brand and brand associations, brand personality strives to catch the personality traits that consumers see in the brand. Brand value, finally, conceptualizes brand as a three-dimensional gestalt based on formal axiology meant to comprise the entire realm of human values.

One of the most recent conceptualizations for measuring the response to a brand is that of brand experience. Brakus et al. (2009) criticize the existing brand constructs for providing incomplete and generalized conceptualizations. Brand experience, while related, is quite different to concepts such as brand attitudes, brand personality, brand involvement and brand attachment. While brand attitudes are general evaluations, brand experiences “include specific sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses triggered by specific brand stimuli. For example, experiences may include specific feelings, not just an overall *liking*.” (Brakus et al., 2009, p. 53). Similarly, brand personality is an inferential type of brand association that does not imply that consumers experience actual sensations, feelings, cognitions and behavioral responses; in essence, customers merely project particular characteristics of brand personality onto a specific brand. Bracus et al. (2009) propose and rigorously test a more comprehensive new scale, brand experience, composed of four aspects: sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioral brand experience.

Brand experience is suggested to apply to all kinds of products and services, including complex experiential products such as tourism (Buhalis, 2000). There is a developed literature that links aspects of destination branding, including destination brand identity, brand positioning and the models above, to brand loyalty and revisit intentions (Pike, 2009). Thus, we propose that:

*H1: A positive brand destination experience will increase tourists desire to revisit the brand destination.*

Satisfaction, typically seen as a post-purchase assessment (Oliver, 1981), has been shown to provide a positive influence on repurchase intentions in numerous studies within the area of tourism (Campo-Martínez et al. 2009). However, some studies have shown strong variations according to the type of service and experiences (Lee et al. 2007). In this study we use satisfaction to compare to the brand experience construct and posit:

*H2: Satisfaction with the brand destination will increase tourists desire to revisit the destination.*

Both of these hypotheses will also be tested with respect to the travelling group’s nationality. Nationality and other aspects of travelling group composition have been shown to have an influential affect on perceptions and behavior with respect to destinations (Armstrong et al., 1997; Danaher and Arweiler, 1996; Kozak, 2002; Richardson and Crompton, 1988). In this study, we also conduct an analysis of brand experience sub-constructs by nationality.

**Methodology**

Tourism is a very developed industry in Denmark, with 4.5 million visitors in 2008 (UNWTO, 2010). Tourist visitors to Denmark typically consist of people from nearby countries, particularly Germany, Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands. Other researchers have studied the nature, success and politics of tourism branding strategies in Denmark, including “Wonderful Copenhagen” (Ooi, 2002) and “Denmark, Enjoy!” (Ooi, 2004). However, relatively little attention has been given to regional Danish tourism branding.

The study focuses on the Lolland-Falster region of Denmark (<http://www.visitlolland-falster.com/>). This comprises three islands in the south-east of Denmark that are a popular tourist destination: Falster (which is known for its beaches and Denmark's southernmost point, Gedser, which has ferry links to Germany) and Lolland (a flat island which includes, among other things, Knuthenborg Safari Park, holiday resorts, Fuglsang Cultural Centre and Fuglsang Art Museum).

Data were collected via a survey at two tourist offices in Lolland-Falster, Marielyst and Nykøbing Falster, between the 12th and 18th of July 2010. The survey utilized the recent brand experience scale of Brakus et al. (2009), modified to reflect the specific domain under investigation. The scale is composed of four aspects of brand experience: sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioral. In addition, the survey also collected single-item measures of satisfaction (“My stay on Lolland-Falster has been satisfactory”) and revisit intention (“I would like to return to Lolland-Falster again another time”). Items were measured using 7-point Likert scales ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree, where 4=neutral. In all, 360 usable responses were received, 176 (48.9%) from Marielyst and 184 (51.1%) from Nykøbing Falster. The majority of respondents were German (50.3%), Danish (29.7%) or Norwegian (7.8%).

Table 1 presents the reliability and validity of the brand experience construct based on a confirmatory factor analysis using Smart-PLS (Ringle et al., 1995). Overall, the composite reliability (CR) for the scale was 0.853, while the composite reliability for the sub-constructs ranged from 0.801 to 0.851, well above the recommended level of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978). All items loaded on their expected constructs very strongly at p<.001. Convergent validity was measured by average variance extracted (AVE) and ranged from 0.581 to 0.658, again above the recommend level of 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Similarly, all square-roots of AVEs for constructs were considerably larger than intercorrelations (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

**Table 1: Psychometric Analysis of the Brand Experience Construct**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Sub-construct** | **Items** | **Loading** | **t-value** |
| Sensory  (AVE=0.658; CR=0.851) | 1: Lolland-Falster makes a strong impression on my senses, visually and in other ways | 0.882 | 51.030\*\*\* |
| 2: I find Lolland-Falster interesting in a sensory way | 0.866 | 48.749\*\*\* |
| 3: Lolland-Falster does not appeal to my senses (r) | 0.669 | 12.026\*\*\* |
| Emotional  (AVE=0.603; CR=0.815) | 4: Lolland-Falster induces feelings and sentiments | 0.876 | 47.312\*\*\* |
| 5: I do not have strong emotions for Lolland-Falster (r) | 0.570 | 8.289\*\*\* |
| 6: Lolland-Falster is an emotional area | 0.844 | 40.125\*\*\* |
| Behavioral  (AVE=0.588; CR=0.801) | 7: I engage in physical activities and behaviors when I am on Lolland-Falster | 0.873 | 31.783\*\*\* |
| 8: Lolland-Falster gives me bodily experiences | 0.877 | 34.881\*\*\* |
| 9: Lolland-Falster is not activity oriented (r) | 0.474 | 4.705\*\*\* |
| Intellectual  (AVE=0.581; CR=0.805) | 10: I engage in a lot of thinking when I am on Lolland-Falster | 0.791 | 25.730\*\*\* |
| 11: Lolland-Falster does not make me think (r) | 0.692 | 13.558\*\*\* |
| 12: Lolland-Falster stimulates my curiosity and problem solving | 0.802 | 32.324\*\*\* |

Note: (r) indicates reverse-coded items. Overall reliability=0.853. All path loadings significant in second-order model (p<.001).

**Analysis and Results**

In order to test the hypotheses (*H1* and *H2*) in the study, a logistic regression approach was used. The categorical variable revisit intention was transformed into a new dichotomous variable: (1) certainty of revisiting the destination and (0) any other situation (Campo-Martínez et al., 2009). This enables us to determine how the variables, satisfaction and brand experience, affect the likelihood of a return visit to the brand destination (Campo-Martínez et al., 2010). The models had adequate goodness of fit to the data. Cox & Snell’s *R2* and Nagelkerke’s *R2* both demonstrate that a good degree of variance in our outcome variable is explained by the model (0.363 and 0.484 respectively). Similarly, the value of -2 log likelihood, 240.754, is also very respectable, demonstrating a good fit of the research model.

The results of testing the research model demonstrate that both brand experience (*H1*, *p*<.01) and satisfaction (*H2*, *p*<.001) play important roles in motivating tourists to revisit the brand destination. The estimated parameters for the logistic regression model were 1.695 for satisfaction and 0.046 for brand experience, with a constant of -13.435 (p<.001). Thus, the likelihood of tourists revisiting Lolland-Falster is positively dependent on providing both satisfaction and a positive brand experience.

**Table 2: Each Model's Overall Goodness of Fit to the Data**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Statistic** | **Danish** | **German** | **Norwegian** |
| *Cox & Snell R²* | 0.379 | 0.365 | 0.441 |
| *Nagelkerke R²* | 0.509 | 0.487 | 0.588 |
| *-2 Log likelihood* | 72.821 | 112.476 | 17.691 |

The research model was further investigated to take into account the composition of tourist groups, particularly with respect to nationality. Tables 2 and 3 test the fit of the logistic regression model on the main respondent nationalities, German, Danish and Norwegian. In all cases the model is a good fit with the data for the subgroups. Furthermore, and most interestingly, there is differing support for the brand experience construct for the three nationalities (H1), ranging from p<.01 for German tourists and p<.05 for Danish holidaymakers to a lack of support for Norwegian visitors. H2 is supported for all subgroups.

**Table 3: Test of Research Model for Subsamples**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Estimated parameters for the explanatory variables** | **Danish** | **German** | **Norwegian** |
| *Constant* | -13.619\*\*\* | -12.595\*\*\* | -13.172\* |
| *Satisfaction* | 1.683\*\*\* | 1.281\*\*\* | 2.080\*\* |
| *Brand Experience* | 0.059\* | 0.072\*\* | 0.008 |

Note: \* p<.05; \*\* p<.01; \*\*\* p<.001.

To further assess patterns of brand experience perceptions among different nationalities, post-hoc ANOVA tests were conducted. The results are shown in Table 4. The results appear to demonstrate that German tourists are the most sensitive to brand experiences. For sensory, emotional and intellectual brand experience and overall, German tourists had significant greater experiences than Danish tourists at p<.01 or greater. This was also the case for German tourists compared to Norwegian tourists for emotional and intellectual brand experience and overall. No differences were detected between brand experiences of Danish and Norwegian holidaymakers suggesting similarity in these Scandinavian groups.

**Table 4: Differences in Brand Experiences Among the Main Respondent Nationalities**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Respondent Nationality | | | Results of ANOVA testing |
| **Brand Experience** | Danish (A) | German (B) | Norwegian (C) |
| Sensory | 15.55 | 17.03 | 15.64 | B>A\*\* |
| Emotional | 12.37 | 15.53 | 12.08 | B>A\*\*\*, B>C\*\*\* |
| Behavioral | 14.51 | 15.51 | 15.92 |  |
| Intellectual | 13.51 | 16.61 | 13.28 | B>A\*\*\*, B>C\*\*\* |
| Overall | 55.76 | 64.55 | 56.09 | B>A\*\*\*, B>C\*\* |
| Note: Levene's Test suggest homogeneity of variance. Scheffe; \*\* p<.01; \*\*\* p<.001. | | | | |

**Discussion and Conclusions**

Destination brands are complex experiential brands. This research suggests not only does satisfaction drive behavior (H2) but that the application of the new scale of Bracus et al. (2009) suggests that brand experience is a significant determinant of revisit intentions (H1). The validity and reliability of the scale are supported within the new brand destination context of this study. Interestingly, further analysis by national subgroups also demonstrates variation among different nationalities in terms of the levels of perceived brand experience, particularly between German and Scandinavian groups. Such differences are supported by other research that has examined differences in destination behaviors and perceptions among national groups (Armstrong et al., 1997; Danaher and Arweiler, 1996; Pizam and Sussmann, 1995; Richardson and Crompton, 1988).

The results of the study suggest that brand experience is a complex concept that must be carefully managed to provide different types of brand experiences for different nationalities. Lolland-Falster is experienced very differently as a brand among German visitors than among Danish visitors. One size does not fit all, and successful brand experiences need to be carefully tailored to the variations between tourists in different international markets.

This study is limited in that it focused on a single brand destination in Denmark. It is also limited in terms of the sample size and the number of respondent nationalities examined. Future research will seek to test the brand experience scale for different brand destinations and for different visitor nationalities. We hope to collect larger samples and to further test for the effect of different respondent characteristics on brand destination experiences.

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