

The Influence of Fit between Tainan Brand Image and Personality on Foreign Students' Tourism Value and Behavioral Intention

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Abstract

This research examines foreign students' perceptions of brand image, brand personality, and the fit between brand image and personality for Tainan City to see whether the perceptions influence their tourism value and affect behavioral intention. The 150 snowball sampling data were collected by questionnaire and analyzed by multiple regression analysis. The analysis results reveal that brand image and personality have a positive influence on tourism value. The fit between brand image and personality has a positive influence on tourism value. Finally, the tourism value has a positive influence on tourists' behavioral intention. Understanding how foreign students perceive Tainan City can help explore foreign tourists' awareness of this city and, consequently, realize how to improve the attraction of touring sites, activities, and services to raise the tourism reputation in international society and attract more foreign tourists in the post-pandemic era.

Keywords: Brand Image, Brand Personality, Tourism Value, Behavioral Intention

1. Introduction

Before the impact of COVID-19, international tourism became cheaper and more prosperous due to the dramatic improvement of transportation and communication technologies and perhaps some other minor driving forces, e.g., local food attraction (Fam, Syed Anuar, Tan, Lai, & Ingko, 2019). Milne and Ateljevic (2001) justified that the explosive expansion of the tourism industry is an outcome of complex global-local interaction and has significantly influenced global and local economic development. The rising tourism of many charming cities, rather than countries, helps pull national and regional economic growth. Tourists become more willing to visit local destinations characterized by distinctive brand images and personalities than countries as touring targets (Lopes, 2011). The local governments and communities enthusiastically improve natural and cultural amenities, accommodations and transportation, and recreation activities to establish differentiated destination brands to boost tourism (Prayag, 2007; Tasci & Gartner, 2007).

One of the characteristics of flourishing international tourism is the increasing young student population (Cavagnaro & Staffieri, 2015; Cavagnaro, Staffieri, & Postma, 2018). The young foreign tourists traveling across Asian countries grow tremendously in the recent decade because of the increase of overseas students. For example, according to the statistics of the Ministry of Education in Taiwan, the percentage of non-citizen students in colleges has risen as high as 187% from 2010 to 2020 (Taiwan, 2020).

The touring perceptual experiences of international students spreading widely by word of mouth help upgrade, or sometimes degrade, the attraction of local destinations. Therefore, almost all major Taiwan cities have done their best to improve the touring environment for potential alien visitors. Perhaps the Tainan City is a particular case worth investigating the relationship between the city brand image, personality, and foreign students' tourism value and behavior because it is the first, oldest, and most culturally attractive metropolis in Taiwan history. Established in the seventeenth century by Dutch and taken over by the famous Chinese general Cheng-GongZheng in 1662, Tainan City is famous for its local cuisines, touring night markets, historic sites, and a magic mixture of modern, ancient, and traditional southern Chinese cultural atmosphere. The investigation of the perception of Tainan City between young local and foreign students may be an exciting and valuable comparison to find a practical way for enhancing the tourism value of the ancient city.

Many studies have shown that city brand image significantly affects tourists' visit intention (Doosti, Jalilvand, Asadi, Khazaei Pool, & Mehrani Adl, 2016; Goodrich, 1978; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). In addition, the brand personality impacts the perceived brand image of a destination and then influences tourist choice behavior (Hultman, Strandberg, Oghazi, & Rana, 2017; Murphy, Moscardo, & Benckendorff, 2007). Since there are fewer discussions about how consistency between city brand image and personality influence tourists' tourism value and behavior, the present research intends to examine the diverse brand image and personality of Tainan City perceived by foreign students from different countries. Whether the degree of fit between brand image and personality impacts tourism value and behavior is also explored.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Brand Image

The brand image investigated since the 1950s and defined in various ways is a net effect of consumer perception of a brand developed by a particular process (Lee, James, & Kim, 2014). For example, Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis (1986) classified the brand concept-image into three categories as functional, symbolic, and experiential image. Consumers focus on one of or mix cognitions for external consuming needs, self-positioning or raising, or sensory pleasure to form brands' images. Bigné, Sánchez, and Sánchez (2001) claimed that the brand image of a tourism destination starts from the mental feelings of touring experiences or promotion advertisements and transforms to a subjective impression of that place afterward. A positive destination image can increase tourists' revisit and recommend intention (Bigné et al., 2001; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). The factors alluring tourists to visit or revisit touring sites may be ascribed as tourists' satisfaction, or preference judging, to the places known as customer perceived value (Holbrook, 1999). Some research has revealed that both brand image and customer perceived value substantially influence visitor satisfaction (Qomariah, 2017) or future visit intention (Aliana Man Wai, Yeh, & Chang, 2015). Other researchers, for example, Ramseook-Munhurrun, Seebaluck, and Naidoo (2015), found the relation path as brand image-tourist value-visitor satisfaction. Consequently, the current study is interested in verifying whether the relationship between the brand image and tourism value is still valid for foreign student tourists visiting Tainan City by following the hypothesis.

H1. The brand image has a positive influence on tourism value.

2.2 Brand Personality

The brand personality was summarized and formally defined as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" and measured by the Brand Personality Scale (BPS), including five dimensions, sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness (Aaker, 1997). The more consistent between brand personality and consumer self-recognition, the higher preference, usage, reliance, and loyalty for the brand. Hultman et al. (2017) proposed the variance of BPS to focus on measuring the brand personality of tourism destinations by several different dimensions, such as dependability, excitement, ruggedness, activeness, philoxenia, and sophistication. The perceived destination personality can vary from place to place and positively influence tourists' attitudes (Hultman et al., 2017) and revisit and recommend intention (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). Thus, brand personality can be applied to distinguish touring destinations from competitors (Murphy et al., 2007). Salehzadeh, Khazaei Pool, and Soleimani (2016) found that destination brand personality positively impacts brand equity, which is the added value to the destination brand. Similar to the relationship in which the brand personality and tourists' self-image congruity positively affects consumers' favorite of the brand (Aaker, 1997; Chua, Kim, Lee, & Han, 2019), the degree of fit between brand image and personality may also affect tourists' perceived value of the destination brand. Hence, this study proposes below two hypotheses.

H2. The brand personality has a positive influence on tourism value.

H3. The fit between brand image and personality has a positive influence on tourism value.

2.3 Tourism Value and Behavioral Intention

Since behavioral intention is a critical antecedent for humans to perform actual behaviors (Ajzen, 1991), thus one of the critical indicators for successful tourism destination marketing activity is tourists' revisit or recommend intention. Numerous research has investigated different factors impacting tourists' retraveling intention. For example, Chen and Chen (2010) confirmed that the experience quality of tourism activities and perceived value affect tourists' satisfaction while perceived value and satisfaction positively influence tourists' behavioral intention to revisit and recommend the destination. The perceived value of destinations impacts tourists' satisfaction and future behavioral intention toward the destination (Pandža Bajcs, 2013; Ramseook-Munhurrun et al., 2015). The perceived destination personality positively influences both the destination attitudes and tourists' intention to visit, revisit, and recommend (Hultman et al., 2017; Yura & Cho, 2016). Chua et al. (2019) testified that the brand personality significantly influences tourists' hedonic and utilitarian values and affects intention to revisit and recommend. To summarize the preceding works about the effect of tourism value on tourists' behavioral intention for Tainan City, the first capital of Taiwan, this study suggests the last hypothesis.

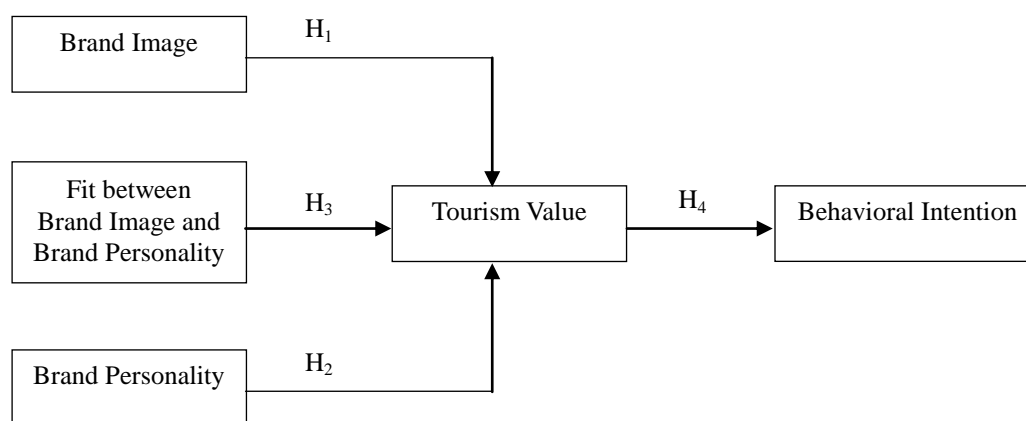


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

H4. Tourism value has a positive influence on tourists' behavioral intention.

Figure 1 shows the proposed conceptual framework, which comprises brand image, brand personality, fit between brand image and personality, tourism value, and behavioral intention.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection and Sample

This study applied both hardcopy and web-based questionnaires to collect data from current or ever-stayed foreign students in Taiwan regardless of whether they had visited the Tainan City. The data collecting was a snowball sampling process for the proportion of foreign students was still too low to adopt random sampling. The total amount of respondents was 215, while the effective sample was 150 after excluding 65 disqualified questionnaires for missing data, outliers, or ambiguities. The sample included 86 females (57.3%) and 64 males (42.7%), and 122 respondents belonged to the 18-22 years old (81.3%). The primary nationality of the sample was Hong Kong/Macau 48 (32.0%), the minor was China 40 (26.7%), and the third was Southeast Asia 46 (Malaysia, Indonesia, and so on 30.7%). Only 18 students have never been to Tainan City, and the remaining 132 students have visited at least one time. The visiting frequency arranged in ascending order was zero (18, 12.0%), one or two times (58, 38.7%), three or four times (44, 29.3%), five or six times (16, 10.7%), and more than seven times (14, 9.3%).

3.2 Measurement

This study used a self-administered questionnaire including six sections to measure brand image, brand personality, fit between brand image and personality, tourism value, and behavioral intention. The questionnaire items validated by previous empirical research were adapted to five-point Likert scales for this study's context. Section one measured brand image by twelve items concerning the functional, experiential, and symbolic brand concepts that were recognized as characteristics of a destination (Gnoth, 2002; Park et al., 1986; Yura & Cho, 2016). Section two measured brand personality by six items from the modified BPS for tourism destinations (Hultman et al., 2017). Since it was not appropriate to adopt the absolute difference model (Sirgy & Samli, 1985) or Graeff (1997)'s approach to appraising the fit between brand image and personality, section three used three items to question respondents' perception directly. Section four measured tourism value consisting of hedonic and utilitarian values by four items (Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994; Chua et al., 2019).

Section five measured tourists' visit, recommend, and suggestion intention by three items adapted from Cronin, Brady, and Hult (2000) and Salehzadeh et al. (2016). The extra item for suggestion intention added to section five was to explore the intensity of foreign students proposing practical improvement suggestions after visiting Tainan City. Lastly, section six requested respondents' relevant demographics, including gender, age, nationality, staying location, monthly expenditure, and visiting frequency for Tainan City.

4. Data Analysis and Results

The reliability of questionnaire items was measured by Cronbach's alpha for each variable. All Cronbach's alphas are greater than 0.8 in this study representing reliable responses. The Cronbach's alpha and descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alpha

Variable	Dimension	M	S.D.	Cronbach's alpha
Brand Image	Functional	3.79	0.69	0.918
	Experiential	3.98	0.78	
	Symbolic	3.47	0.73	
Brand Personality	Dependability	3.31	0.93	0.816
	Excitement	2.60	1.01	
	Ruggedness	3.44	0.91	
	Activeness	3.31	1.10	
	Philoxenia	4.02	0.89	
	Sophistication	3.67	0.97	
Fit between Brand Image and Personality	Fitness	3.66	0.71	0.842
Tourism Value	Hedonic	3.73	0.79	0.829
	Utilitarian	3.81	0.77	
Behavioral Intention	Visit	4.12	0.92	0.816
	Recommend	4.13	0.95	
	Suggestion	3.35	1.10	

Table 2. Influence of Brand Image on Tourism Value

Brand Image	Tourism Value					
	Hedonic			Utilitarian		
	β	t	p	β	t	p
Functional	0.370	4.338	0.000	0.299	3.195	0.002
Experiential	0.174	1.936	0.055	0.216	2.190	0.030
Symbolic	0.319	3.906	0.000	0.294	3.286	0.001
F	80.248			58.4		
p	0.000			0.000		

Table 3. Influence of Brand Personality on Tourism Value

Brand Personality	Tourism Value					
	Hedonic			Utilitarian		
	β	t	p	β	t	p
Dependability	0.028	0.409	0.683	0.137	1.742	0.084
Excitement	0.027	0.416	0.678	-0.172	-2.293	0.023
Ruggedness	0.042	0.620	0.537	-0.041	-0.533	0.595
Activeness	0.298	3.812	0.000	0.180	2.026	0.045
Philoxenia	0.284	3.595	0.000	0.279	3.108	0.002
Sophistication	0.270	3.648	0.000	0.316	3.749	0.000
F	32.996			20.04		
p	0.000			0.000		

Table 4. Influence of Fit between Brand Image and Personality on Tourism Value

Fit between Brand Image and Personality	Tourism Value					
	Hedonic			Utilitarian		
	β	t	p	β	t	p
Fitness	0.540	7.812	0.000	0.627	9.79	0.000
F	61.020			95.851		
p	0.000			0.000		

Table 5. Influence of Tourism Value on Behavioral Intention

Tourism Value	Behavioral Intention								
	Visit			Recommend			Suggestion		
	β	t	p	β	t	p	β	t	p
Hedonic	0.495	6.956	0.000	0.487	6.512	0.000	0.411	4.064	0.000
Utilitarian	0.359	5.042	0.000	0.338	4.514	0.000	0.101	0.993	0.322
F	121.433			102.688			22.866		
p	0.000			0.000			0.000		

The hypotheses were tested by regression analysis. Table 2 ~ Table 5 shows all testing results. According to Table 2, the functional ($\beta = 0.370$, $p < 0.001$) and symbolic ($\beta = 0.319$, $p < 0.001$) brand concepts of the brand image have significant positive influences on hedonic tourism value, while the functional ($\beta = 0.299$, $p < 0.01$), experiential ($\beta = 0.216$, $p < 0.05$), and symbolic ($\beta = 0.294$, $p < 0.01$) brand concepts of the brand image have significant positive influences on utilitarian tourism value. These results support the Hypothesis 1. Results in Table 3 show that only three dimensions of brand personality, activeness ($\beta = 0.298$, $p < 0.001$), philoxenia ($\beta = 0.284$, $p < 0.001$), and sophistication ($\beta = 0.270$, $p < 0.001$) have significant positive influences on hedonic tourism value. Four dimensions of brand personality, excitement ($\beta = -0.172$, $p < 0.05$), activeness ($\beta = 0.180$, $p < 0.05$), philoxenia ($\beta = 0.279$, $p < 0.01$), and sophistication ($\beta = 0.316$, $p < 0.001$) have significant positive influences on utilitarian tourism value. Therefore, the Hypothesis 2 is partially but mostly supported. Table 4 demonstrates that the fit between brand image and personality positively impact both the hedonic ($\beta = 0.540$, $p < 0.001$) and utilitarian ($\beta = 0.627$, $p < 0.001$) tourism value, and the Hypothesis 3 is fully confirmed. Finally, analysis results in Table 5 verify that hedonic tourism value has positive effect on tourists' visit ($\beta = 0.495$, $p < 0.001$), recommend ($\beta = 0.487$, $p < 0.001$), and suggestion ($\beta = 0.411$, $p < 0.001$) intention. However, the utilitarian tourism value has positive effect only on tourists' visit ($\beta = 0.359$, $p < 0.001$) and recommend ($\beta = 0.338$, $p < 0.001$) intention. The Hypothesis 4 is also mostly testified.

5. Conclusions and discussion

Much research has been done to discover the effect of brand image and personality for tourism destinations on tourists' behavioral intentions. Nevertheless, whether the approved relationships are still valid for different cultural characteristics of tourists and tourism destinations is an attractive topic that needs to investigate deeper. The functional brand image positively influences foreign students' hedonic value because of Tainan City's famous local food attractions, similar to Sabah, Malaysia (Fam et al., 2019). The functional brand image also affects utilitarian value due to cheaper expense for high-quality touring perceptions in Tainan City. The experiential brand image does not significantly affect hedonic value but has a substantial effect on utilitarian value. Perhaps foreign students were attracted by abundant folk cultural, humanistic, and historical touring sites in Tainan City for soul relaxation and gaining cultural literacy rather than exciting but noisy and vulgar business facilities. The symbolic brand image impacts hedonic value due to the local governments' efforts in the recent decade to move Tainan City from a cultural and historical destination to a multidimensional touring attraction so that foreign students loved to visit Tainan City. The influence of symbolic brand image on utilitarian value comes from the tourists' satisfaction of their brain, the spiritual reward of cultural and historical exploration, and stomach, the local variant cuisines. Part of the above conclusions coincides with previous research (Gallarza & Gil Saura, 2006).

The three brand personality dimensions, activeness, philoxenia, and sophistication, have an impressive effect on hedonic value by which foreign students perceived a peaceful and polite Tainan City. Since the major motivation for most tourists to visit a specific destination is to pursue entertaining satisfaction, thus, including the above three brand personality dimensions, one extra personality dimension, excitement, also influences the utilitarian value. Tourists must perceive the fit between brand image and personality to identify the hedonic and utilitarian values and in turn affect their behavioral intention. According to Chen and Chen (2010), the perceived value influences consumers' selections before purchase and affects the loyalty, repurchase, and recommend intention after purchase. Most foreign students had recognized the tourism value and were eager to visit and recommend the Tainan City.

However, perhaps lack of local identity, foreign students did not exhibit evident intention to suggest practical improving solutions to help raise touring quality. All above discussions at least offer the local government a path of touring policy in the post-pandemic era.

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