

Brand Image in Loyalty of Heritage Tourism

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Heritage tourism has become a burgeoning area of research, as it was found to help promote economic growth and regional development, and enhance social identity and heritage conservation. The term “heritage” is often assigned the role of carrier of historical value of the cultural elements of a society, and as such heritage is seen as a strong attraction for tourists; it may refer to tangible elements including historical buildings, art works and landscapes or intangible elements involving the distinctive ways of life and experience of spaces perceived by the visitors as heritage. The latter perspective leads to diversification of heritage and expands to non-traditional areas as industrial production, historical theme parks, restaurants, and seaside resorts. Loyalty has been widely examined in the context of cultural tourism.

Keywords: industrial heritage ; brand image ; loyalty

1. Introduction

In 2020, there were more than 90 industrial heritage sites inscribed in the World Heritage List ^[1]. With the advancement of new technology and globalization, many industrial facilities are abandoned across countries. Some of these sites have been rejuvenated and transformed into travel destinations in an attempt to celebrate history and at the same time reshape city image. Some examples of this include Big Pit at Blaenavon in South Wales (former coal mine, now part of Blaenavon World Heritage Site), The Ruhr region of Germany (once one of Europe's largest coal mining areas), and Jiufen in Taiwan (former gold mine known from the movie *City of Sadness*). These areas successfully integrate their valuable heritage into tourism efforts and attract high numbers of visitors ^[2].

For loyalty aspects, it was showed that satisfaction, image, emotions, quality/performance, and motivation are important influential factors ^{[3][4][5][6]}. As implied by Kim, Wong, Chang, and Park ^[7], the selecting of loyalty factors should depend primarily on the research nature and contexts since tourists' loyalty might differ by industry and market stage of product life cycle. Many have been documented a path relationship between experience, satisfaction, and loyalty ^{[8][9][10][11][12]}. Results have been shown that tourists' experiences directly influence their evaluation of the travel process, and hence determine their satisfaction and subsequent behaviors. The influence of brand image on satisfaction and loyalty have been examined in the aspect of consumer behavior ^{[13][14]}, and satisfaction might fully mediate the influence of brand image on loyalty in the tourism field ^[15]. In the era of the experience economy, experience has been viewed as the core for heritage tourism and is significant in the building of destination brand image ^{[16][17]}.

2. Industrial Heritage Tourism and Experience

Mostly, it was agreed that heritage tourism is one of the most significant and fast growing segments of tourism ^[18]. Among the segments, industrial heritage tourism represents a promising niche market that assists in regional restructuring and economic development. Industrial heritage tourism has been defined as “the development of touristic activities and industries on man-made sites, buildings and landscapes that originated with industrial processes of earlier periods” ^[19] (p. 342). Themes of industrial heritage are classified into ten categories: extractive industries (e.g., iron, gold), bulk product industries (e.g., textiles), manufacturing industries (e.g., machine manufacture), utilities (e.g., water supply), power sources and prime movers (e.g., windmills), transportation (e.g., railroads), communication (e.g., telephones), bridges, trestles or aqueducts (e.g., movable bridges), building technology (e.g., roof systems), and specialized structures/objects (e.g., dams) ^[20]. Of these, many sites have developed tourism, with mines, metal working sites, factories, and transportation systems being the most visited.

Industrial heritage has been called the “landscapes of nostalgia” ^[21] (p. 566). It is “not just about the monuments and artifacts that remain, important though they are, but also about the people and communities whose lives, enterprise and energy have made the areas what they are” (the European Route of Industrial Heritage, adapted from Cole ^[22] (p. 481)). Visits to these industrial heritage sites give tourists nostalgic and novel experiences about traditional manufacturing and processing systems. McIntosh and Prentice ^[23] examined the process of visitors interacting with an industrial heritage site

and noted that “insight” from the interaction process represented a key component of the experiences visitors reported. Heritage settings inducing visitors’ personal, familiar, or affective responses were appreciated the most. In other words, visitors went to these heritage destinations to look for unique experiences that were personally meaningful and derived from the interaction between the staged activities and the individuals. In this regard, visitors become an actor rather than spectator ^[24]. To involve the visitor as a participant or a co-producer, heritage settings must take into account marketing activity offerings and visitor perceptions. Determining which marketing activities would induce deeper and more positive experiences from visitors appears to be a key issue and requires further examination.

The main idea of experiential marketing is identifying the core of products or service offerings and then connecting these to intangible, tangible, and interactive experiences that enhance the perceived value and help customers make their purchasing decisions ^[25]. In other words, experiential marketing focuses more on customers’ sense and emotions’ stimulation than on the functions of product/service offerings. After integrating the different aspects of experience formation, Schmitt ^[26] further proposed five types of consumer experiences that can be created by marketing stimuli, including sense, feel, think, act, and relate, which are termed strategic experiential modules (SEMs). The sensory experience includes esthetic pleasure, excitement, and satisfaction that can be derived from visual, sound, smell, taste, and touch stimuli. The affective experience appeals to customers’ feeling and emotions that range from mildly positive moods to intense emotions of joy or nostalgia. The think experience includes convergent and divergent thinking induced by surprise and provocation. The act experience involves encouraging changes in lifestyles, interaction, and behaviors. Finally, the relate experience expands beyond the individual’s aspect and relates an individual to a broader social system (e.g., a subculture). Among these five experiences, sense was considered to be powerful for brand building ^[27] and easier to start with, while affect was the experience most influential on subsequent behaviors when it occurred during the interaction.

Since the introduction of the experiential marketing concept and SEMs by Schmitt ^[26], there have been limited focus on related issues. Many of the tourism aspect were conducted concentrate on the application of experiential marketing ^{[28][29]} and scale development ^[30]. Using the experiential approach in the context of industrial heritage tourism is even less common. For a brief one of industrial heritage tourism research published in the following 10 major tourism journals—Annals of Tourism Research, International Journal of Tourism Research, Journal of Travel Research, Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research, Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing, Journal of Destination Marketing and Management, Current Issues in Tourism, Journal of Sustainable Tourism, Tourism Management, and Tourism Management Perspectives —. It was indicated that existing ones have mostly concentrated upon four areas: the planning and management issues of turning industrial heritage sites into tourist attractions, its relationship to community, image reshaping for industrial cities, and visitor experiences and authenticity. Clearly, planning-related topics, community support, and the mining industry predominate in the field, while few on visitor experiences were undertaken.

Experiences are private events that are perceived and often generated from observation or direct participation in marketing activities as provided before or after purchase ^[26]. As a marketer, providing the right stimuli (marketing efforts) prompting desired visitor experiences is important. Therefore, here was measured visitors’ perceived experiences after undergoing the marketing efforts (experiential marketing) in an industrial heritage setting.

3. Brand Image

Brand image is considered as the entirety of impressions that consumers receive from many sources ^[31]. These sources could be from media reports, word-of-mouth, personal experiences, or media advertising. Later, Keller ^[32] defined brand image as “consumer perceptions of a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory” (p. 3). These associations are the informational links stored in the minds of the consumer and can be reinforced as well as evoked when exposed to marketing stimuli. Kotler and Armstrong ^[33] indicated brand image as the set of beliefs about a particular brand that help differentiate it from other brands. These beliefs are perceived based on brand attributes and will differ depending on personal experiences, selective memory, and encoding. Brand image plays an important role in the consumer’s decision process when evaluating alternative brands, since it signifies higher quality and less purchasing risk that leads to higher purchasing intention ^{[34][35]}.

As for dimensions of brand image, Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis ^[36] developed a framework, called brand concept management (BCM), to facilitate brand image communication and higher market performance. In the framework, the brand concept is the core which guides us through the sequential process of image building, and can be classified into three types depending on customer needs. These include: (1) functional concept: emphasize the brand’s performance in solving consumption-related problems (e.g., destination providing entertainment as well as educational programs); (2) symbolic concept: emphasizes the brand’s heightening in self-identification, self-expression, and group membership (e.g.,

destination linked to locations at film programs); and (3) experiential concept: emphasizes the brand's sensory satisfaction and cognitive stimulation, and especially highlights the experiential aspects of fantasy, fun, and pleasure associated with the consumption process (e.g., destination with a variety of fun activities). These three aspects of brand image mirror the three type benefits of brand associations by Keller ^[32] and are also suggested by many researchers ^{[37][38][39]}. Given that the definition by Keller ^[32] has received the most support ^{[40][41][42]}, therefore, it was modified the definition by Keller and adopt the classification by Park et al. ^[36] to define brand image as “visitors' perceptions of a destination brand as reflected by the brand associations held in memory, and that consists of three components: functional, symbolic and experiential image”.

4. Brand Image and Experience

In the model of customer-based brand equity, Keller ^[32] used an associative network memory model to explain the process of image forming: the memory is composed of a set of nodes and interconnecting links where nodes signify stored concepts or information while links represent the strength of association between nodes. For a specific association to appear, the nodes containing specific information must be activated first and the other nodes with desired concepts must be strongly connected to the activated nodes. The process starts with a stimulus from the external environment (usually directed by marketers, such as a nostalgic atmosphere in destination), nodes containing information related to that atmosphere being activated (e.g., evokes the scene from childhood), and then those favored nodes with strong links to the activated nodes being activated (e.g., remembers related events and story in that scene). Cai ^[40] also stressed that brand image is formed through a process that starts with selecting one or more brand elements and then establishing brand associations that reflect the attributes, affective, and attitudes components of an image. In other words, by carefully selecting appropriate marketing stimuli, marketers could induce and reinforce visitors' association to a brand, which could lead to a positive brand image. These stimuli could be in the forms of sensory, affective, intellectual, behavioral, and social stimuli.

The relationship between experience and brand image has been proposed and verified by many researchers. For example, Padgett and Allen ^[43] discussed the potential to communicate brand image through a narrative approach and recommended the use of both narrative and argumentative advertisements to convey a functional and experiential brand image. Berry ^[16] stressed that the actual experience visitors perceive is more powerful than any advertisement to brand image building. Ghaffari, Abasi, and Monfared ^[44] showed that all dimensions of cultural tourists' experience have influence on destination brand image. It was indicated that the importance of experience to brand image.

5. Experience, Satisfaction, and Loyalty

Mehrabian and Russell ^[45] proposed that environmental stimuli influence an individual's affective states, which in turn influence approach or avoidance responses. Following the same direction, Schmitt ^[46] introduced the construct of experiential marketing and argued that customers not only want functional features and benefits but the offerings which touch their hearts, stun their senses, and stimulate their thinking. He further recommended five types of experience-inducers for managers to create the desired experiences. Marketers can engage customers in the consumption process by using services and goods in a way that creates memorable events, and which further lead to revisit intentions and positive word-of-mouth. Phillips and Baumgartner ^[47] explained the satisfaction formation process from an experiential perspective and stressed that the satisfaction responses can be described as an experientially motivated process in which consumers approach consumption, form expectations (based on the experiential outcomes), experience (exposing to marketing efforts), and evaluate. As such, it is reasonable to assume that an individual with positive experiences is more likely to be satisfied with the consumption and reveal more positive loyalty behaviors.

In the aspect of consumer, many are conducted to examine the influence of different environmental stimuli on satisfaction. These environmental stimuli include color, scent, lighting, background music, and cleanliness ^{[48][49]} and have been proved to enhance customers' satisfaction and purchasing behaviors. In tourism areas, someone have empirically examined the relationships of experiences to satisfaction and loyalty. For example, Barnes et al. ^[30] and Milman and Tasci ^[50] indicated that affective (feel) experiences can directly influence satisfaction and loyalty behaviors. Stavrianea and Kamenidou ^[12] and Chen, Wang, Li, Wei, and Yuan ^[3] confirmed the direct influence of tourist experience on satisfaction and loyalty.

6. Brand Image, Satisfaction, and Loyalty

The evaluation of experience is difficult given the intangible and high-risk nature of tourism, and hence previous visits play an important role in forming visitors' satisfaction. Visitors need to collect information internally and externally to form their

own beliefs and judgments towards a destination. The information obtained internally involves the activation of knowledge stored in the memory [51]. In the context of a destination brand, the knowledge could be those attributes related to a specific destination. When visitors perceive certain destination attributes, they will generate expectations in satisfying specific needs which can further elicit satisfaction and encourage future loyalty behaviors [52]. Kotler, Bowen, and Makens [53] suggested that customers tend to have a positive experience towards a purchase when they had a good image of that product before obtaining it. Taking this principle to tourism areas, visitors having a favorable image towards a destination would perceive their onsite experiences positively, and that leads to a higher level of satisfaction and loyalty.

In addition, it is argued that image measurement cannot be based on attributes alone but on the value and benefits from using the brand [54]. This coincides with Keller's [32] model that stressed the favorability of brand image as a function of needs fulfillment benefits and attributes, and also implies the importance of benefits-based image on consumers' satisfaction. The influences of brand image on satisfaction and loyalty have been widely examined in aspect of consumer behavior [14][55], and further verified in the field of tourism [12][15]. Sondoh et al. [13] investigated the influence of brand image on satisfaction and loyalty, and indicated that the influences vary depending on the brand image components. For example, the image components of functional and appearance enhancement showed positive influences on loyalty but the components of symbolic and experiential images did not.

7. The Mediating Role of Brand Image and Satisfaction

Identifying the determinants of loyalty will allow managers to concentrate on the major influential factors that lead to customers' repeat purchases or visits. Previously, it has been shown that satisfaction, quality/performance, image, emotions, and motivation are good predictors of loyalty [5][6][56], with satisfaction displaying a strong relationship to loyalty [57][58]. Satisfaction typically plays a mediating role between visitors' experiences and loyalty. For example, Chao [59] reported that brand image and satisfaction play very important roles as mediators to establish customer loyalty. Similarly, Han, Back, and Barrett [60] found that satisfaction fully mediated the relationship between affective experiences and loyalty behaviors. However, this role is not consistent across all results. Barnes et al. [30] found that satisfaction only partially mediated the relationship of experience and loyalty behaviors, while Prayag et al. [10] even reported a nonsignificant mediating effect of satisfaction. The same situation applies to the effect of brand image. For airline customers, Brodie et al. [55] found that brand image has no direct effect on loyalty, but affects loyalty through its influence on customer value. Faullant et al. [15] further noted that the importance of image and satisfaction on predicting loyalty differs depending on visitors' experiences, with image more influential for repeat customers. Still, in the tourism field, it was investigated the mediating roles of brand image and satisfaction on the relationship between experience and loyalty is limited. It is argued that satisfaction is a necessary but insufficient condition for encouraging positive loyalty behaviors [61]. In other words, loyalty cannot be predicted by satisfaction alone and it is best explained by combining both satisfaction and other variables such as brand image and affect (experiences) [29][62][63][64].

As described above, visitor experience may affect their loyalty, and the influence might be mediated by satisfaction and brand image. These relationships have been reported in the context of cultural tourism, and were proposed to be applicable to the heritage tourism sector, which is a segment of cultural tourism.

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