



Factors Affecting Brand Equity of Tourism Destination Image. In Zhejiang Province

¹ Jin Fengyuan, ² Albattat Ahmad, ³ Azman Norhidayah

^{1,2} Graduate School of Management, Post Graduate Centre, Management and Science University, University Drive, Off Persiaran Olahraga, 40100, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

³ Faculty of Business Management and Professional Studies Management and Science University, University Drive, Off Persiaran Olahraga, 40100, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

(Received: 02 September 2023

Revised: 14 October

Accepted: 07 November)

KEYWORDS

Food Image,
Destination Image,
Accommodation
Service Quality,
Brand Equity

ABSTRACT:

This study explores the interactions between food image, destination image, accommodation service quality and brand equity. It is done in the context of Zhejiang as a tourist destination. This study provides valuable insights into tourism management and destination branding. This contributes to a broader understanding of destination brand equity factors. As well as providing actionable recommendations for stakeholders in Zhejiang's tourism industry, the study aims to improve brand equity and visitor satisfaction by providing actionable recommendations.

1. Introduction

Due to technological and communication advances, the tourism sector has experienced rapid growth during the emergence of a worldwide economic system. There has been a significant increase in the number of people travelling and a diversification of destinations. Globally, tourism has transformed from a privilege of a few to an indispensable and universal element of daily life (UNWTO, 2019). Tourism has contributed significantly to the economies of different regions, making it an important catalyst for socioeconomic progress and a major source of income for millions. The purpose of tourism is primarily to provide opportunities for experiential learning. Lee, Seong, and Qu (2020) argue that tourism destinations' ability to offer distinctive and memorable experiences sets them apart from other destinations. Capitalizing on these experiences helps tourism destinations shape their image and develop brand equity.

This study was conducted in Zhejiang Province, a famous tourist destination in China known for its striking scenery, cultural heritage, and culinary culture. Recent growth in China's domestic tourism market provides an opportunity to study destination branding. The purpose

of this study is to deepen the understanding of destination brand equity through a detailed study of the Zhejiang case. As well as contributing to the current academic literature, it aims to make a valuable contribution. It is still necessary to explore the complex relationships between the various factors that influence destination brand equity, despite the extensive literature on destination branding. This study provides insights into destination branding by examining the key factors that affect brand equity in the context of Zhejiang Province.

2. Theoretical Review

2.1. Food Image Theory

Based on the food image theory, a traveler's perception of food in a particular location may significantly affect his or her decision-making and overall experience. The importance of food extends beyond its primary function as a source of nourishment. The tourism industry plays an important role in enhancing cultural identity as well as stimulating the local economy and creating a positive impression of the destination (Quan and Wang, 2004).

Increasing amounts of research have highlighted the important role that food plays in shaping people's perceptions and descriptions of their travel destinations.



Li et al. (2015) demonstrated that food imagery has a significant impact on perceptions of a place and tourists' behaviors, particularly in the context of Taiwanese night markets. There is evidence that the impact of food on a place's attractiveness and branding extends beyond the mere experience of taste. Food plays a significant role in tourism storytelling and promotional campaigns associated with tourist destinations (Ellis, Park, Kim, & Yeoman, 2018). This study examines the socio-cultural and symbolic meanings of food.

Zhejiang Province can benefit from culinary image theory as a theoretical framework for analyzing the impact of its specialty cuisines (particularly the highly regarded Hangzhou cuisine) on the region's destination image. To develop effective marketing strategies and improve tourist satisfaction, it is vital to understand this correlation.

2.2. Destination Image Theory

A well-established concept in tourism research is destination image theory, which emphasizes the importance of perceptions of the destination in shaping tourist behavior (Gartner, 1993; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). According to Baloglu and McCleary (1999), the target image is a multidimensional concept containing both cognitive and affective components. Cognitive factors include the information and attitudes people have about a place. Among these factors are physical features, the climate, attractions, and services. Alternatively, the affective element relates to people's feelings about a location.

Over the last decade, destination understanding has improved tremendously. Recent research has found that tourists' perceptions of a destination have a large influence on their purchasing decisions (Beerli & Martin, 2004). Furthermore, tourism experience value appears to be influenced by the destination's image (Prayag and Ryan, 2012). Chen & Tsai (2007) also found that tourists' loyalty to a destination is influenced by the destination's image. A destination's image in its environment is expected to exert a significant influence on Zhejiang Province's brand equity. According to Chen and Phou (2013), the brand equity of a destination may be enhanced by favorable perceptions. It may lead to more tourists and positive word-of-mouth. In contrast, negative perceptions may deter potential tourists and hurt brand equity. Moreover, recent academic research has

highlighted the importance of managing place images actively, especially in the digital age. To summarize, destination image theory provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding how tourists perceive Zhejiang Province. It is widely acknowledged that maintaining a destination's image actively and strategically is crucial to its competitiveness as well as its attractiveness.

2.3. Service Quality Model (SERVQUAL)

The Service Quality Model (SERVQUAL) was created in 1988 by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry. Designed to assess the perceptions of customers, the model is a well-recognized concept in service marketing. The SERVQUAL methodology emphasizes service quality. There is a gap between customer expectations and the actual service provided.

According to SERVQUAL, service quality can be measured on five dimensions: tangible service, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

In several industries, including tourism, SERVQUAL has been widely used. In Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988), it enables management to identify service quality deficiencies and take appropriate measures to improve service quality. During the past decade, scholars have used the SERVQUAL model to analyze and improve service quality in the tourism industry. According to Park & Jeong (2019), tourists visiting Indian mountain resorts were surveyed about the quality of services they perceived. Tourists' service quality ratings are most heavily influenced by reliability and empathy, according to their research.

SERVQUAL may be able to help Zhejiang Province assess and improve its accommodation services. It is possible for service providers to improve their services by understanding tourists' expectations and perceptions, thereby enhancing tourism satisfaction and experience. This could damage Zhejiang's tourism reputation.

3. Empirical Review

3.1. Food image

Food image refers to the common beliefs and impressions customers have about the cuisine in a particular place or region. A variety of factors influence the formation of these views, such as personal preferences, cultural heritage, past experiences, and



external stimuli such as marketing strategies and word-of-mouth recognition (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016).

During the past few years, gastronomic images have become increasingly important in tourism. Kim, Eves, and Scarles (2009) emphasize the influence of destination image on tourists' decision-making processes. The culinary cultures of places that are known for their unique and enticing cuisines can attract 'food tourists' who will engage in purposeful culinary experiences (Ellis, Park, Kim, & Yeoman, 2018). It is also possible for tourist potential to be deterred from visiting a place if their food has a poor reputation.

As well as influencing the choice of a destination, the visual presentation of food influences subsequent behaviors such as the desire to return, make recommendations, or write an online review (Su et al., 2021). Gastronomic image management is therefore crucial for building a strong brand and increasing global tourism's competitiveness. While gastronomic image plays a vital role in forming destination brand equity, it does so in a variety of ways. Depending on how well local gastronomic choices match tourists' expectations and preferences, tourists' dietary choices may be influenced. Food images can be perceived differently depending on a variety of factors, such as safety, cleanliness, familiarity, and dietary restrictions. Effectively addressing these issues is crucial.

3.2. Destination image

'Destination image' refers to people's cognitive and emotional impressions of a tourist destination (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). In this discussion, there are several elements that make up the multidimensional concept. Natural attractions, monuments, and infrastructure are tangible factors, as are local culture, hospitality, and atmosphere.

Tourism behavior and marketing strategies are heavily influenced by the perception of a destination's image. Tasci & Gartner (2007) found that potential tourists are attracted to destinations that align with their interests, tastes, and perceptions of quality. It is possible that tourists' satisfaction with the destination and their overall evaluation of the trip are affected by the image of the destination (Chen & Tsai, 2007). Prayag (2009) argues

that travelling influences memory recall, word-of-mouth recommendations, and future travel intentions.

Various information sources, personal characteristics, and social engagement contribute to the creation of a destination image (Stylidis, Shani, & Belhassen, 2017). As a result, understanding and managing destination images requires in-depth audience insight and continuous research.

3.3. Quality of accommodation services

Accommodation plays a vital role in shaping the overall travel experience and directly impacts tourist satisfaction and impressions of a place. Several basic elements comprise an accommodation facility, including cleanliness, location, price, safety, facilities, and the quality of service provided by staff (Lu et al., 2023)

As a comprehensive tool for assessing the quality of services in several industries, including tourism, the SERVQUAL model was developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988). In this model, five dimensions are introduced: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. In physical terms, tangibles refer to buildings, equipment, and personnel. For a service to be reliable, it must be able to deliver promised services consistently and accurately. Customer responsiveness refers to a company's willingness to assist customers quickly. Knowledge, courtesy, and the ability to convey trust and confidence are all components of assurance. As a final point, empathy refers to how a company treats its customers with care and personalization.

A quality accommodation service is often characterized by several factors, including staff courtesy and timeliness, exemplary culinary offerings, hygienic facilities, strengths of the venue, and overall affordability (Abdullah et al., 2017). Poor service quality at a hotel, for instance, could reduce the quality of the overall trip regardless of the other attractions the site offers.

Since quality perceptions in the housing sector are subjective, measuring service quality is challenging. Various factors can affect tourists' impression of a place, including their personal preferences, cultures, and past experiences (Chen & Chen, 2010). Thus, it is important to conduct continuous research to better understand the dynamic needs of tourists.



4. Conclusions

With its cultural, historical, and natural landmarks, Zhejiang Province has grown into a leading player in the tourism industry. There is a strong impact of culinary imagery on brand equity in Zhejiang Province because of its rich culinary heritage. It is imperative to conduct a comprehensive study and develop a successful methodology for promoting unique gastronomic experiences for domestic and international tourists. Tourism brand equity is influenced by three aspects - food image, destination image, and accommodation quality - in Zhejiang Province. Brand equity is built and enhanced by a positive perception of the destination, such as Zhejiang. Combined with its natural beauty, rich culture, historical monuments, and vibrant cities, Zhejiang Province makes for a unique tourist destination. In spite of this, when it comes to communicating this visual image to prospective tourists, there are substantial barriers. The recognition of negative associations related to high population density or environmental pollution is also difficult. The existing destination image must be evaluated thoroughly and strategies implemented to strengthen it. It is essential to conduct a study of Zhejiang's accommodation quality to gain a deeper understanding of its impact on Zhejiang's brand equity. To attract more tourists, the region can strategically upgrade its tourism accommodations by analyzing areas that need improvement. Ultimately, this will improve tourism overall. If tourists ignore these issues, they may be less satisfied with their travel experience in Zhejiang Province. Travelers' actual experience may not meet their initial expectations, which will negatively affect the Zhejiang tourism industry.

Reference:

1. Abdullah, D., Jayaraman, K., Shariff, D. N., Bahari, K. A., & Nor, N. M. (2017). The effects of perceived interactivity, perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness on online hotel booking intention: A conceptual framework. *International Academic Research Journal of Social Science*, 3(1), 16-23.
2. Baloglu, S., & McCleary, K. W. (1999). A model of destination image formation. *Annals of tourism research*, 26(4), 868-897.
3. Björk, P., & Kauppinen-Räsänen, H. (2016). Local food: a source for destination attraction. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 28(1), 177-194.
4. Beerli, A., & Martin, J. D. (2004). Factors influencing destination image. *Annals of tourism research*, 31(3), 657-681.
5. Chen, C. F., & Phou, S. (2013). A closer look at destination: Image, personality, relationship and loyalty. *Tourism management*, 36, 269-278.
6. Chen, C. F., & Tsai, D. (2007). How destination image and evaluative factors affect behavioral intentions? *Tourism management*, 28(4), 1115-1122.
7. Chen, C. F., & Chen, F. S. (2010). Experience quality, perceived value, satisfaction and behavioral intentions for heritage tourists. *Tourism management*, 31(1), 29-35.
8. Echtner, C. M., & Ritchie, J. B. (1993). The measurement of destination image: An empirical assessment. *Journal of travel research*, 31(4), 3-13.
9. Echtner, C. M., & Ritchie, J. B. (1991). The meaning and measurement of destination image. *Journal of tourism studies*, 2(2), 2-12.
10. Ellis, A., Park, E., Kim, S., & Yeoman, I. (2018). What is food tourism? *Tourism management*, 68, 250-263.
11. Gartner, W. C. (1994). Image formation process. *Journal of travel & tourism marketing*, 2(2-3), 191-216.
12. Kim, Y. G., Eves, A., & Scarles, C. (2009). Building a model of local food consumption on trips and holidays: A grounded theory approach. *International journal of hospitality management*, 28(3), 423-431.
13. Lee, S. W., & Xue, K. (2020). A model of destination loyalty: Integrating destination image and sustainable tourism. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 25(4), 393-408.
14. Li, Y. R., Lin, Y. C., Tsai, P. H., & Wang, Y. Y. (2015). Traveller-generated contents for destination image formation: Mainland China travellers to Taiwan as a case study. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 32(5), 518-533.
15. Lu, L., Jiao, M., & Weng, L. (2023). Influence of First-Time Visitors' Perceptions of Destination Image on Perceived Value and Destination



- Loyalty: A Case Study of Grand Canal Forest Park, Beijing. *Forests*, 14(3), 504.
16. Park, J., & Jeong, E. (2019). Service quality in tourism: A systematic literature review and keyword network analysis. *Sustainability*, 11(13), 3665.
 17. Parasuraman, A. B. L. L., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. (1988). SERVQUAL: A multiple-item scale for measuring consumer perceptions of service quality. 1988, 64(1), 12-40.
 18. Prayag, G., & Ryan, C. (2012). Antecedents of tourists' loyalty to Mauritius: The role and influence of destination image, place attachment, personal involvement, and satisfaction. *Journal of travel research*, 51(3), 342-356.
 19. Prayag, G. (2009). TOURISTS'EVALUATIONS OF DESTINATION IMAGE, SATISFACTION, AND FUTURE BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS —THE CASE OF MAURITIUS. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 26(8), 836-853.
 20. Quan, S., & Wang, N. (2004). Towards a structural model of the tourist experience: An illustration from food experiences in tourism. *Tourism management*, 25(3), 297-305.
 21. Styliadis, D., Shani, A., & Belhassen, Y. (2017). Testing an integrated destination image model across residents and tourists. *Tourism management*, 58, 184-195.
 22. Su, Y., Xu, J., Sotiriadis, M., & Shen, S. (2021). Authenticity, perceived value and loyalty in marine tourism destinations: The case of Zhoushan, Zhejiang Province, China. *Sustainability*, 13(7), 3716.
 23. Tasci, A. D., & Gartner, W. C. (2007). Destination image and its functional relationships. *Journal of travel research*, 45(4), 413-425.
 24. United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). (2019). UNWTO Tourism Highlights 2019 Edition.