

Multidimensional Model of Customer-based Brand Equity and Its Application to the Religious Events: The Case of Mazu

Hsing-Hui Lin

Department of Nutrition, Hospitality, and Retailing

Texas Tech University

and

Jessica Yuan

Department of Nutrition, Hospitality, and Retailing

Texas Tech University

and

Eunmi Sohn

Department of Nutrition, Hospitality, and Retailing

Texas Tech University

and

Hsing-Ling Huang

Department of Nutrition, Hospitality, and Retailing

Texas Tech University

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between brand equity of religious events and tourists' perceived value of the brand equity and revisit intention of tourists by using branding theory and its implication regarding religious events. Four proposed dimensions -- brand awareness, brand image, brand quality and brand loyalty -- will identify, measure, and test. Data will be collected from visitors who attended the annual Mazu festival. The structural equation modeling (SEM) will be employed to test whether the dimensions of brand equity will have an effect on perceived value and revisit intention. The results will be utilized for event marketing to increase business revenue and enhance corporate images as well as participants' revisit intention.

Keywords: *destination brand, customer-based brand equity, religious event, structural equation modeling (SEM), Mazu.*

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between brand equity of religious events and tourists' perceived value of the brand equity and revisit intention of tourists by using branding theory and its implication regarding religious events. Religious tourism refers not only to the form of tourism with strong or single-minded religious motivation of pilgrimage, but also to those non-pilgrimage tourist activities, such as traveling to the religious sites for sightseeing, cultivation and recreation (Chen, 2006; Ron, 2007). Rinschede (1992) distinguishes organizational forms of religious tourism into several characteristics such as number of participants, choice of transport, seasonal travel, and social structure. Hence, understanding the tourists' behaviors can inform tourism management in developing ways to meet tourists' needs on journeys to religious destinations as well as during their stay at those destinations.

Destination brand is often used in promotion and marketing communication strategy to influence destination image (Aaker, 1996). Murphy *et al.*, (2007) explore the links among five key constructs proposed for the destination branding and choice process. Meanwhile, Baloglu and McCleary (1999) evaluate the attributes of the destination through both cognitive and affective processes.

Today, Mazu is one of the most popular religious idols in Taiwan, and over 16 million people believe in Mazu, accounting for 75 percent of Taiwan's population. A belief in Mazu is defined officially as a Folk Religious belief in Taiwan and plays an important role in traditional Chinese Culture for thousands of years. The Dajia Mazu Cultural Event is one of the representative events in Taiwan. Dajia Cheng Lan Temple has operated in a business model since the 80's and for years increasingly utilized media coverage to attract worshippers as well as massive tourists to attend the events.

This study applies and extends the concept of customer-based brand equity to brand measurement of religious events in an integrated model. This study has the following objectives: a) to develop a valid and reliable model of consumer-based destination brands, b) to empirically assess the dimensions of the destination brand construct, c) to test the relationship among dimensions of the destination brand construct, and d) to validate the model construct.

Customer-based brand equity

The concept of customer-based brand equity and its measurement have emerged in tourism and hospitality settings (Konecnick & Gartner, 2007; Qu *et al.*, 2010). Destinations are far more multi-dimensional than consumer goods and other types of services (Kim & Kim, 2005). Hence, this study is concerned with exploring the dimensions of the customer-based brand equity of a destination. Four proposed dimensions -- brand awareness, brand image, brand equity and brand loyalty – will identify, measure, and test. The propositions are presented for the conceptual model in Figure 1, with the dimensions for this construct explained.

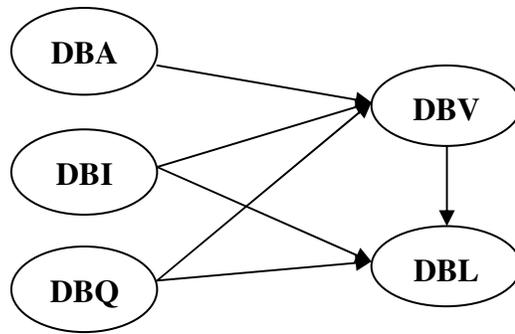


Figure 1. *The proposed baseline model.*

Note. DBA (destination brand awareness), DBI (destination brand image), DBQ (destination brand quality), DBV (destination brand value), and DBL (destination brand loyalty).

Aaker (1996) states that brand awareness represents the strength of the brand's presence in the mind of the target customer along a continuum as well as potential tourists. Brand awareness is considered one of the major components of a brand's effect in hospitality and tourism (Kim & Kim, 2005), especially in the consumer's decision-making (Kwun & Oh, 2004; Oh, 2000). Moreover, brand image has been not only considered as the reasoned or emotional perceptions consumers attach to specific brands (Keller, 2003) but also identified as an important source of brand equity (Keller, 2003; Lassar *et al.*, 1995). In fact, there is a positive relationship between the perceived value of a product's brand and future behavioral intentions characterized as repurchase or revisit intention (Tsai, 2005; Kim *et al.*, 2009; Chen & Tsai, 2007). Also, customer value is positively associated with future behaviors, such as purchase and search intentions (Oh, 2000) and willingness to buy or revisit (Kim *et al.*, 2009).

Hospitality and tourism scholars have prioritized “loyalty” as a subject of special practical importance for research. Cai (2002) reported a significant and positive association between visitors’ affective image and loyalty. This study limited brand loyalty to the attitudinal and behavioral elements and proposes a significant relationship between brand value and brand loyalty.

METHODOLOGY

Measurement items were developed from both a literature review and proposed hypothesis model. Two research questions have been developed: a). Do all dimensions of brand equity affect perceived value on visitors who attend religious events? b). Do all dimensions of brand equity affect revisit intention on visitors who attend religious events?

By using convenience sampling strategy, data will be collected from visitors who attended the annual Mazu festival. The ideal data collection is 400 samples. A pilot test will be conducted on visitors who have ever visited a religious event in Taiwan. The data collected from samples will be used to test the validity and reliability of the scale items. The structural equation modeling (SEM) will be employed to test whether the dimensions of brand equity will have an effect on perceived value and revisit intention.

First, construct reliability of all six dimensions (brand awareness, brand image, brand loyalty, brand quality, perceived value, and revisit intention) will be assessed with Cronbach’s alpha coefficient values. Next, structural equation modeling (SEM) will be used with SPSS v.17 and MPlus v.5.2 to test the study hypotheses. The SEM analysis will perform a two-stage procedure. Firstly, the measurement model will be evaluated. Secondly, the structural model fit will be accessed and structural parameters will be reviewed to determine whether the data support the proposed hypotheses.

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