

The Customer-Based Brand Equity for Sport Tourism Destinations

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ABSTRACT: Purpose of this study was study of brand equity in Golestan province sport tourism destination's from the sport tourist's perspective. Statistical sample were 242 foreign and domestic customers and sport tourists. We use of researcher based questionnaire with high validity and reliability ($\alpha=0.86$). For data analysis were used descriptive statistics and inferential (One sample t-test). Statistical calculations were performed using SPSS 18 software ($p\leq 0.05$). The results showed that the average dimension of awareness in the out the 95% confidence level, is less than 3 and the difference of the mean is negative. But in the average dimension of destinations image, perceived quality and loyalty in the out of the 95% confidence level, is greater than 3 and the difference of the mean is positive. From the sport tourist's perspective, Golestan sport event and sport tourism destinations have not a good name and reputation to raise awareness of the destination. But From the perspective of customers and sports tourists, Golestan sport tourism destinations is a safe destination and has a beautiful scenery, nature, pleasant climate and natural sporting attractions, and has a quality of information available to travel to Golestan and quality of sport facilities is good for hosting major sporting events.

Keywords: Brand Equity, Sport Tourism Destination, Golestan.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of brand equity has emerged as one of the most crucial topics for customer-based perspectives in marketing management since the 1990s (Aaker, 1993, 1996; Keller, 1993, 2008; Kim & Kim, 2005; Yoo & Donthu, 2001) and has been recognized as an important factors for creating competitive market advantages and marketing strategies of differentiation (Boo, Busser, Baloglu, 2009; Chang & Liu, 2009; Ha, Swinder, Siva, 2010). A few scholars have identified the dimensions of brand equity and its implications for resort and travel destination management (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). It is generally accepted that a brand is a powerful means of differentiation, and that differentiation is a significant competitive marketing strategy (Kapferer, 2008; Keller, 2008; Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2005). Strong brand leads competitive advantages (Lee & Back, 2010), increase organization cash flow and accelerate liquidity (Miller & Muir, 2004), provide premium price, profitability and more loyalty for customers (Madden, Fehle, Fournier, 2006), and also support brand extension opportunity (Yasin, Noor, Mohamad, 2007). The extension of the brand concept from products to service industries such as tourism offers implications for resort and travel destination management (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998). While branded consumer products have a longstanding academic literature, the literature on destination branding is a relatively recent phenomenon (Buhalis, 2000). Destination branding is considered a vital aspect of current destination management practice, as broadening tourist opportunities and travel locations have resulted in the increased substitutability and lack of differentiation amongst some destinations (Pike, 2009). Tourism regions or destinations are considered as key elements of national or international tourism activities. Each region has its own tourism attractions and therefore theoretically there are many tourism destination options for potential tourists to choose. These tourism regions

are called tourism destinations when they have sufficient resources, infrastructure and adequate service for tourism activities and tourists. Hereby the achievement of these factors increases the chance of appreciation (Crompton, 1992). Although branding and brand management was available for many decades, but the brand equity is a key and fundamental concept for most organizations which are appeared in recent 20 years (Leone et al., 2006). Building brand equity is considered an important part of brand building (Pappu et al., 2005). Emerge of brand equity increases the importance of marketing strategies and provided focus point for researchers and managers (Chen, 2009). Brand equity is a key and central concept in brand management and has been considered in different perspectives (Boo, Busser, & Baloglu, 2009). In the few last decades, brand equity concept has grown rapidly. One reason for its popularity is strategic role of that and importance in obtaining competitive advantage in strategic management decisions (Atilgan, Aksoy, Akinci, 2005).

Appropriate management of brand equity leads more loyalty, low risk of marketing activity and marketing crisis, flexible response to price fluctuations, more business support and cooperation, effectiveness of marketing communications, licensing opportunities, additional opportunities for brand extension, more attraction for investors, more supports from investors (Aaker & Biel, 1993; Keller, 2008), greater profit margins (Kim & Kim, 2005), ability to attract good employees (DelVecchio, Jarvis, Klink, & Dineen, 2007), protection of potential competitors entrance during outsourcing (Lim & Tan, 2009). A brand equity of destination can be positive or negative and is considered an important part of the decision making process of customers when they consider their destination alternatives. As many of the researcher has explained brand equity of destination as is an important determinant and also plays an important role in destination selection process (Boo, et al., 2009; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). Recently, the growth potential of tourism regions begin to be bound to service capacity of business, leisure and recreation interests (Hall & Weiler, 1995). Sport tourism as a strong and dynamic part of tourism has begun to be one of the most important factors in tourism destinations. This fact has also begun to attract academicians. The researches done in recent years in this subject can be summarized as sporting events, Sport tourism and destination management (Chernushenko, 1996), Travel flows for specific sport activities (Priestley, 1995), Niche sport markets, Inherited sport facilities and sport tourism resources (Gammon, 2002). Sport and tourism industries are parallel to each other in terms of the development process in the last 50 years. They both are democratizing, easy to participate and have increased freedom (Standeven & De Knop, 1999). They both become a social event globally and have been subject to the forces of globalization (Higham & Hinch, 2003).

Today, sport and tourism are concerned with the important economic activities in the developed and developing nations (Swart & Bob, 2007). Based upon the world tourism organization estimates, 43% of the world jobs will be associated with the tourism industry by 2010. For example, from 1997 to 2005, sport tourism brought about an annual increase in gross domestic growth (1.3%), which resulted from economic activities with regard to holding big sport competitions, and unemployment declined by 1.9% on annual basis (Kasimati & Dawson, 2009). Thus, sport can considerably influence sport-based services and products in terms of functional and visual dimensions. Hence, it is considered as one of the effective factors highly influencing national growth and revenue in the 21st century (Icoz, Gunlu, & Oter, 2010). The corresponding studies indicate that sport tourism is the most developed sector of the tourism industry (Kim & Chalip, 2004) such that it is regarded as a world multibillion trading element, producing 4.5 trillion dollars for tourism industry and world tour (Tassiopoulou & Haydamb, 2007). Moreover, for tourism industry, sport, clubs, teams, sport events and facilities have become attractions. Beyond that, individual sport stars are also among attractions for tourists. Sport's development as a tourism attraction creates new opportunities for sport clubs or athletes, and managers to increase their market share. The aim of investments done in a destination for sport tourism is not only for the development of local community in sports but also to attract tourists and change the image of the destination and become a popular brand (Gratton, Shibli, & Coleman, 2005). Studies have proven that Golestan is among the top10 countries from the viewpoint of tourist attractions and has the greatest natural variety and diversity, while now Golestan's share of this market is insignificant and only about 0.1% of its gross domestic product. Specially, The present natural sport attractions in Golestan province are widespread and generally related to hiking, nature tourism, hunting, fishing, winter sports (such as skiing, skating, snowboarding), beach and water sports (such as swimming, boating, surfing, diving), desert, camel riding, nature therapy, mud therapy, spa therapy, mountaineering and caving and adventurous sports (Koozeshian, Ehsani, & Adabi Fieroozjah, 2010; Zeytonli, Honari, & Farahani, 2011).

However, in Golestan, in spite of its numerous capacities in attracting various tourists and considering the importance and necessity of developing tourism of the country, there has not yet been any systematic research on customer-based brand equity for a sport tourism destinations and lack of analytical model for Evaluation of brand equity in sport tourism destination's from the sport tourist's perspective and

unfortunately, the tourism industry and as a result the sports tourism of the country has not found its true place. Thus, it is essential for managers and experts in the country to develop and promote this industry. The purpose of the present research was to evaluation of brand equity of sport tourism destinations from the sport tourist's perspective.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Purpose of this study is Evaluation of brand equity in Golestan sport tourism destinations from the sport tourist's perspective. This study's type is descriptive. Hereby, theoretical data about research subject are collected and theoretical background of the study is prepared. The target population was inbound sport tourists who were able to read, write, and speak persian, Arabic, Russian and English and visited Golestan in national and international sport events, during a seven-month period of research in between November 2012 and May 2013. Statistical Society was 242 foreign and demostic customers and sport tourists. The sample method used in this study was simple random sampling. There is not any scale prepared directly about the subject. So, question scales are prepared by examining previous studies on the subject (Konecnik & gartner, 2007; Boo et al., 2009). The survey questionnaire consisted of two major sections.

The first section included questions relating to tourist characteristics to identify the socio-demographic characteristics. This section helps to gather information about gender, age, education, marital status, residential location, occupation, length of stay. The second section is the model of CBBESTD adapted and modified by the researcher. This section concludes dimensions of brand awareness, image, perceived quality and brand loyalty. Thirty-four questions were adopted and modified in this section, including 5 items for brand awareness, 13 items for image, 9 items for perceived quality, and 7 items for brand loyalty. A five-point Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, and 5= Strongly Agree) was employed to measure brand equity of sport tourism destinations. Its validity coefficient confirmed by experienced professors.

A pilot test was performed to assess how well the survey instrument captured the constructs it was supposed to measure, and to test the internal consistency and reliability of questionnaire items. The first draft of the survey instrument was distributed to 30 randomly selected visitors who were resided in sport tourism destinations. Cronbach's alpha was used to verify the internal consistency reliability. The CBBESTD model's dimensions including brand awareness, image, perceived quality and brand loyalty show a significant internal consistency of .85, .82, .79, .77, respectively. Total reliability of questionnaire was Cronbach alpha (86%). For data analysis was used descriptive statistics and inferential one sample t-test. Statistical calculations were performed using SPSS 18 software ($p \leq 0.05$).

RESULTS

The socio- demographic characteristics information of respondents is presented in table -1. According to the study results, the mean age of respondents was 31, 74.4% of respondents (N=180) were male and 25.6 % of them (N= 62) were female. 46.7% of respondents (N=113) were single and 53.3% of them (N=129) were married. Distribution of respondents by educational level shows that the majority of respondent were bachelor (60.7%), 32.6.7% of respondents had diploma degree and 6.6 % of them had master's degree. Moreover, 5% (N= 12) are experts of sport and physical education executives & 4.5% (N= 11) are Experts of tourism and executives & 49.2% (N= 119) are athlete & 20.2% (N= 49) are coach & 17% (N=41) are team managers and 4.1% (N= 10) are referee.

Descriptive Statistics for brand equity of Golestan sport tourism destinations from the sport tourist's perspective.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Brand Awareness.

Brand Awareness	N	Mean	SD
Golestan sport tourism destinations has a good name & reputation	242	2.45	1.23
I can easily name famous Golestan sport tourism destinations	242	2.46	1.25
When I think about sport tourism destination, Golestan sport tourism destinations comes to mind immediately	242	2.54	1.19
Golestan sport events is very famous and I can easily name famous Golestan sport event.	242	2.47	1.17
Average Dimensions of Brand Awareness		2.48	

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Brand Image.

Brand Image	N	Mean	SD
Golestan sport tourism destinations has beautiful scenery and nature	242	3.83	0.956
Golestan sport tourism destinations offers good nightlife and variety entertainment	242	2.81	1.11
Golestan sport tourism destinations has good climate and pleasant weather	242	3.75	1.05
Golestan has safe and secure sport tourism destinations	242	3.64	1.02
Golestan has friendly personnel and people	242	3.81	1.07
Golestan has modern sport training camps for sport tourism like football	242	2.17	1.04
Golestan has good beaches and summer sport tourism destinations, for like swimming and diving	242	3.44	1.15
Golestan has proper mountains and winter sport tourism destinations for sport tourism, like ski	242	3.17	1.09
Golestan has proper desert and wilderness sport destinations for like rally	242	3.19	1.17
Golestan sport tourism destination is proper for hosting mega sport events	242	3.19	1.03
Golestan has attractive sport product and events (sport teams, events, conferences, exhibitions, etc.)to attract tourists	242	3.10	1.26
The overall image that I have towards the Golestan sport tourism destination is good	242	3.23	1.27
Average dimentions of Brand Image		3.31	

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Brand Quality.

Brand Quality	N	Mean	SD
Golestan sport tourism destinations have high quality of accommodations	242	3.02	1.14
Golestan sport tourism destinations has high quality of infrastructure	242	2.90	1.12
Golestan sport tourism destinations offers standard hygiene and cleanliness	242	3.18	1.22
Golestan sport events and destinations have readily available travel information	242	3.16	1.25
Golestan sport event and destinations offers good quality restaurant services	242	3.00	1.15
Golestan has reasonable cost of transport, hotel and resturant	242	3.06	1.25
Golestan sport tourism destinations have excellent sport event facilities for hasting mega sport event	242	3.17	.912
Golestan sport destinations and sport events performs better than other similar sport events and destinations	242	3.28	1.04
Average dimentions of brand quality		3.11	

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Brand Loyalty.

Brand Loyalty	N	Mean	SD
Golestan sport destination is one of the preferred destination to visit	242	3.88	1.10
I feel pleasure to be in the Golestan sport tourism destinations	242	3.04	1.05
In the following years, I like visit Golestan sport events and sport tourism destinations again	242	3.92	1.06
Golestan sport event is one of the preferred event to visit	242	3.86	1.38
I would Recommend to visit Golestan sport events and sport tourism destinations to others	242	3.92	1.09
Overall, I am loyal to Golestan sport events and sport tourism destination	242	3.92	.99
Average dimentions of brand loyalty		3.77	

Table 5. One-Sample Test for Brand equity of Golestan sport tourism destination.

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Test Value = 3		
				Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Brand Awareness	-5.53	241	0.000	-0.420	-0.569	-0.341
Brand Image	1.65	241	0.008	0.175	0.0164	0.314
Brand Quality	1.76	241	0.012	0.169	0.0262	0.150
Brand Loyalty	1.88	241	0.154	0.191	0.213	0.056

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In tourism marketing, destination branding has become a powerful force for transmitting a favorable brand image to target market and brand equity is a key and central concept in brand management and has been considered in different perspectives. Appropriate management of brand equity leads more loyalty, low risk of marketing activity and marketing crisis, effectiveness of marketing communications, licensing opportunities, more attraction for investor and Sport tourism as a strong and dynamic part of tourism has begun to be one of the most important factors in tourism destinations. Sport event and destination as a major introduced channels destination and important impact on identify tourism destinations to target markets and tourists. The goal of this research was evaluation of Golestan brand equity of sport tourism destination's from the sport tourist's perspective. Results showed that the average dimension of awareness (2.48), in the out the 95% confidence level, is less than 3 and the difference of the mean is negative. But in the average dimension of destinations image (3.31), perceived quality (3.11) and loyalty (3.77) in the out of the 95% confidence level, is greater than 3 and the difference of the mean is positive. From the sport tourist's perspective, Golestan sport event and sport tourism destinations have not a good name & reputation to raise awareness of the destination. But From the perspective of customers and sports tourists, Golestan sport tourism destinations is a safe destination and has a beautiful scenery, nature, pleasant climate and natural sporting attractions and has not good nightlife and variety entertainment, has not a high quality of accommodations, has high quality of infrastructure, have readily available travel information, and Golestan sport tourism destinations have excellent sport event facilities for hasting mega sport events such as horse riding. Overall, customers and sport tourists was loyal to Golestan sport events and sport tourism destinations and Golestan sport tourism destinations was one of the preferred destination to visit from the sport tourist's perspective, but Golestan sport tourism destinations were weaknesses in awareness.

Tourists are becoming increasingly sophisticated and discerning, and destination choice is now a considerable indication of lifestyle and a way to express identity. Thus, destinations have been required to find new ways to differentiate themselves from the competition and to establish connections with consumers. Nowadays sport event and destination as a major introduced channels destination and important impact on identify tourism destinations to target markets and tourists. Branding destination with sport event helps cities attract tourists or funds in the increasingly competitive environment. So, Golestan needs to position itself better in the market by incorporating appropriate brand equity because sport tourism destination branding influences not only the destination selection process but also future tourist behaviors such as the intention to revisit the destination and to spread positive word of mouth. 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. This study is limited in that it focused on a some sport tourism destination in Golestan. 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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