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Customer Based Brand Equity for Tourism Destination

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Abstract: *Brand equity is a concept born in 1980s. It plays a significant role in creating added value for the destination through gaining the competitive advantage. To promote a destination it should be meaningful enough to the customer and also to attract and retain the customer are important. Because unlike most other products and services, there is no urgency or emergency about a holiday and it is an infrequent purchasing decision, which occurs once a year or less, especially when it comes to an international trip. Hence, when taking strategic marketing decisions, policy makers need to consider what travelers expect from the destination in order to satisfy them and attract new tourists to the destination. Therefore brand equity is regarded as a very important concept in business practice as well as in academic researches because marketers can gain advantages through a strong brand. Marketers and researchers use various perspectives to study brand equity. Customer based approaches view it from the perspective of the consumer-either an individual or an organization. This paper will only study the customer based equity which refers to tourism destination, There are different theoretical approaches have been developed by different researchers and these theories and empirical evidences have been discussed throughout this paper with related to the destination marketing. The aim of the study is to review the dimensions of customer based brand equity from various literatures and empirical studies made within the area of customer based brand equity for a tourism destination branding in order to provide more integrative conceptualization of brand equity to develop conceptual framework for further studies.*

Keywords: *Brand equity, Destination marketing, Brand Resonance, Brand awareness, Brand performance, Brand imagery, Brand Judgments, Brand feelings*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The study of brand equity is becoming increasingly popular since some researchers have concluded that brands are one of the most valuable assets to the organization. The concept of brand equity began to be used widely in the 1980s by advertising practitioners (Barwise 1993). Important academic contributors throughout the 1990s were Aaker (1991), Srivastava and Shocker (1991), Kapferer (1992), and Keller (1993, 1998). High brand equity levels are known to lead to higher consumer preferencesand purchase intentions (Cobb-Walgren et al. 1995) as well as higher stock returns(Aaker and Jacobson, 1994).

Tourist destinations also benefit from concerted branding strategies (Kemp et al., 2012). In today's global world of tourism, traveling to distant vacation destinations isincreasingly popular. As a result, the competition between destinations to attractmore tourists is intensifying. In order to enhance their tourism revenues, destinationsmust develop effective destination branding strategies to stand out in potentialtourists' minds as viable choice possibilities. Because of the competition amongtourism industry branding has become an important element of tourism management.Since the 1990s there has been a growing interest in the concept of customer-basedbrand equity (CBBE) for firms (Aaker, 1991). Based on the CBBE model of firms,Konecnik and Gartner (2007) have investigated the different dimensions ofcustomer-based brand equity for a tourism destination (CBBETD).Within thetourism literature, academicians and scholars have considered there have been veryfew studies on CBBETD. This paper review the definitions and dimensions of customer based brand equity by drawing together strands from various literature and empirical studies specially this study based on Keller'(2001) brand equity model which includes six factors of brand salience, brand performance, brandimagery, brand judgments, brand feelings, and brand resonance view point of thecustomer effect on destination branding.

Destination Marketing

The product as the first and most important element in the marketing mix can bedefined as "anything that can be offered to a market to satisfy a want or needincluding physical goods, services, experiences, events, persons, places, properties,organizations, information and ideas." (Kotler *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, the tourismproduct, which is commonly referred to as the destination, is "anything a touristconsumes", (Kastenholz, 2010, p. 314) and are places that attract visitors for atemporary stay, which range from continents, countries, states, provinces, cities,villages and to purposely built resort areas (Ispas, 2008, quoted Pike 2004). Ratherthan a single product, a destination is blend of products "which range over a wide variety of commercial offerings (accommodation, food and beverage, recreation, sports, animation, etc.) and „price-less goods" (such as natural and cultural heritage,landscape, hospitality, etc.)" (Kastenholz,2010).Different destinations have different attractions and more importantly a differentlevel of competitive ability. Attractions of destinations are different from each otherdue to factors such as the size of the location, climate of the destination, culturalheritage and natural beauty and resource availability. This diversity presents adifficult marketing challenge to a particular destination. Thus, it is not a simple taskfor any destination which has the desire to become a recognized destination, with theobjective of attracting tourists for economic and other benefits. When it come todestination marketing, "Marketing is a societal process by which individuals obtainwhat they need and want through creating, offering, and freely exchanging productsand services of value with others" (Kotler et al., 2012). Stressing the concept of valueas a central concept of marketing, marketing management can be defined as "art andscience of choosing target markets, and getting, keeping and growing customersthrough creating delivering and communicating superior customer value" (Kotler etal., 2012). In this context, tourist Destination Marketing has been defined as "themanagement process through which the National Tourist Organizations and/or touristenterprises identify their selected tourists, actual and potential, communicate withthem to ascertain and influence their wishes, needs, motivations, likes and dislikes,on local, regional, national and international levels, and to formulate and adapt theirtourist products accordingly in view of achieving optimal tourist satisfaction there byfulfilling their objectives" (Ispas 2008).

Brand/ Branding

Branding has the propensity to distinguish one product from another by creatingdifferent brand elements, "name, logo, symbol, and package design" and it can create value for a firm resulting in financial profit (Keller, 1998). The American MarketingAssociation (2008) defined "a brand as name, term, sign, or combination of themintended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and todifferentiate them from those of the competition." A brand for a new product isshaped by creating a new name, logo, or symbol and as a result of this it receives"awareness, reputation, and prominence in the marketplace" (Keller, 2002). Aaker's (1991) widely accepted definition of a brand is "to *identify* the goods or services ofwhether one seller or a group of sellers, and to *differentiate* those goods or servicesfrom those of competitors."A traditional definition of a brand was: "the name, associated with one or more itemsin the product line that is used to identify the source of character of the item"(Kotler 2000, p. 396). Within this view, as Keller (2003a) says, "technicallyspeaking, then, whenever a marketer creates a new name, logo, or symbol for a newproduct, he or she has created a brand" (p. 3). He recognizes, however, that brandstoday are much more than that. As can be seen, according to these definitions brandshad a simple and clear function as identifiers.

A branding concept incorporating visitor experience into the process of branding issupported within a tourist destination context (Blain et al., 2005). Ritchie and Ritchie(1998) defined a destination brand as "a name, symbol, logo and word mark or othergraphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination; furthermore, it conveysthe promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with thedestination; it also serves to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurablememories of the destination experience. Cai (2002) stated that "destinationbranding is a strategic combination of a consistent mix of brand elements to identifyand distinguish a destination through positive image building and unlike typicalgoods and services, the name of a destination brand is relatively fixed by the actualgeographical name of the place".Research on destination branding began to emerge after the first journal article onthis subject was published in 1998 (Gnoth, 1998). The first book was published in2002 (Pike, 2007). Even though many destinations have adapted branding strategiesfor marketing their products and services, there is no clear conceptualization onbranding a destination (Gnoth*et al.*, 2007). Tasci and Kozak (2006) discussed theconcepts 'brand' and 'image'. They concluded that these are related concepts andbrand is referred to as "a product of marketing activities of destination authorities"while image is considered as "more of a product of consumer perception" as it playsthe role of a sub-concept of a destination brand. In other words, if the image of adestination is positive, the brand would be more effective in the market. The brandwould influence awareness, choice, satisfaction, recommendation and loyalty. Manydestination organizations use destination branding as their main strategy because astrong brand creates value added to the seller and buyer as it builds strong brandequity (Cai, 2002). Morgan et al. (2004) discussed many successful destinationbranding initiatives and suggested destinations can become brands which have"celebrity value" and "emotional appeal."

Brand Equity

In the last two decades, brand equity has become the most interesting researchtopic in marketing for both academics and practitioners. Despite the fact that brandequity is a potentially important marketing concept, it is not without controversy(Taylor et al., 2005). It is because brand equity is defined in different ways fordifferent purposes (Keller, 1998). Brand equity is the most common tool used torepresent brand performance (Pike, 2010, p.124) as it represents the added orsubtracted value a brand gives to products or services (Aaker, 1996, p.7-8) and assuch brand equity should reflect “the way customers think, feel, and act with respectto the brand”(Kotler and Keller, 2011, p.243). Brand equity is defined as thedifferential positive (or negative) effect on a brand based on the recognition thebrand has earned over a certain period of time. This then transfers into higher salesand higher profit margins compared to rival brands (Business Dictionary.com, 2009).Smothers finds this to explain why some brands have a very loyalcustomer base. It is simply because the customers feel attracted to the brand’spersonality and charisma (Aaker *et al.*, 1993).The results of this study are strengthened by a previouslyperformed study which shows that brands with high brand equity needs less frequentpromotion than brands with low brand equity (Jagmohan, 1990).

he importance of developing a strong brand and relevant brand performance tools,as mentioned above, is even more paramount for destinations as the broadening oftourist opportunities is resulting in a lack of differentiation between destinations(Pike, 2005).Furthermore, the literature search made by Pike (2009, p.858-861)suggests that the field of destination branding is not only poor, but there is also a lackof research in the area of brand performance measurement, which is defined above asbrand equity. Despite the fact that the importance of customer-based brand equity fordestinations is being acknowledged, there is very few research made in this field ofstudy. The research made by Konecnik and Gartner (2007) of customer based brandequity for Slovenia is often being mentioned in current literature as one of the fewresearch made regarding destination brand equity (Im*et al*., 2012, p. 385; Boo et al.,2009, p.219). The research made by Boo et al. (2009) of customer-based brandequity for gambling destinations and the research made by Pike et al. (2010) and Pikeand Bianchi (2013) regarding customer-based brand equity for Australia and longand short-haul markets are other examples of research in the field of destinationbrand equity.

Customer Based Brand Equity

However, in a general sense, the literature suggests that there have been two primaryperspectives relating to studying brand equity (Keller, 1993; Taylor et al, 2005;Kapferer, 2008). The first approach is motivated by financial outcome for the firms.With this perspective, the brand is evaluated financially for accounting purpose andis usually manifested in the balance sheet. The second approach is based on thecustomer-brand relationship. There have been also debates on the importance of brand equity for products andservices. Some researchers argue that branding (and thereby brand equity) is moreimportant for services due to the intangible nature and the so-called ‘credence’attributes of services, which makes it difficult for customers to examine the contentand quality of a service before, during and even after the consumption of the service(Krishnan and Hartline, 2001). However, the findings of Krishnan & Hartline (2001)do not support the contention that brand equity is more important in services than forproducts.Aaker (1991) defined “brand equity as a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to abrand, its name and symbol add to or subtract from the value provided by a productor service to a firm and/or that firm’s customers.” His approach to brand equity isviewed as a managerial and corporate strategy perspective. He stated that the assetsand liabilities linked to a brand’s name or symbol can be grouped into fivedimensions: brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations,and other proprietary brand assets. He suggested that we can generate brand equityby strengthening those dimensions.

Today, the CBBE model is a well‐established marketing concept (Aaker, 1991, 1996;Keller, 1993, 2001). Keller (2008, 2009) extends the CBBE model in order to alsoaddress the consumer knowledge structure behind the brand development and toreflect the relationship building process between customers and the brand.Specifically, the model reflects the CBBE pyramid (i.e. hierarchy) consisting of sixbrand building blocks corresponding to four stages of brand development.Keller (1998), who approached the concept of brand equity from the perspective ofthe consumer, defined “customer-based brand equity as the differential effect thatbrand knowledge has on the consumer or how customers respond to the marketing ofthat brand.” He also suggested that as customers respond more favorably to a productwhose brand is identified, the brand has positive customer-based brand equity and itexists when the consumer has a high level of awareness and familiarity and strong,favorable, and unique brand associations in their memory (Keller, 2001). The brandis established through the proper identity, the appropriate brand meaning, the rightbrand responses, and the appropriate brand relationships with customers byestablishing six core brand values: brand salience, brand performance, brandimagery, brand judgments, brand feelings, and brand resonance (Keller, 2001).The strongest brands do extremely well in all six of these areas and therefore achieveall four of the steps concerning building a brand. The top of the pyramid, consumerbrand resonance, is considered the most valuable building block. This can only occurwhen all the other blocks are synchronized to fit the customers‟ needs and desires. Ahigh consumer brand resonance means customers feel a loyalty towards the brandand continuously seek opportunities to interact with the brand and share this withothers (Keller, 2001).

The basic idea of the CBBE-model is that the measure of the strength of a branddepends on how consumers feel, think, and act with respect to that brand. To achieveconsumer brand resonance a brand first needs to elicit the proper emotional reactionsfrom consumers and to elicit the proper emotional reactions there must be anappropriate brand identity and the right meaning. The right meaning and identity canmake the customers consider this product as relevant and their kind of product. Thestrongest brands make consumers feel so attached to the brand that they in fact become "spokesmen" for the brand (Keller, 2001).Further this model describes that a brand's power and value to the corporation isdetermined by the customers. Through deeper learning and experiences with a brandthe customers end up thinking and acting in a way that allows the corporation toobtain the advantages of brand equity. The model states that even though marketersplay a huge part and need to design the most effective brand-building programspossible, the success of those marketing efforts ultimately depends on customers‟responses. The different stages and blocks of the model will be further explainedbelow (Keller, 2001).

Brand Identity: "*Who are you?"*

Brand identity can be reached only trough the creation of brand salience which is aconsequence of brand awareness. In fact a highly salient brand is a brand that ownshigh levels of brand awareness both in terms of depth, easiness with whichconsumers recall and recognize the brand, and breadth, how many purchases andconsumption situations the brand comes to the consumer mind.Awareness is a key determinant identified in almost all brand equity models (Aaker 1991, Kapferer 1991, Keller 1992, Agarwal and Rao 1996, Krishnan 1996, Na, Marshall and Keller 1999, Mackay 2001). Keller (2003, p.76) defines awareness as " the customers' ability to recall and recognize the brand as reflected by their ability to identify the brand under different conditions and to link the brand name, logo, symbol, and so forth to certain associations in memory". Aaker (1996) identifies other higher levels of awareness besides recognition and recall (Aaker 1991). He includes top-of-mind, brand dominance, brand knowledge and brand opinion.

Brand Meaning "What are you"

Brand meaning is based on brand image and it can be created both directly from them personal experience of the consumer or indirectly through advertisement or othercommunication tools. Brand Image is defined as "*Perceptions about a brand asreflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory*" (Keller, 1993). FromKeller's definition it can be understood that in order to create brand image, brandassociations are fundamental. Aaker states that associations are "*anything "linked"in memory to a brand*" (Aaker, 1991). According to the Keller Associations can bedivided in three main categories (Keller, 1993): 1) Attributes which are "*descriptivefeatures that characterize a product or service*" (Keller, 1993) and can be productrelated or non-product related; 2) Benefits which are "*personal values consumerattach to the product*" (Keller, 1993) and can be divided in functional, experiential,and symbolic; 3) Attitudes that are "*consumers' overall evaluations of a brand*"(Keller, 1993). As brand meaning can exist only if brand image is formed, the lattercan exist only if associations are strong, favorable and unique. This can drive theconsumer's purchase decision and make him choose the brand over another one.Strength, favorability, and uniqueness have to be reached in this order to create thebrand image. There are two different types of brand image: *Brand performance andBrand imagery* (Keller, 2001). Brand performance focuses on the product and itsdifferent abilities to satisfy customer needs such as financial needs and functionalneeds. When discussing Brand performance there are five different attributes andbenefits connected to brand performance, *Primary characteristics and secondaryfeatures* is one sub-dimension in brand performance and refer to the fact thatcustomers expect a certain level of characteristics in the product which need to bemet. Sometimes the customers also expect special functions besides the primaryones, called secondary features. Another sub-dimension is *Product reliability,durability and serviceability*. Reliability concerns the products stability inperformance. Durability is the time the product is expected to last. Serviceabilityexplains how easy it is to repair the product when possible errors occur. *Serviceeffectiveness, efficiency and empathy* explains to which extent the brand offers therequired services for their products. Efficiency concerns the speed and theresponsiveness of the service while empathy explains the attitude of the serviceprovider. Another sub-dimension is *Style and design* which focuses on the aestheticattributes of the product. The final sub-dimension of brand performance is *Price* andit refers to the price strategy of a brand. It sends signals to the customers how tocategorize the brand (Keller, 2001).

Brand Imagery is the other type of Brand image and focuses on the intangibleattributes of the product. This part concerns emotions and thoughts customers havetowards a brand instead of the physical benefits. In this area there are four maincategories, the first sub-dimension of Brand Imagery is *User profiles* which describesthe person or the company that uses a specific product. These descriptions involvethe basic segmentation variables. Another sub-dimension is *Purchase and usagesituations.* Purchase describes the different channels, types of stores and how easy itis to purchase the product. Usage explains under which circumstances the usage ofthe product comes into mind. The next sub-dimension is *Personality and values*which discusses how brands can take different personalities. These personalities caninclude a number of different characteristics such as sincerity, excitement,competence, sophistication and ruggedness. The final sub-dimension is *History,heritage and experience.* The history of a brand is connected with past personalexperience and it can create association. Since these associations are mainly based onpersonal experiences they are often individual. However, sometimes there areconnections between different people to be found in these associations (Keller,2001).

Brand response: "*What about you? What do I think or feel about you?"*

The third layer is called Brand responses and shows how customers respond to the brand,different thoughts and feelings that customers may have. These feelings can come fromboth head and heart, the main criteria is of course that they are positive. Responses aredivided into consumer judgments and consumer feelings. Consumer judgments focusupon customer's personal opinions and evaluations with regard to the brand. Brandjudgments involve how customer put together all the different performance and imageryassociations for the brand to different kinds of opinions (Keller, 2001). Brand judgmentis further divided into four subcategories (Keller, 2001). *Brand quality* dimension canbe related to perceived quality, which is related to the idea that the consumer hasabout the product. Therefore it is even more powerful than the realistic values ininfluencing purchase decisions and creating loyalty. Perceived quality is aparticularly relevant dimension since it justifies m premium price and constitutes thebase of brand extensions, and is hence considered by Aaker (1991) one of the keycomponents of the equity. *Brand credibility*, it contains also the company behind thebrand and therefore its expertise, trustworthiness and likeability. *Brand consideration*is the probability of the brand to be included in the set of usable or buyable brands.Going further than awareness, brand consideration can be seen as a directconsequence of strength, favorability and uniqueness of the brand. *Brand superiority*defined as the advantage that only that particular brand can bring to the consumer.Consumer feelings explain exactly what it sounds like, the feelings that customershave towards a brand. It can be emotional reactions or influence on part ofcustomers‟ lives, for example the brand can affect customers‟ feelings aboutthemselves or others. Consumer feelings are generally divided into six differentcategories of *Warmth* makes the customer feel peaceful or calm while *Fun* refers to ifthe customers are amused by the brand. Another sub-dimension is *Excitement* whichmakes the customers see the brand as something special. *Security* refers to the factthat the customers feel safe and comfortable. The brand removes certain worriescustomers may have. The next sub-dimension is *Social approval* which is when thecustomers feel that others respond more positively to them because of the brand. Thefinal sub-dimension is *Self-respect.* It describes how customers feel better aboutthemselves because of the brand. They may feel a sense of pride or success (Keller,2001).

Brand Relationships: "*What about you and me? What kind of associationand how much of a connection would I like to have with you?*"

This stage is linked to Brand Resonance, which can be described by the kind of bondthe costumer has with the brand and his level of engagement. Therefore it can beassociated to Aaker's brand loyalty dimension that is defined as the level ofconsumer's affection to the brand. Four are the categories in which brand resonancecan be divided *Behavioral loyalty;*it can be measured by the amount and frequencywith which consumers buy the particular product. *Attitudinal attachment is* theattachment refers to the deepness of feelings the consumer has to the brand.Attachment exists when "love" replaces "like". *Sense of community,* it refers to theidentification with a brand community. *Active engagement* is occurs when costumersbecome ambassadors of the brand when "Customers are willing to invest time,energy, money, or other resources into the brand beyond those expended duringpurchase or consumption of the brand." (Keller, 2001).

II. CONCLUSION

According to the literatures it stress out the importance of marketing the destination with proper marketing strategies in order to capitalize the potential towards the well recognized tourism destination. Keller'scustomer brandequity model identifies six components including brand salience, brandperformances, brand imagery, brand feelings, brand judgments and brandresonances. The process of building a brand requires following above mentioned four consecutive steps. Therefore this study critically reviewed and identified the dimensionsof Keller's brand equity model from academic literatures and provides the necessary depth and breadth of understating of brand equity and its measures for practically applying for destination branding.When summarizes the literatures findings of the Keller's CBBE model indicators and casual relationships between various dimensions of the brand equity pyramid, this concept could be used for developing strong brand equity from the perspective of customer to empower tourism destination as practical approach for the marketers and policy markers.To build brand equity for a tourism destination cannot be done within short period of time. Since it needs well designed practical marketing approach. Therefore more empirical studies need to be done on the dimensions of the customer based brand equity for a tourism destination. A brand equity measure on the basis ofthe framework developed will be established as to capitalize the full range of all the different kinds ofinformation involved on these dimensions. Although it is yet a challenge to develop holisticperspectives toward brand equity that will encompass the full range of all the information involved.

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