

A Study on Brand Personality Traits of Tourist Destinations and Tourist Self-Congruity

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Abstract: Recently, the idea of brand personality has begun to be applied in the study of tourist destinations and has gained some attention. Most of the previous studies have only used the consumer goods model and have not fully considered the special characteristics of tourism and all the different self-perceptions of tourists. Here is an organised system of analysis for the brand personality of tourist destinations and tourist self-congruity. According to the reasons for changes in the tourism experience, it has been proposed to revise the dimensions of destination brand personality. It can also show the many levels of tourists' self-concept in tourism situations and the features of selective activation. The concept of correspondence in this paper is not fixed and varies. Many studies have found that cognition is an intermediary variable; emotional resonance is a cause, and changes in self-congruity irregularly affect behavioural intention. According to the three attributes of the different places, contextual regulation and experience co-creation are used to build the brand image of a tourist destination. This paper will offer all the theoretical support for the research on the psychological links between tourists and tourist destinations.

Keywords: Tourist Destination Brand Personality, Tourist Self-Concept, Self-Congruity, Mechanism of Action, Contextual Adaptation

Introduction

As a compound consumption item, its brand image and how well it can meet the psychological needs of tourists in tourist areas will affect the overall competitiveness of the product. Brand personality theory can help us understand the relationship between brands and consumers, but there are still some problems in applying this theory to the study of tourist destinations. In addition to the symbols of general consumer goods, destinations also have many different demands for various areas, emotions and a sense of self from tourists. Therefore, the structure and kind of its personality traits are fundamentally different from those of typical products. At the same time, tourists' self-concept in tourist situations has several levels of individual self, social self and ideal self, as well as characteristics of selective activation; thus, new research directions have been provided for the application of self-congruity theory. The goals of this paper are to build a theoretical analysis system for the brand personality of tourist destinations and tourist self-congruity; to study how the congruity effect affects tourists' attitudes and behaviour through cognitive appraisal and emotional resonance; and to explore all kinds of ways and situations to adjust the brand personality of a tourist spot and extend the explanation scope of brand personality theory.

1. Theoretical Construction of Tourist Destination Brand Personality and Self-Congruity

1.1 Dimensional Migration of Brand Personality and Contextual Adaptation of Destinations

Brand personality theory started in the area of personality psychology and has been applied to marketing; now, it is used to understand how consumers feel about brands. When this theory is applied to the study of tourist destinations, its meaning and structure will need to be changed. Destinations have many attributes, such as geographical area, social culture, service facilities, etc.; therefore, their characteristics cannot be fully expressed in the five-dimensional structure of general consumer goods brands. A special attribute of the tourism environment is that a place is not only a functional area but also rich in symbols, and thus it often has a complex pattern of multiple overlays and contextual dependencies.

Therefore, in setting the attributes for the personality of the destination brand, traits of tourism experiences such as "leisureliness", "authenticity" and "charm value" should be included. Given that we know the basic nature of tourism consumption, attributes of a tourist's perception of a place include the traditional ones of brand competitiveness and sincerity, as well as whether this place can provide a psychological environment and emotional support different from daily life. The purpose of building this index is to increase the explanatory power of the brand personality theory in the tourism industry, and a theoretical basis for the following study on the relationship between the index and tourists' self-concept has been provided.

1.2 The Multiple Levels of Tourist Self-Concept and Its Activation in the Tourism Context

Tourist self-concept is not a single, fixed psychological entity but rather a system of many levels, such as the individual self, the social self and the ideal self. In daily life, how much different levels of the self are shown varies according to social role norms and habitual environments; people often have a relatively fixed pattern for presenting themselves. However, due to the special conditions of the tourism environment, people are temporarily freed from their daily social roles and behavioural norms, and various levels of the self can be expressed. At this time, some people reveal their true colours. Tourists want to know who they are really, or they hope to achieve an ideal self through tourism^[1].

Thus, tourism activities have become an ideal place to organise and attract people with all kinds of self-concepts. When the tourists are far from home, they do not need to worry about fitting in with others and can be more free in their expression. At the same time, the display of the social self is also changing. Based on the above activation mechanism, research on self-congruity in the tourism context should move away from the model of fixed correspondence and consider all possible correspondences among different levels of self and destination brand personality. Given the hierarchical structure of the self-concept, congruence between tourists and destinations is not a single match but rather a selective resonance of all levels of psychology in a particular situation.

1.3 Extension of the Congruity Theory Framework and the Bidirectional Interactive Logic

The first kind of self-congruity theory is based on how well a person's perception of a brand's personality aligns with their own sense of self, and it is generally used to explain changes in behaviour. However, the one-way matching model is not very suitable for the case of tourist attractions. The two attributes of tourism consumption are functional satisfaction and symbolic expression, and there is also a complicated, bidirectional congruence between tourists and destinations. On the one hand, tourists choose destination brands that are in line with their own sense of self because they have a psychological need for self-verification. At the same time, tourists can also use the brand personality of the destination to create or strive for an ideal self and achieve self-enhancement motivation.

The new logic of two-way interaction is an extension of the framework of congruence theory from fixed matching to continuous construction. The correspondence between tourists and tourist attractions during the course of a trip for tourists is not a fixed situation that exists before the tour; rather, it changes and develops constantly as tourists experience the trip. Given their daily lives and the sense of place that people have attached to it, tourists develop a feeling of belonging. At the same time, the brand personality of the destination will also be continuously confirmed, strengthened or changed through interaction. The bidirectionality and dynamism of this will help us explore the idea of self-congruity in tourism from a new angle and expand the range of theoretical research.

2. Analysis of the Mechanism of Action for Brand Personality and Self-Congruity

2.1 The Mediating Effect of Cognitive Appraisal in the Formation of Brand Attitude

The perception of the brand personality of a tourist spot by tourists does not directly affect their attitude towards the brand; instead, this influence occurs at the level of cognition. Tourists will compare the perceived personality of the tourist spot with their own sense of self and then begin to judge internally how well the two are in harmony. The evaluation process is to consider each item in detail, activate and retrieve one's own concepts, determine how well they match, and finally, "congruity perception" is one of the cognitive results of this process. Cognitive products are independent mediators that bring information from the outside world into people's minds and thus affect their emotions.

How people process the information they have obtained will also influence the operation of the cognitive appraisal path. When tourists are in a high-involvement state, they will generally use the central route for organised cognitive processing and carefully consider all aspects of brand personality and self-concept based on the abundant information to form a congruence judgment. When the participation rate is low, people will take the long way and form an early impression of whether it is worth participating based on heuristics or general knowledge. The two processing modes will result in different formation mechanisms for congruity perception and thus have different effects on the stability and duration of brand attitude. The appearance of this path will make the psychological process of destinations and tourists more obvious and less hidden in a "black box"^[2].

2.2 The Catalytic Effect of Emotional Resonance and the Construction of Psychological Connection

Congruence perception in cognition should be converted into a stable brand attitude and behaviour intention via the catalytic effect of emotional resonance. Emotional resonance is not the same as general satisfaction or happiness; it is a type of psychological connection that occurs when one feels a deep link with a particular place. It is a strong sense of belonging to this place for the tourists; they feel that the place has become an extension or projection of their own identity. Emotions among tourists and places have changed; now, convenience is not the sole attraction, and shared values also play a role.

The basis for building a psychological link based on emotional resonance is the attraction a place has for tourists. This link can be seen in the psychological representation of self-brand linkage; tourists have added the destination to their system of self-concept and now consider it one of their own attributes. After forming a psychological connection, tourists will have both defensive and positive attitudes towards the place, and the resulting emotional attachment to the place will also be more stable and lasting. Therefore, emotional resonance can be a trigger that moves the congruence judgment from the cognitive domain to the emotional area and adds emotional depth to attitudes that have not reached such a level at the level of rational evaluation.

2.3 The Dynamic Evolution of Self-Congruity and the Nonlinear Relationship with Behavioral Intention

The self-congruity of tourists and destinations is not a fixed psychological condition but varies and changes in different phases of the tourism experience. Congruity at the pre-trip stage is mainly based on how closely tourists' expected perceptions of a place's brand personality align with their own self-concept, and the type of congruity perception at this time is still speculative and idealised. When the tourists are at the place and have had some experience with the brand, they will gain a better understanding of the brand and change their first impressions. After the experience is over, as time passes and memories are recalled, one's sense of congruence will change again, and then a general retrospective evaluation will be made. For the reasons mentioned above, there are different periods in the effect of congruity on behavioural intention.

The Effect of Self-Congruity on Tourists' Behavioural Intention is not positive. If the degree of fit is low, then increasing the level of congruence will increase people's wish to visit again or recommend a place. However, if the degree of congruence is too high, adding more congruence will not improve behaviour; it may even reduce the intention to act. The reason for this non-linear relationship is that a very high degree of congruence may make tourists feel "too familiar" or "lacking in novelty" psychologically; tourists who are in search of self-expansion and new experiences will no longer find a destination with full congruence attractive. To address the problem of linearity in the previous research on the congruity effect, some studies have added dynamic evolution and nonlinearity to better reflect the complex nature of tourists' behaviour and intentions.

3. Differentiated Shaping and Contextual Adaptation of Tourist Destination Brand Personality

3.1 Differentiation of Destination Brand Personality and Target Market Anchoring

According to the concept of uniqueness in brand personality theory, destination brands have different positions for their personalities, and their strategy is to create barriers to brand identity by intentionally highlighting certain attributes of personality. As the competition among tourist destinations has become more and more homogeneous, people are starting to desire all-around personality in brand images, and as a result, many brands have become vague and highly substitutable.

Differentiation is also one; it can create a particular psychological world for the people living there. The reason for the above strategy is that people's cognition is selective; when they are exposed to a large number of brands, they will pay more attention to those with distinctive personalities and are less likely to remember average, forgettable brands. Diversity can be achieved by using local resources, culture and geography in the original brands of different places to create a unique sense of place for tourists.

The anchor for linking differentiated positioning and the level of self-concept for the target market is the psychological basis of building brand personality. The groups of tourists have various differences in their self-concept structures. Some tourists are led by their true selves and tend to choose a destination personality that is in line with their current self-perception in order to achieve the psychological pleasure of self-verification; other tourists are led by their ideal selves and prefer to choose a destination personality with the desired traits so as to attain the psychological goal of self-enhancement. The anchor device should be in line with the main self-level of the target group of tourists so that the brand personality can serve as a psychological projection tool for their sense of self. Compared with the traditional division of the market by demographics and geography, an anchor based on the level of self-concept has strong psychological explanatory power and can better reflect tourists' choices and behaviour; thus, it provides more theoretical support for the construction of destination brands^[3].

3.2 The Moderating Effect of Tourism Contextual Factors on the Congruity Effect

The degree of fit between brand personality and tourists' self-concepts is not fixed but changes from time to time due to all sorts of reasons in the tourism environment. The first kind of moderation is due to external factors, and it works by altering how people learn about a problem and how strongly they feel about it. When tourists are far from home and their own culture, or when they are in a place rich in nature, their minds will be busy observing and feeling the unique attributes of that place. Therefore, the brand's personality will be more distinctive, and as a result, the effect of congruity will be stronger. At the same time, in areas that are more commercially oriented or too artificial, tourists do not pay much attention to the environment and therefore give less weight to brand personality information in their perception, reducing the effect of congruity on attitude and behaviour. Physical context refers to how far away a place is from the city, what kind of scenery can be seen, and how private an area is; all of these provide the background for the congruity effect.

Changes in society and over time have also changed the extent of the congruity effect. Socially, the kind of travel companion and how they interact will affect tourists' sense of the destination's brand and the standards by which they judge it. Solo travellers are more likely to use their own sense of self for the judgment of congruence, and group travellers may add the reference frame of the social self; thus, the evaluation of congruence for groups differs. At different times in a tourist's trip, the degree to which they are aware of the coincidence varies. At the first time they arrive, the tourists will be more attentive to the information and have formed a sense of congruence with their expectations for what they will experience. During the period of immersion, the tourists will be closer to the place, and congruence will be expressed more as emotional harmony at the level of experience. At the time of parting and in the following days, there is generally a sense of all-encompassing remembrance of the experience due to memory reconstruction. Based on the three types of contextual factors, it can be seen that without considering specific situations, we do not know how congruity affects tourists' attitudes and behaviours in various ways.

3.3 Dynamic Maintenance of Brand Personality Congruity and the Path of Experience Co-creation

Consistency between the personality of the destination brand and the sense of self that tourists have should be regarded as a fluctuating psychological resource, and thus needs to be continuously built over time rather than being an achieved fixed state of agreement at a particular time. The theoretical implication of dynamic maintenance is that congruence perception takes many forms and is at different levels of stability at different times in a tourist's experience. At the pre-trip stage, the congruence judgment is based on secondary information and the formation of expectations; therefore, it has speculative and idealistic characteristics and is easily swayed by marketing materials. At the time of the on-site experience, congruence perception is verified and adjusted through direct contact and actual participation, and the actual information can strengthen, weaken or change the initial judgment of congruence. At the time of post-experience recall, congruence perception is reconstructed and generally organised in memory to form an end attitude. At any time, if there is discord, the whole work will be

deemed to be bad. Therefore, the maintenance of congruity should cover all links in the process of tourist-destination interaction. Therefore, the old idea that congruity is an inborn quality of people has been disproven.

Experience co-creation is the main way to achieve dynamic maintenance of congruity, and its essence is to change the form of congruity from one-way matching to two-way construction. Co-creation is changing; tourists are no longer passive receivers of congruence but active constructors of meaning and congruence. Behaviors such as posting and interacting on social media, making personalised choices during on-site consumption, participating in all sorts of participatory tourism activities, constantly projecting one's own self-concept and personality preferences onto the destination, and then adjusting the perception of congruence based on responses and feedback received from the destination are all ways tourists express themselves. The other is destination management; it will be both a guide and a helper. Design of touchpoints that are rich in symbols can give tourists a chance to express themselves and offer various combinations of services; thus, favourable conditions for congruence between tourists and destinations will be created for destination managers. Dynamic maintenance based on the co-creation of experience is no longer about "perceived fit"; now it is about "meaning creation". To create a deep and stable sense of congruence between tourists and destinations, we need to build all kinds of psychological connections by providing many contact opportunities rather than depending on a single match.

Conclusion

The three parts of this paper are: Theoretical Basis, Mechanism of Operation and Application Methods. Based on the above, this paper proposes that the dimensions of destination brand personality should be in line with actual circumstances, reveals various degrees and selective applications of tourists' self-concepts, and extends the theory of congruence from one-way matching to a system of mutual influence. At the level of mechanisms, this paper clarifies the mediating role of cognitive appraisal and the catalytic effect of emotional resonance, proposes that self-congruity will change dynamically in different stages of tourism experience, and finds that it is nonlinearly related to behavioural intention. Anchoring Strategies at the Application Level, Levels of Self-Concept in the Target Market, Moderating Effects of all kinds of Contextual Factors, and a Dynamic Maintenance Path for Congruity Based on Experience Co-creation are studied in this paper. In the future, more research will be carried out to study the differences in personality structure among all kinds of destinations, as well as their significant turning points in development and the interaction of contextual factors, to expand the theoretical system.

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