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Research Paper

The effect of celebrity on brand awareness, perceived quality, brand image, brand loyalty, and destination attachment to a literary festival

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed whether a celebrity writer endorsement affects festival brand equity and attachment to a festival destination. Subjects were non-residents who attended a local literary festival. Among celebrity attributes, expertise was revealed to be most related to brand equity and destination attachment. Additionally, loyalty to the festival was found to affect attachment to the festival destination, while festival brand awareness had a positive impact on festival brand loyalty. Results provide theoretical implications related to how celebrity endorsements influence destination brand, and festival community attachment. The results of this study also have practical implications related to how festival organizers can more efficiently promote visitation to the host destination. It is also believed results significantly contribute to understanding the efficacy of endorsements in an event context.

1. Introduction

Successful festivals contribute to the local economy and create job opportunities. The revenue from hosting festivals can overflow to neighboring regions and across an entire country (Kim, Han, & Chon, 2008; Kim, Prideaux, & Chon, 2010). More specifically, festivals can generate a range of non-market benefits, including positive images of the host community, community pride, and enhancement of the community's quality of life (Kim & Morrison, 2005). Festivals may also help to preserve local heritage resources through the income they generate (Prentice & Andersen, 2003). Therefore, local festivals/events have been suggested as tools to enhance local brand values and images (Jago, Chalip, Brown, Mules, & Ali, 2003; Manthiou, Kang, & Schrier, 2014).

This study interweaves multiple concepts including literary festival tourism, celebrity, brand equity, and destination attachment. The literary festival examined in this study is held annually in a small mountain town. The event features a variety of literary presentations in memory of a famous author, and the venue offers a good opportunity for visitors to enjoy countryside scenery and agricultural tourism activities. For example, festivals related to William Shakespeare are globally prominent. His birth town, Stratford-upon-Avon in the UK, is inundated with literary tourists attending poetry or literary festivals as well as visiting his birthplace. These local festivals have been found to be educational, inspire imaginations, motivate literary activities, and

communicate with contemporary writers. Beyond festivals in his birth town, numerous Shakespeare-related festivals have been hosted by local governments and educational institutions in other British regions, Commonwealth countries, and the US (Geigner, 2015; Shevtsova, 2014).

This study focuses on the 'Hyo-seok Literary Festival' in Bongpyung, Korea, which is dedicated to the writer Hyo-seok Lee (1907–1942), a literary genius who died young. Since the festival is situated in Hyo-seok's mountainous highlands (altitude 800 m), non-locals are unlikely to visit without a special reason. Since 1999, the Hyo-seok Literary Festival has been held for 10 days in September, when buckwheat flowers cover the village and countryside. This arts festival is held both in honor of the writer and to promote the village's agricultural products. In 2014, the festival attracted 743,823 people, motivated mainly by interest in Hyo-seok Lee and the attraction of the pastoral region (Hyo-seok Lee Literary Festival Association, 2015). Since the area is very isolated (surrounded by mountains), it was not well known to Koreans beyond the festival.

Even though the importance to understand literary festivals from a tourism attraction development perspective has been addressed (Driscoll, 2015; Robertson & Yeoman, 2014; Weber, 2015), few studies have examined either the role of brand equity or celebrity endorsement in festival tourism. Additionally, research exploring the role of a literary celebrity in a local festival has been not empirically conducted in the

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academic literature. These research gaps motivated this study.

Thus, this study attempts to assess whether celebrity writer endorsement affects festival brand equity and attachment to a festival destination. It has several specific purposes including to: (1) assess the effects a festival title and celebrity attributes have on brand equity; (2) investigate the influence of celebrity attributes on attachment to the festival town; and (3) explore whether festival brand equity leads to attachment to the festival destination.

2. Literature review

2.1. Celebrity endorsement and related attributes

In contemporary culture, the public often idolizes celebrities, including movie stars and professional athletes (Koernig & Boyd, 2009; Lord & Putrevu, 2009). Respect for celebrities lives on even after their death through revival and reproduction of their work. For example, even though Elvis Presley, two of the Beatles, and Michael Jackson have died, their popularity continues through their music, movies, and advertisements. Since people tend to be interested in the lives of celebrities, celebrities have become increasingly prominent in the mass media (Stern, 1994). In particular, a myriad of celebrities now endorse products in TV advertisements and act as human brands acclaimed by the public in our other-directed society (Han & Ki, 2010; Ketchen, Adams, & Shook, 2008). Celebrity endorsements thus exert a powerful influence on consumer behavior.

The effects of symbolic communication between consumer and product can be maximized when the characteristics of the endorser and those of the product match (Kim, Wang, & Ahn, 2013). This has been validated by numerous previous studies indicating which types of endorsement are most effective (Chang, Wall, & Tsai, 2005; Hsieh & Chang, 2005; Kim et al., 2013; Kim, Wang, Jhu, & Gao, 2016; Lin, Wang, & Chen, 2008; Wang, Chou, Su, & Tsai, 2007; Wang, Hsieh, & Chen, 2002; Wang, Kim, & Agrusa, 2018).

Even though there are research streams relating to celebrity endorsement, it is imperative to focus on purpose of this study, that is, an understanding of celebrity endorsement attributes and their influence festival brand equity, festival brand loyalty, and attachment to the host community. The celebrity endorsement attributes of trustworthiness, familiarity, and expertise have been widely adopted by previous research (Dholakia & Sternthal, 1977; Han & Ki, 2010; Kim et al., 2013; Lord & Putrevu, 2009; Magnini, Honeycutt, & Cross, 2008; Ohanian, 1991; Till & Busler, 2000; Wang et al., 2018). Trustworthiness refers to the degree to which a celebrity is perceived by customers as transferring a message of integrity, honesty, and believability through advertising (Ketchen et al., 2008). Trustworthy endorsers have been found to improve the credibility of a brand, alleviate doubts, and promote economic gains (Erdogan, 1999; Gilchrist, 2005).

Familiarity has been defined as "knowledge of the source through exposure" (Erdogan, 1999: p. 299). Consumers can become more familiar with a celebrity through exposure to his/her physical appearance, dress and accessories, beauty, elegance, sexual appeal, manners, and politeness. Familiarity is transferable in that the physical features or images derived from celebrities may be transferred to the products they endorse (Belch & Belch, 2013; Dwivedi, Johnson, & McDonald, 2015; Gakhil & Senior, 2008; Ilicic & Webster, 2011; Lord & Putrevu, 2009; Ravi & Saxena, 2015; Thomas & Fowler, 2015; Um & Lee, 2015).

Perceived expertise has been defined as an individual's skill, experience, and knowledge in decision-making (Lord & Putrevu, 2009; Magnini et al., 2008). Expertise has also been associated with competence, qualification, expert ability, mastery, and authoritativeness (Han & Ki, 2010; Ketchen et al., 2008; Magnini, Garcia, & Honeycutt, 2010). Because consumers often lack specific product knowledge, which in the hospitality sector relates to the intangibility of many of the services offered, they may be willing to rely on recommendations by a trusted authority figure (i.e. a celebrity). The greater the celebrity endorser's

perceived level of expertise in an advertisement, the more persuasive or effective the advertisement is likely to be (Herstein & Mitki, 2008; Magnini et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2007).

2.2. Brand equity

Brand equity addresses the value of products, services, and corporate brands, and has recently been expanded to measure the brands of cities and nations (Elliot, Papadopoulos, & Kim, 2011; Kim & Schuckert, 2017). From a customer viewpoint, customer-based brand equity (CBBE) is defined as "the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand" (Keller, 1993: p. 8). The CBBE model was first advocated by Aaker (1996a, 1996b) and has since been applied to diverse academic disciplines including: the brand equity of tourism destinations (Bianchi, Pike, & Lings, 2014; Boo, Busser, & Baloglu, 2009; Gomez, Lopez, & Molina, 2015; Horng, Liu, Chou, & Tsai, 2012; Im, Kim, Elliot, & Han, 2012; Kim, Im, & King, 2015; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Lim & Weaver, 2014), hotels (Dioko & So, 2012; Nam, Ekinci, & Whyatt, 2011; Oh & Hsu, 2014; Prasad & Dev, 2000; Xu & Chan, 2010), restaurants (Hyun, 2009; Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2010; Lu, Gursoy, & Lu, 2015), conferences and exhibitions (Camarero, Garrido, & Vicente, 2010; Jin, Bauer, & Weber, 2010; Kim S, 2016), and festivals (Manthiou et al., 2014).

In conceptualizing customer-based destination brand equity (CDBBE), a four-part structure incorporating brand awareness, perceived quality, brand image and brand loyalty has been most popular (Horng et al., 2012; Hyun & Kim, 2011; Kim, Kim, & An, 2003; Lu et al., 2015; Nel, North, Myburg, & Hern, 2009). Brand awareness refers to "the ability of a potential buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category" (Aaker, 1991, p. 61). It has been found to be an important indicator that intensifies from no awareness to recognition to recall to top-of-mind (Aaker, 1991). Brand awareness is an initial step toward consumer commitment to a brand and has consistently been found to be related to brand loyalty (Hsu, Oh, & Assaf, 2012). In hospitality and tourism contexts, it has been applied to diverse contexts (Im et al., 2012; Oh & Hsu, 2014).

Perceived quality refers to "a consumer judgment resulting from comparisons made by consumers between expectations and the perception of the service performance" (Lewis & Chambers, 1989, p. 313). Tourists' behavioral intentions, including loyalty to the destination, typically develop from a combination of expectations, services, and perception (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). Brand quality is one of the key components of brand equity as applied to a destination (Boo et al., 2009). As a result, perceived quality is likely an important construct for explaining tourists' attitudes toward a destination.

Brand image has been defined as "perceptions of the brand that reflect consumer associations in the mind of the consumer" (Keller, 1993, p. 3). Brand image has also been suggested to be an organization or cultural activity's hallmark that sets it apart from others (Camarero et al., 2010). Local festivals in particular typically attempt to create a unique and distinguished image that will encourage tourists to visit the festival and make them regular visitors. Loyalty refers to strong commitment to repurchase a preferred product or service. In a tourism destination context, repeat visitation and intention to return or recommend a place to others are representative items to for measuring loyalty (Kim et al., 2016).

In summary, previous literature has consistently shown that brand equity includes brand awareness, perceived quality, brand image and brand loyalty (Camarero et al., 2010; Dioko & So, 2012; Horng et al., 2012; Hsu et al., 2012; Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2010; Manthiou et al., 2014; Nam et al., 2011; Oh & Hsu, 2014; Prasad & Dev, 2000; Šerić, Gil-Saura, & Ruiz-Molina, 2014; Xu & Chan, 2010). In this study, brand equity is conceptualized to play a crucial role which is postulated to mediate the effect of celebrity endorsement on tourists' attachment to a literary festival destination.

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