



Differences among generations of USA tourists regarding the positive content created about Colombia in social media

Gonzalo Luna-Cortés

Fundación Universitaria Konrad Lorenz, Carrera 9 Bis No. 62 – 43, Bogotá, Colombia

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Self-congruity
Nation brand
Destination brand
Social media
Generational segmentation

ABSTRACT

This research analyzes if generational segmentation moderates the relationships among self-congruity, nation brand, destination brand and the use of social media by USA tourists to create positive content about Colombia. Using the methodology of SEM, the results show that experience self-congruity influences the perception of the destination brand and the content created in social media about Colombia. Also, a positive perception of the nation brand motivates the creation of positive content about the country. Using an invariance test and a multi-group analysis, it was found that the relationship between self-congruity and the positive content created on social media can only be accepted among Generation Y tourists. Furthermore, the relationship between nation brand, destination brand and the content created on social media can only be accepted among Generation X tourists. The conclusions of the paper present the managerial implications of these findings.

1. Introduction

According to Proexport (2014), many of the tourists who visit Colombia every year are young travelers from the USA. This is a very attractive group of consumers for the development of the tourism industry in countries of South America (Arza, 2014). In this context, it can be observed that Colombia needs to increase their exports, since the tourism industry in this nation is lower than in most of the Latin American countries (Proexport, 2014). One of the main problems regarding Colombia is that it has a bad nation brand image, which affects the image of the country as a tourism destination (Bassols, 2016). Therefore, this research focuses on nation brand, destination brand and USA travelers who visit this country.

Recently, some studies have analyzed the influence of the content that appears on the internet on the image of a country (e. g. De Rosa, Bocci, & Dryjanska, 2017; Li, Park, & Park, 2016; Wakefield & Bennett, 2017). These studies mostly focused on the efforts made by some institutions to promote a good image of the nations on their websites, but there is a lack of research when it comes to the variables that affect the positive content created by visitors on the internet (Wakefield & Bennett, 2017).

Some research have also examined the influence of experience self-congruity on visitation choices, consumers' habits and post-trip consequences and intentions (Chaney & Martin, 2017), but little is known about the effect of this construct on the tourists' perception of the destination brand, the nation brand and the use of social media (De

Rosa et al., 2017; Wakefield & Bennett, 2017).

In order to fill these gaps, and to answer some questions related to the tourism in Colombia, this study examines the relationship between experience self-congruity with the perception of the nation brand and the destination brand by USA tourists who visit the country. Also, it aims to analyze if these three constructs can be connected with the intention to create positive content in social media about the country. Finally, it can be observed in previous studies that tourists from different generations have different consumer habits (Gardiner & Kwek, 2017). During and after the trips, Generation Y and Generation X present different behaviors regarding the creation of content in social media (Amaro, Duarte, & Henriques, 2016). Thus, the present research intends to examine if there are differences in the relationship of self-congruity, nation brand and destination brand with the use of social media by these generations of USA tourists, regarding their trip to Colombia.

2. Literature review

2.1. Theoretical foundations of self-congruity

The first theoretical foundations of self-congruity are based on the theory of self-concept. It was established that the interaction between a product, a service or a brand and the individual's self-concept can influence some consumer's decisions (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967).

In 1982, Sirgy focused on the theory of self-image. It was indicated

E-mail address: gonzalo.lunac@konradlorenz.edu.co.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2018.07.002>

Received 25 January 2018; Received in revised form 12 July 2018; Accepted 16 July 2018

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that products, brands and services can present personal images. The author pointed out that the problem with self-concept theories in the literature was the great number of different conceptualizations. Based on these differences, Sirgy (1982) proposed the possibility of multiple selves, and considered four facets of self-image: (1) actual self (how the self is perceived by the individuals); (2) ideal self (the self one person wishes to be); (3) social self (how the individual thinks that others perceive him or her); and (4) ideal social self (the way an individual wishes to be perceived). Based on this theory, self-congruity is defined as the association between the consumer's self-image (actual self, ideal self, social self and ideal social self) and the image of a product or a brand (Sirgy et al., 1997).

More precisely, self-congruity refers to the degree of match or mismatch between an individual's perception of a brand, a product or an experience and the perception they have of themselves (Sirgy et al., 1997). The more similar the two concepts, the higher the preference for that brand, product or experience, because its symbolic characteristics reinforce and validate the individual's self-perception. Thus, regarding the theory of self-congruity, it can be assumed that consumers prefer brands, products, services or experiences that they associate with a set of personality traits congruent with their own (Boksberger, Dolnicar, Laesser, & Randle, 2011). Others authors use "self-image congruence" or "self-congruence" when referring to the same term (Matzler, Strobl, Stokburger-Sauer, Bobovnick, & Bauer, 2016).

The studies in the area of tourism suggest that self-congruity has a positive influence on pre-trip visitation interests and purchase proclivity, as well as on post-trip consequences and intentions (Qu & Qu, 2015). One of the most repeated pre-trip visitation construct in the literature is the destination choice (Beerli, Díaz, & Moreno, 2007). Qu and Qu (2015) analyzed the effects of self-congruity in this context of research. As a result, they suggested that, if the image of the destination is congruent with the tourist's identity, the intention to travel will increase.

When it comes to post-trip consequences, some authors have analyzed the relationship between self-congruity and constructs as satisfaction (Souiden, Ladhari, & Chiadmi, 2017), loyalty (Chaney & Martin, 2017), intention to recommend, both online and offline and revisit intention (Beerli et al., 2007). However, there is a lack of literature regarding the relationship between experience self-congruity and the tourists' perception of the nation brand and the destination brand during and after their vacations (Li et al., 2016; De Moya & Jain, 2013).

2.2. Theoretical foundations of nation brand and destination brand

The theoretical foundations of nation brand are based on the studies conducted in the 60s and 70s on the theory of country image (Jones & Ashmore, 1973). Some authors studied the perception of a country by different groups of individuals (citizens, experts on economics, consumers, etc.). When other authors incorporated the concept of brand to this theory, different terms appeared in the literature, such as country brand, nation brand and nation branding (Dinnie, Melewar, Seidenfuss, & Musa, 2010).

On the basis of these theories, nation brand has risen to prominence from several fields, such as public diplomacy, public relations, marketing and tourism (Dinnie et al., 2010). When it comes to its definition, according to Dinnie et al. (2010), a nation brand is a unique, multi-dimensional blend of elements that constitute culturally grounded differentiations.

On the one hand, nation brand and country brand are normally used interchangeably in the literature (Fan, 2006). On the other hand, nation branding and nation brand are two different concepts. Nation branding refers to the image of a product based on the country of origin, while nation brand refers to the elements of the whole nation, and it focuses on these elements without any association with a product (Fan, 2006).

Among these concepts, the present study focuses on nation brand.

Some authors argued that nations engage in competitive marketing strategies in order to improve their brand images, their identities and their reputation in the global market, with the intention of boosting their exports and stimulating inflow in investment, education and services (Fan, 2006). It has also been established that a positive nation brand image can stimulate consumers' vacation choices (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998). Thus, nations with strong positive brand identities may gain some competitive advantage in the area of tourism. The analysis of nation brand in the area of tourism is related to another concept in the literature: the destination brand (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998).

In 1998, Ritchie and Ritchie conceived destination brand as different elements that differentiate the destination and suggest a pleasant travel experience. Thus, it represents intangible properties, as a different culture, climate and touristic attractions. Different characteristics have been examined in the studies that focused on destination brand, such as history heritage (Anholt, 2007), the culture (Hankinson, 2009), the experience and entertainment (Anholt, 2007), dining, business tourism, pricing, image repair (Avraham, 2016), people characteristics, social environment, health and education, as well as the reason for the visit, including the possibility to rest or recreation and sports (Akhoondnejad, 2018; Williams, Brown, Kitterlin, & Benjamin, 2018). However, these studies do not include the examination of constructs related to the tourists' identity and experience self-congruity.

2.3. Experience self-congruity, nation brand and destination brand

Countries in the globalized world opt to promote their distinct characteristics and retain their position, aiming for the presentation of a unique identity, and based on tangible but also intangible elements. These characteristics can be associated with a national identity, which incorporates the place identity (Kovoura, 2014). Thus, advertisers, marketers and tourism policy makers may promote the perceived distinct elements of a nation, a place, a region embedded with special emphasis and symbolism, and create a positive destination brand image (Kovoura, 2014).

Some studies have established that many individuals choose brands based on their symbolic properties, before their functional characteristics (Amujo & Otubanjo, 2012). Nation brand and destination brand may involve creating and establishing a mutual relationship with the individuals' self-images, in order to satisfy their basic desires as well as their emotional needs (Amujo & Otubanjo, 2012).

According to the study by Kaneva and Popescu (2011), countries and destinations can tell stories, animate conversations and extend narratives that can be connected to the individuals' identities. Iordanova (2007) indicated that the promotion of the attributes that form the destination brand attempts to draw in visitors using attractions that represent the country, which increases the sense of identity.

It has also been indicated in the literature that the congruence between an individual's and a country's personality influence the perception of the nation (Stokburger-Sauer, 2011). For this to occur, there should be an association between the individual's self-concept and the national brand (Stokburger-Sauer, 2011).

When foreigners travel, they normally change the image they had of the country (Knott, Fyall, & Jones, 2015) and self-congruity contributes to the development of identification via perceived similarities between the citizens' identities and the nation brand (Stokburger-Sauer, 2011). Therefore, there seems to be a relationship between self-congruity and the tourist's perception of the image of the country as a whole, as well as with its destination brand (Knott et al., 2015). Based on these previous studies, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1. Experience self-congruity influences the tourist's perception of the nation brand.

H2. Experience self-congruity influences the tourist's perception of the destination brand.

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