



Integrating country and brand images: Using the product—Country image framework to understand travelers' loyalty towards responsible tourism operators



Makarand Mody^{a,*}, Jonathon Day^b, Sandra Sydnor^b, Xinran Lehto^b, William Jaffé^b

^a School of Hospitality Administration, Boston University, 928 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston 02215, USA

^b School of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Purdue University, 900 W. State Street, West Lafayette, IN 47907, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Product-Country Image
Loyalty
Tour operator
Responsible tourism
India

ABSTRACT

While much research into loyalty has been conducted at the destination level, tourists' loyalty towards their intermediary has not been considered. To address this gap, the present study develops a model of tourists' loyalty towards responsible tourism operators by integrating two streams of literature. The first stream pertains to branding, consumer behavior, and international business, specifically Product-Country Image (PCI), while the second stream pertains to the extensive work concerning the concepts of destination image and destination loyalty in tourism. Data were collected using an Internet survey of domestic and international travelers to five responsible tourism operators in India. Results indicate that tourists' motivations to participate in responsible tourism and their perceptions of the destination and the operator's brand constitute the determinants of their attitudinal and behavioral loyalty towards their operator. The study advances the PCI framework in the context of tourism, thus contributing to the literature on image measurement and also extending place image theory. The findings have important product development and positioning implications for operators and destination marketers in India.

1. Introduction

Although consumer loyalty has been studied extensively in hospitality and tourism, complete understanding of the topic remains elusive in both practice and theory. Much research into loyalty has been conducted at the level of the destination. [McKercher, Denizci-Guillet, and Ng \(2012\)](#) suggested the need to rethink loyalty at different tiers in the tourism system. Specifically, while “it is apparent that intermediaries exert significant influence on travel behavior, the role of intermediaries and other decision-makers has also not been considered in loyalty research” (p. 729).

The present study responds to this gap by developing a model of tourists' loyalty towards responsible tourism operators in India. It examines the concept of loyalty at a different tier in the tourism system—at the level of the brand—by integrating two streams of literature. The first stream originates in the literature on branding, consumer behavior, and international business: Product-Country Image (PCI). The second stream stems from extensive work concerning the concepts of destination image and destination loyalty in tourism. The context of responsible tourism is particularly appropriate for such an examination. While there are no official statistics indicating the size of the

responsible tourism industry, trends indicate that growth in responsible tourism continues to outpace the growth of the tourism industry as a whole ([The Case for Responsible Travel: Trends & Statistics 2016, 2016](#)). Moreover, there is a strong business case for responsible tourism: “tourists are increasingly showing a preference for products and suppliers that demonstrate good social and environmental performance. By improving its performance in these areas, a tour operator can enhance its reputation and recognition in the marketplace as a responsible operator” (p. 4). Thus, an understanding of the factors that determine loyalty towards responsible tourism operators has theoretical and practical significance. In addition to advancing the PCI literature in the context of tourism, the present study contributes to the literature on image measurement and to place image research, an area that has been challenged by lack of breadth ([Elliot & Papadopoulos, 2016](#); [Elliot, Papadopoulos, & Szamosi, 2013](#)). Moreover, the findings provide responsible tourism operators with the type of information that is critical to the development and marketing of their products by answering a critical research question in the Indian context: What factors impact travelers' loyalty towards their responsible tourism operator?

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: mmody@bu.edu (M. Mody), gjday@purdue.edu (J. Day), ssydnorb@purdue.edu (S. Sydnor), xinran@purdue.edu (X. Lehto), jaffew@purdue.edu (W. Jaffé).

2. Literature review

2.1. Responsible tourism

The idea of responsible tourism can be charted back to the Manila Conference on

World Tourism organized by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in 1980 (Goodwin, 2011). Following nearly three decades of intermittent progress in our understanding of responsible tourism, there has been a resurgence of research interest in the idea that “tourism-related actors can develop a sense of ethical and moral responsibility that has resonance beyond self-interest, and that there is at least a possibility that this could change behaviours and contribute to more sustainable development” (Bramwell, Lane, McCabe, Mosedale, & Scarles, 2008, p. 253). While the nomenclature surrounding responsibility and sustainability is often used interchangeably, it is not the purpose of the present study to delve into definitional and conceptual issues surrounding the phenomenon of responsible tourism. Thus, the authors adopt a broad conceptualization of responsible tourism as the practice-oriented manifestation of the concept of sustainable development (Mihalic, 2016), and examine tourism-related actors that self-identify as adhering to the principles of responsible tourism development.

For suppliers, responsible tourism management is a strategic business decision: it has been shown to result in increased brand and company reputation, improved staff morale and retention, and a higher return on investment (Leslie, 2012). Moreover, the business case for responsible tourism is anchored in demand-side trends in international tourism which indicate that “consumers are increasingly looking for products and services that reflect their own values and provide a ‘feel good’ emotion by indirect support of the environment and society” (Frey & George, 2008, p. 111). Thus, there remains the need to understand the phenomenon of responsible tourism at the level of the business (Bramwell et al., 2008; Goodwin, 2011; Pomeroy, Noble, & Johnson, 2012). One particular type of business that occupies a unique position in the supply side of responsible tourism is the tour operator. According to Wearing and McDonald (2002) the tour operator plays a critical role as an intermediary in the responsible development of tourism, particularly in less developed countries, by harmonizing inequitable power relations in the tourism system and thus more effectively using tourism as a tool for poverty reduction (Erskin & Meyer, 2012). Thus, the practice of responsible tourism has manifested primarily in the context of less developed countries (Brown & Hall, 2008). Given this push for more responsible forms of tourism development in the developing world, India provides the canvas for our examination of the factors that contribute to the formation of loyalty at the level of the tour operator. The problems inherent in India's political ecology and the limitations of governmental and non-governmental organization solutions to the country's development challenges highlight the critical role of businesses in the supply side in effecting responsible tourism (Allen, Bhatt, Ganesh, & Kulkarni, 2012). The authors use a highly relevant framework from the literature on branding, consumer behavior, and international business to facilitate this examination: Product-Country Image (PCI).

2.2. Product-Country Image (PCI)

The literature concerning PCI provides the underlying model of



consumer behavior used to understand the notion of brand loyalty in responsible tourism. The first empirical study in the domain of PCI was conducted by Schooler (1965, as cited in Samiee, Leonidou, Aykol, Stöttinger, & Christodoulides, 2016), who found that the national origin of a product might have an influence on customer evaluations of that product: this proposition was subsequently referred to as the country of origin (COO) effect (Saimiee et al., 2016). Following this study, research on topic proliferated and took various directions. For example, early research on the topic perceived COO as an information cue that consumers consider in the information search, evaluation of alternatives, and purchase decision stages of the purchase funnel (e.g. Ahmed & d'Astous, 1993; Steenkamp, 1990), while later scholars examined the direct and moderating effects of demographic and/or psychographic characteristics of consumers on the COO effect (e.g. Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2004; Leonidou, Hadjimarcou, Kaleka, & Stamenova, 1999). Another stream of research drew a distinction between COO and country of manufacture, country of assembly, and country of design (e.g. Chao, 1993; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999), while a fourth stream of research dissected the concept of country image into various components such as cognitive, affective, and conative (e.g. Laroche, Papadopoulos, Heslop, & Mourali, 2005), or macro and micro country images (e.g. Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2007). While these streams of research collectively form the foundational platform for PCI studies, more recent empirical evidence has identified that the COO effect on consumer evaluations is moderated by product category (e.g. Ahmed et al., 2004; Andéhn, Nordin, & Nilsson, 2016; Mützel & Kilian, 2016). With this recognition, the present study uses the PCI framework to examine the factors that contribute to the formation of loyalty in the category of responsible tourism.

While the concept of Tourism Destination Image (TDI) has been extensively examined in the field of tourism, the use of PCI in tourism has been a more recent phenomenon, following a recognition that developments in PCI can contribute significantly to place image theory (Nadeau, Heslop, & Luk, 2008). In one of the earliest attempts to bring these two streams together, Mossberg and Kleppe (2005) draw a parallel between country and product image constructs and destination images at different geographical units. In more recent studies, Stepchenkova (2015) and Zhang, Wu, Morrison, Tseng, and Chen (2016) found that country image affects destination image, which subsequently affects tourists' visitor intentions or evaluations of their destination experience. In this regard, the work of Elliott, Papadopoulos, and colleagues (Elliott et al., 2013; Elliot & Papadopoulos, 2016; Elliot, Papadopoulos, & Kim, 2011) is notable in its efforts to create more integrative models that advance place image theory by combining PCI and TDI. The present study adds to this limited body of knowledge in the context of responsible tourism.

2.3. PCI and responsible tourism loyalty

The central proposition of the PCI framework is that the image of a brand/product is impacted by the image of the country from which the brand/product originates. German cars provide an example. Since Germany is a country well known for its automotive technology, one can hypothesize on the basis of the PCI literature that the image of a car made by a German manufacturer, like Audi, is positively impacted by the country's favorable image pertaining to its automotive technology. Then such favorable brand/product image would result in a favorable consumer attitude and/or behavioral outcome for the brand. The

Fig. 1. Product-Country Image (PCI) framework.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7422812>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7422812>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)