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Research Paper

Towards a taxonomy of a golf-destination brand personality: Insights from the Algarve golf industry

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ABSTRACT

This research explores how the golf industry in the Algarve positions golf destinations in terms of personality traits. It reveals the results of interviews conducted with tourism and golf-industry stakeholders in the Algarve. The objective of the study was to generate potential golf-destination-brand personality traits. Golf industry stakeholders tested the traits on the 'Big-five' model, on the Brand Personality Scale as well as the descriptors of destination image found in the literature, in order to identify the most appropriate ones to describe a golf destination. Free-elicitation interviews generated a total of 482 different potential golf destination brand personality traits, while 15 checklist interviews generated 92 items. From those, a set of 47 items was sent to a panel of eight expert judges for validation. The experts validated 30 potential golf-destination-brand personality traits while 17 items were eliminated. The findings also identified attributes that stakeholders consider to be essential for a golf destination, as well as specific characteristics of the Algarve that should be associated with the brand in order to guarantee differentiation. The paper concludes by stating how the scale can be useful for marketing and positioning purposes.

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1. Introduction

In the field of tourism, destination branding has been attracting researchers' attention. The concept of branding has only started to expand into the tourism industry and to become a topic of research in the late 1990s (Pike, 2002; Tasci & Kozak, 2006). Destination branding can be defined as 'the development and active management of destinations brands, including the development of brand names, logos or symbols, and the definition of long-term brand strategies (Caldwell & Freire, 2004)'. Destination branding, as suggested by Cai (2002, p. 722), is '... selecting a consistent element mix to identify and distinguish it through positive image-building; unlike typical goods and services, the name of a destination brand is relatively fixed by the actual geographic name of the place'. Over the years, the destination-branding concept has been developed and examined and the benefits of branding have been revealed by a number of authors (e.g. Blain, Levy, & Richie, 2005; Gnoth, 1998; Morgan, Pritchard, &

Pride, 2004), leading to greater complexity in the literature about destination branding.

Developments in destination branding lead us into areas such as destination image and destination personality. Marketing research implies that commercial goods can be positioned using human traits (Batra, Lechmann, & Singh, 1993). For instance, Aaker (1997) has suggested that brands, like human beings, can be represented in consumers' minds in terms of personality traits. Researchers in this area claim that attributing personality characteristics to objects is something spontaneous and natural (e.g. Guthrie, 1997). With the increased exposure to international information plus rapid global communication channels, opportunities to form organized mental representations of places become a natural process. Assuming that these representations naturally revolve around human traits, people may spontaneously position places according to personality dimensions (D'Astous & Boujbel, 2007).

Assuming that a destination-brand personality is a concept related to the concept of destination image, this study not only investigates, from the suppliers' perspective, the attributes which help to differentiate a golf destination, but also identifies the attributes and traits that contribute to form its personality. To develop a golf-destination brand-personality scale, specific brand-personality dimensions and traits must be identified. In this context, the aim of this study is to

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define a brand-personality taxonomy that can be applied to golf destinations, based not only on human and brand personality traits and on brand image descriptors, but also on traits generated by the golf industry itself, i.e. destination-specific traits. This study contributes to theory by identifying specific golf-destination attributes and selecting potential items to include in a golf-destination brand-personality multidimensional scale that is capable of accessing a golf destination's brand personality and its specific attributes.

2. Literature review

2.1. Destination branding

It should be noted that destination branding is a difficult and complex process, as compared to the branding of goods and services, due to the fact that it involves many factors and associations to be considered, such as geography, tourist attractions, natural resources, local products, residents' characteristics, institutions and infrastructure (Fan, 2006). Over the past few decades, there have been discussions about how to promote destinations and attract tourist and how to apply marketing techniques to destinations. In the literature, a significant number of studies in the field of destination branding have investigated how the concept of branding has been applied to nations (e.g. Anholt, 2002; D'Astous & Boujbel, 2007; O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2000; Rojas-Méndez, Murphy, & Papadopoulos, 2011; Rojas-Méndez & Papadopoulos, 2012), and to cities and regions (e.g. Hankinson, 2004). However, the majority of destination-branding studies mostly focus on brand image and tourists' decision-making in relation to tourism behaviour (Cai, 2002; Hall, 2002; Hankinson, 2005; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002; Prebensen, 2007; Pritchard & Morgan, 2001; Tasci, Gartner, & Cavusgil, 2007).

The attributes of destinations are difficult to define, their image is more complicated, and the associations they evoke are more numerous and diverse as opposed to goods and services. In addition, the ownership of a destination brand is unclear due to the existence of multiple stakeholders, which leads to a diverse audience. The fact that places are more abstract and involve greater complexity leads to a number of difficulties, particularly in the adaptation of several constructs that are present in traditional branding literature (Kotler & Gertner, 2002; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002). Nevertheless, relevant similarities do exist, for instance destination brands are also built on trust and consumer satisfaction, and several personality traits, such as friendliness or reliability (Kaplan, Yurt, Guneri, & Kurtulus, 2010). Besides the difficulties in branding destinations, a strong place brand offers important benefits to its stakeholders; it is a critical tool for competing with other destinations as it enhances awareness of the brand and its attributes with regard to economic, social, political and cultural aspects (Kaplan et al., 2010). In sum, the development of a destination brand with a strong personality may generate considerable advantages.

2.2. Brand personality and destination-brand personality

The concept of personality is normally attributed to humans. However, this notion can also define the characteristics of a non-human being (anthropomorphism), which Guthrie (1997, p. 51) defines as 'the transmission of human characteristics to non-human things and events'. Therefore, personality traits are also attributed to brands. Accordingly, brands, like humans, may possess distinct characteristics (Plummer, 1985). This idea has contributed to the development of the brand-personality concept as defined by Aaker (1997, p. 347), i.e. 'the set of human characteristics associated with the brand'. Mowen (2000) argues that consumers view their preferred products as extensions of themselves. Users' behaviour is motivated by the

symbolic value of the product, thus satisfying and enhancing their self-consistency and self-esteem (Hong & Zinkhan, 1995). Accordingly, when consumers choose from among competing products, they tend to access the level of similarity between the personality traits communicated by the product (Plummer, 2000) and the personality they want to project of themselves (Zinkhan, Haytko, & Ward, 1996).

Reinforcing this argument, Guthrie (1997) suggests that humans are not comfortable with that which is not human. Also, Moon (2002) advocates that people are attracted to others with a similar personality because similarity is considered to be emotionally rewarding. Consequently, humans anthropomorphize objects and brands to facilitate interactions with the non-material world (Fournier, 1998), resulting in relationships based on symbolic value. That is how brands become alive as active objects with their own personality in consumers' minds.

Although brands are not people, they can be personified (Aaker & Fournier, 1995), that is, brands can be characterized by personality descriptors such as "youthful", "colourful" and "gentle" resulting from a firm's communication (Plummer, 2000). Based on a brand-as-a-person perspective, Aaker (1997, p. 347) defines brand personality as 'the set of human characteristics associated with the brand'. In line with this idea, DeChernatony (2001) argues that personality features are the most fruitful ingredient when designing an appealing brand position and are readily translatable into appealing communication imagery.

Even though human and destination personalities may share a similar conceptualization (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006), the difference relies on how they are formed. While perceptions of human traits are inferred from a person's behaviour, physical characteristics, attitudes and socio-demographic characteristics (Park, 1986; Pervin, 2003), perceptions of a destination's personality traits can be formed and influenced by the direct and/or indirect contact that the tourist has with that destination (Plummer, 2000). 'Tourists receive and interpret the various messages sent by destinations, and build a representation of the 'behaviour' of the destination' (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006, p. 129), therefore, personality traits can be directly associated with destinations, either through hotel employees, restaurants, tourist attractions and tourist imagery, and/or indirectly through marketing programmes (cooperative advertising, value pricing, celebrities and media constructions) (Batra et al., 1993; Cai, 2002). In this context, Ekinci and Hosany (2006) conclude that, as destinations are composed of tangible and intangible components associated with particular values, histories, events and feelings, and rich in terms of symbolic values, the personification of a destination can easily occur. That richness in tangible and intangible components together with the outcomes of the relationship that tourists establish with destinations, other than human personality traits (HPT), might emerge as part of a destination's brand personality. For instance, some traits do not relate to human characteristics, e.g. sunny (for climate), expensive (for price), quality (for accommodation and facilities), but describe the critical attributes of a destination.

2.2.1. Relational brand personality

The current literature about the relationship between an individual and a brand leads to the conclusion that "since brands can be personified, human personality descriptors can be used to describe them" (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003, p. 149). However, 'the adjectives used to describe human personality may not be relevant to brands' (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003, p. 149). Therefore, an adaptation is required. When analysing the means for this adaptation, the literature points us towards a theory that sees places as relational brand networks, and to the relational network-brand model developed by Hankinson (2004).

According to this approach, a place brand is represented by a core brand and the brand relationships which extend brand reality or brand experience. As these relationships are dynamic (they

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