



Understanding the impact of culinary brand equity and destination familiarity on travel intentions

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores determinants of brand equity and the role of destination familiarity for travel intentions in culinary tourism from the perspective of foreign tourists. This analysis advocates four elements for brand equity (brand loyalty, brand image, perceived quality and brand awareness) for culinary travel intentions in Taiwan. Building on extensive literature, this study developed and empirically tested a model of the relationship using survey data collected from 407 foreign tourists from ten regions. The results indicate that there is a direct positive relationship between brand equity and travel intentions in culinary tourism. Moreover, the study recognizes the moderating role of destination familiarity, which positively moderates the effect of brand loyalty and perceived quality on travel intentions.

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1. Introduction

The tourism industry in the Asia Pacific region is rapidly growing and is recognized as one of the most significant economic resources in the region. Since 2001, the growth rate of tourism in the Asia Pacific region has already exceeded the America and has become the world's second largest tourist receiving region (Lee & Chien, 2008). Compared with other intentions toward tourism destinations, culinary tourism offers effective promotional and marketing tools to encourage travelers to visit a destination to enjoy the interesting and unique food there (Harrington & Ottenbacher, 2010; Smith & Costello, 2008). Many countries have developed strategies to effectively increase the number of tourists. The Tourism Bureau of Taiwan has promoted the abundance of unique, natural and diverse cuisines in Taiwan to attract more foreign tourists. Culinary tourism is becoming an important aspect of the tourism industry with great potential for attracting international tourists (Horng & Hu, 2009; Horng, Liu, & Tsai, in press; Horng & Tsai, 2010, in press).

Chinese culinary culture has a long history of development across mainland China. While Chinese food is popular in every country around the world, gourmets know that one can find all of

the different cuisines of China only in Taiwan. In Taiwan, the local cuisines are unique and diverse. Tourists can find snack shops or distinctive specialty restaurants everywhere. Recently, the younger generation has rapidly changed their dietary preferences. Beyond traditional Chinese food, the cuisine has expanded to foreign foods, such as American fried chicken and sandwiches, Italian pizza and noodles, Japanese sashimi and sushi, German pig's knuckles, Korean pickles, Swiss fondue, and nearly everything else. Taiwan's culinary culture is developing from different dimensions of culture, life, history, economics and society. Taiwan's international culinary brand marketing strategy also combines new technology, tastes, products, shops and gourmet image and pricing strategies. Through consistent image building and appropriate packaging, Taiwan's food has created a unique culinary brand in the international market. These features make Taiwan's culinary culture more complex than traditional Chinese dining. As this example shows, it is important to understand the role of destination familiarity in travel intentions and how travel intentions can be affected by brand equity in an increasingly competitive tourism market.

The term "culinary tourism" was developed by Lucy Long in 1998 (Wolf, 2002). Long (2004) defined culinary tourism as participation, including but not limited to the consumption and presentation of food or cuisine, in the special or unique food experiences related to a tourist destination. Long (2004) emphasized that the culinary tourism experience is a way for tourists to

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enjoy and accept different local cultures without reluctance. The importance of food and cuisine has caught the attention of tourism researchers. Boyne, Williams, and Hall (2002) found that tourists spend almost 40% of their budget on food when traveling. Further, Horng and Tsai (2010) argued that cuisines that are well known for taste and quality can be developed into tourism products. The 2004 Restaurant & Food service Market Research Handbook reported that travelers generate over 50% of total revenue for restaurants (Graziani, 2003). Past research has shown, therefore, that there is an inseparable relationship between the culinary industry and the tourism industry. More recently, with increasing interest in local cuisine, culinary tourism has been recognized as an effective promotional tool and has become an increasingly vital part of destination tourism (Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Horng & Hu, 2009). Although culinary tourism is becoming a crucial segment of the tourism industry, few studies have examined the relationships between culinary brand equity, destination familiarity and travel intentions in culinary tourism (Hjalager & Corigliano, 2000). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to investigate how brand equity contributes to travel intentions and how destination familiarity moderates the relationship between brand equity and travel intentions in culinary tourism.

The work is structured as follows. This study first review the literature, addressing the main constructs of the research – brands in the tourism industry and the category of brand equity – focusing particular attention on the determinants and drivers of culinary travel intentions. The hypotheses of a model reflecting the interrelations among the proposed variables. The following section details the method applied in the empirical work and describes the applied measurement scales. The findings of empirical setting employ a sample of 407 foreign tourists, as set out earlier. Then, discuss the implications of findings to both practitioners and researchers.

2. Literature review and hypotheses

2.1. Brand equity

The issue of brand equity has emerged as one of the most crucial topics for customer based perspectives in marketing management since the 1990s (Aaker, 1991, 1996; Keller, 1993; Kim & Kim, 2005; Srivastava & Shocker, 1991; Yoo & Donthu, 2001) and has been recognized as an important factors for creating competitive market advantages and marketing strategies of differentiation (Bailey & Ball, 2006; Boo, Busser, & Baloglu, 2009; Chang & Liu, 2009; Ha, Swinder, & Siva, 2010). A few scholars have identified the dimensions of brand equity and its implications for resort and travel destination management (Camarero, Garrido, & Vicente, 2010; Konečnik & Gartner, 2007; Williams, Gill, & Chura, 2004; Woodside, Cruickshank, & Dehuang, 2007).

Brand equity has been defined through many dimensions and perceptions: the objective brand in personality characteristics and brand image and subjective brand in brand attitude (Blackston, 1995); brand value in tangible value and intangible value (Kamakura & Russell, 1993); brand strength with customer perception and behavior (Srivastava & Shocker, 1991); and the discovery of a halo of brand equity dimensions that measure performance, social image, commitment, value and trustworthiness (Lassar, Mittal, & Sharma, 1995). These numerous definitions imply that effective marketing programs in brand equity have incremental value in the minds of consumers, which might foster greater confidence in consumers to induce consumers to be loyal and to pay a premium price for a brand.

Aaker (1991) provided the first definition of brand equity as a concept that extends to both tangible and intangible elements. The dimensions of brand equity are defined as “a set of brand

assets” (including brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and others) linked to a brand name and symbol that add to or subtracting from the value provided to consumers. That definition indicates that brand equity adds value to the product or service and increases customer satisfaction, which, in turn, provides a number of benefits to the firm. Yoo and Donthu (2001), in a different method, implemented a multi step psychometric to test the reliability of brand equity. The results demonstrated that the brand equity scale is reliable, valid, parsimonious, and generalizable across brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand image. Within the tourism literature, operationalizations of brand equity usually fall into three different perspectives for consideration: the customer based perspective, the financial perspective, and the combined perspective (Kim & Kim, 2005). According to the literature, the four dimensions of brand equity, brand image, perceived quality, and brand loyalty have been broadly accepted and used in prior studies (Aaker, 1991; Konečnik & Gartner, 2007; Yoo & Donthu, 2001).

On the basis of these studies, the role of brand equity was examined in travel intentions for culinary tourism. Accordingly, the dimensions of brand loyalty, brand image, perceived quality and brand awareness were used because they are germane to the arguments involving tourist travel intentions for culinary tourism.

2.2. Brand equity and travel intention

Travelers' intentions are the result of their perceptions from previous travel experiences. Jang and Namkung (2009) explained that travel motivation is an effective predictor of tourist behavior because travelers' mindsets significantly influence their future travel. This finding indicates the importance of measuring tourist perceptions and identifying the dimensions of destination brand equity that influence travelers' tourism intentions (Boo et al., 2009; Kim & Kim, 2005; Stokburger Sauer, 2011). Moreover, as the field of culinary tourism continues to develop, food plays an increasingly critical role in differentiating and promoting specific tourist destinations, especially with respect to the likelihood that tourists will visit culinary regions (Horng & Tsai, 2010). According to the Tourism Bureau's statistics, culinary tourism has become one of the most popular types of tourism to attract foreign tourists to Taiwan. Therefore, it is important to obtain data from broad samples and to develop an understanding of the brand equity factors in the desire to participate in culinary tourism. These factors create positive impressions of culinary features, which are then transferred from brand image to tourist travel intentions for culinary tourism. This study follows the underlying dimensions of brand equity (i.e., brand loyalty, brand image, perceived quality and brand awareness), examining how those dimensions affect the travel intentions of foreign tourists in culinary tourism.

Brand image refers the brand perceptions in the minds of consumers (Keller, 1993). From the travel intentions perspective, brand image among foreign tourists is considered as a primary and valuable repository, which reflects important indicators of customer segments and market potential and provides insights into the emphasis on functional, social, and sensory brand image in culinary tourism. Accordingly, organizations in particular are aiming to forge a unique and efficient image and identity that will encourage tourist travel intentions, with the aim of making those tourists into loyal visitors (Camarero et al., 2010). From a cognitive standpoint, the perceived image of a destination reflects the resources linked to functional features of that destination that attract tourists. In other words, when a culinary brand image becomes popular in the minds of tourists, it will naturally link to an array of benefits and positive expectations of quality, reliability and trust, also increasing travel intentions for the culinary brand of Taiwan. In part, this link is achieved by coupling brand image with tourists' perception of that

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