

BRAND EQUITY OF INDIA AS A TOURIST DESTINATION: STUDY OF ANTECEDENTS USING PLS-SEM APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

India has seen dramatic growth in tourism and slowly is emerging as one of the promising tourist destinations. However, the potential of the industry in terms of employment and income generation has not been fully utilized. An understanding of the tourist perception and the Brand equity a destination holds with its tourists enhances how the tourism industry in the country shapes up. The paper aims at contributing to the understanding of the key psychological factors that influence the formation of destination brand equity perceptions among tourists. The study has employed the Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modelling approach for validating the measurement and to estimate the effect of various antecedents on the Consumer Based Brand Equity in the context of India as a tourist destination.

Keywords: *Destination Brand Equity, Brand Awareness, Brand Image, Brand Loyalty, Perceived Quality, India*

INTRODUCTION

Competitiveness in tourism means that the destination is a unique offering in terms of experience and satisfaction difficult to imitate thus attracting consumers to the same destination repeatedly (Cracolici & Nijkamp, 2009; Saayman et al., 2015). Countries are competing consistently and modifying their strategy to become unique and recognizable to attain sustainable competitive advantage (Woodside & Lysonski, 1989; Krešić & Prebežac, 2011; Kozak, Kim, & Chon, 2017). To stand out from other popular destinations, a destination should hold a competitive position in the world tourism landscape (Di Marino, 2008). India has seen dramatic growth in tourism and slowly is emerging as one of the promising tourist destinations. However, the potential of the industry in terms of employment and income generation has not been fully utilized as India as a tourist destination has not gained the rankings it can achieve with its rich and diverse socio-cultural and geographic spread. The tourist and the destination have an interesting and deep relationship. An understanding of the tourist perception and the Brand equity a destination holds with its tourists enhances how the tourism

industry in the country shapes up. The paper aims at contributing to the understanding of the key psychological factors that influence the formation of destination brand equity perceptions among tourists. This detailed study on the Destination brand equity of India will enable marketers to develop strategies to take competitive advantage, and design strategies for better results to create a better image, enhance brand equity, and improve their marketing efforts to maximize the effective use of their resources.

EARLIER STUDIES

Brand equity as a concept garnered much attention from marketers, governments, and scholars after the publication of David Aaker's work titled "Managing Brand Equity" in 1991. Brand equity has been defined in various ways and forms as it results from consumers' perceptions. Aaker (1991) defines brand equity as a set of assets and liabilities that are linked to the brand name and added to or subtracted from the value provided by the product. Kim and Kim (2005) defined destination brand equity as perceptual equity (perceived quality, image, awareness). Konecnik (2006) introduced the concept of CBBE to destination brand study. There are numerous studies dealing with Brand equity, however, there remains a lack of agreement on the effective measurement of destination brands (Im et al., 2012).

Earlier studies on Destination Brand Equity have focused their attention on dimensions of Brand Awareness (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995; Boo et al, 2009; Kim et al, 2009; Gartner and Ruzzier,2010) which is the first dimension consistent in both Keller's (1993) and Aaker's (1996) brand equity theories (Oh, 2000;

Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2003; Kim & Kim, 2005; Lee & Back, 2008). The most influential brand equity model in the service industry was developed by Berry (2000), which was adopted and examined by many studies in the service industry (e.g. Boo et al., 2009; Tsai et al., 2010; Hwang & Hyun, 2012; Gómez et al., 2013).

Destination image and loyalty to the destination have also been extensively studied (Boo et al., 2009; Bianchi & Pike., 2011; Im et al., 2012; Pike and Bianchi., 2013; Saydan, 2013; Zhang, Fu, Cai, and Lu., 2014; Tran and Tran, 2017; Tran et al., 2019). However, Liu et al. (2013) established that the Brand Image (BI) of the destination precedes Brand Loyalty (BL). Several researchers have analyzed the influence of BI on CBBE (De Chernatony et al., 2006; Chang and Liu, 2009; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Barreda, 2014). Styliadis et al. (2017) also noted that destination image has a significant positive impact on the PQ of the brand which ultimately influences consumers' behavioral intention (Ranjbarian and Pool 2015). Previous studies regarding the effect of Destination Brand Loyalty on a destination's CBBE (Atilgan et al., 2005; Gil et al., 2007; Kashif et al., 2015; Srihadi et al., 2015; Tong & Hawley, 2009) confirmed the presence of a significant effect. There is a dearth of studies on the consumer-based brand equity of India as a tourist destination and this paper is an attempt to fill this gap in the literature.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

The brand equity model as proposed by Aaker (1991), operationalized by Yoo and Donthu (2001), and Yoo et al. (2000); and subsequently adapted in key research by multiple authors

(Atilgan et al., 2005; Rajh., 2006; Yasin et al., 2007, Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Buil et al., 2008; Tong and Hawley., 2009; Boo et al., 2009; Tsai et al., 2010; Sanyal and Datta., 2011; Hwang & Hyun, 2012; Gómez et al., 2013) has been followed for the paper which posits that Consumer-based Brand Equity (CBBE) comprises of destination brand awareness (DBA), destination brand image (DBI), destination brand quality (DBQ), and destination brand loyalty (DBL) as the antecedents.

Data was collected through an internet survey posted on various social media platforms to reach a representative sample of users from across India and abroad. the social media platform was used to identify the tourist groups on Facebook and LinkedIn platforms where the online questionnaire was shared. Approximately 20 traveler groups were connected on different platforms having a strength of more than ten thousand travelers from different countries. A total of 457 completely filled questionnaires were received which were finally used for analysis. Out of these 264 were Indian respondents and the remaining 193 were foreign tourists.

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), is a statistical technique widely used in modeling for behavioral sciences. It is operationalized as a combination of factor analysis and multiple regression or path analysis. Structural Equation Modelling focuses on theoretical constructs, represented by latent or unobservable factors. The relationships between the various latent constructs are represented by regression or path coefficients between them. Composite-based Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) approach has been found to be more effective in terms of the prediction

orientation of the method and its capabilities to handle complex models without imposing assumptions of distributional properties on the data. (Chin, 2010; Hair et al., 2010).

The antecedents of Consumer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) were identified from the extant literature. The four major antecedents identified are Destination Brand Awareness (DBA), Destination Brand Image (DBI), Destination Perceived Quality (DPQ), and Destination Brand Loyalty (DBL). The interrelationships between these antecedents were also identified from the study of existing literature and were included in the hypothesized model used to predict brand equity. The structural relationships hypothesized in the model include the relationships between the various antecedents of Consumer Based Brand Equity (CBBE), namely, Destination Brand Awareness (DBA), Destination Brand Image (DBI), Destination Perceived Quality (DPQ), and Destination Brand Loyalty (DBL) and effects on CBBE of India as a tourist destination.

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

For checking the multivariate normality, Mardia's coefficient was calculated for the multivariate measure of skewness and kurtosis using WebPower which is an online statistical power analysis tool (Zhang & Yuan, 2018). Mardia's coefficient was found to be significant, and hence the data is inferred to be not multivariate normally distributed. In this case, using Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was appropriate as it is a non-parametric technique that does not place the normality assumption on the data as a requirement. SmartPLS 4 software (Ringle et al., 2022) was used to analyze the model.

Table 1: Results of CFA for the measurement model.

Construct		Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
DBA	BA1	0.901	0.781	0.783	0.901	0.821
	BA2	0.910				
DBI	BI1	0.794	0.815	0.818	0.878	0.644
	BI2	0.810				
	BI3	0.853				
	BI4	0.750				
DPQ	PQ1	0.673	0.804	0.826	0.871	0.630
	PQ2	0.837				
	PQ3	0.776				
	PQ4	0.875				
DBL	BL1	0.909	0.870	0.882	0.912	0.723
	BL2	0.883				
	BL3	0.733				
	BL4	0.864				
CBBE	BE1	0.886	0.850	0.852	0.909	0.768
	BE2	0.864				
	BE3	0.879				

Source: Authors' calculations

Note: All values significant at $p < 0.05$.

Measurement Model Assessment - Reliability and Validity

Table 1 summarizes the results of internal reliability and convergent validity for constructs used in the survey instrument. Values of all reliability and validity are above the acceptable threshold levels of 0.7 for Cronbach's Alpha, Rho A, and Composite reliability, and 0.5 for Average Variance Extracted (Hair et al., 2019) thus establishing the reliability as well as convergent validity of the instrument. To establish the discriminant validity, the AVE of each construct should be higher than the shared variance of the same construct and all other constructs in the model are measured as the squared inter-construct correlation (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Also, for PLS-SEM studies, the HTMT values of the constructs must be below 0.9 (Henseler et al., 2015). Table 2 and Table 3 present the results of F-L and HTMT criteria which show that the discriminant validity for all constructs in the model is established as per both criteria.

Table 2: Fornell-Larcker Criterion for Discriminant Validity.

	CBBE	DBA	DBI	DBL	DPQ
Consumer Based Brand Equity	0.877				
Destination Brand Awareness	0.714	0.906			
Destination Brand Image	0.710	0.693	0.803		
Destination Brand Loyalty	0.826	0.739	0.772	0.850	
Destination Perceived Quality	0.641	0.562	0.755	0.676	0.794

Table 3 HTMT Criterion for Discriminant Validity.

	CBBE	DBA	DBI	DBL	DPQ
Consumer Based Brand Equity					
Destination Brand Awareness	0.872				
Destination Brand Image	0.849	0.867			
Destination Brand Loyalty	0.855	0.890	0.816		
Destination Perceived Quality	0.743	0.675	0.815	0.789	

Structural Model Results

The latent variable scores of the exogenous constructs in a partial regression are used to calculate the VIF values in structural model assessment. All the inner VIF values were found to be below 5, ruling out the possibility of any significant multicollinearity among the predictor constructs (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 4 shows the explanatory power and model goodness of fit statistics of the structural model developed for the study. All R square values are above 0.5 showing that the model has good explanatory power with a high explanatory power of above 0.7 for the brand equity of India as a tourist destination.

Model Fit Assessment for the model in PLS-SEM is based on the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value with an SRMR value below 0.08 indicating a good model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1998).

Table 4: Explanatory Power & Model Fit.

Explanatory Power: R Square		
	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Consumer-Based Brand Equity	0.715	0.713
Destination Brand Image	0.480	0.479
Destination Brand Loyalty	0.690	0.688
Destination Perceived Quality	0.573	0.571
Model Fit		
SRMR	0.078	

Table 5 and Figure 1 show the bootstrapping results run with 5000 subsamples giving path coefficients and their significance. It can be seen from Table 5 and Fig 1 that all the path coefficients for direct effects are coming out to be significant except the path coefficient of Destination Brand Awareness to Destination Perceived Quality and Destination Brand Image to Consumer Based Brand Equity. Results provide evidence of a significant positive path coefficient of Destination Brand Awareness (DBA) to Destination Brand Image (DBI). This implies that DBA affects DBI in a positive manner. The coefficient of DBA to Destination Brand Loyalty (DBL) is also found to be positive and significant implying that DBA has a positive effect on DBL. The coefficient of DBI to the Destination's Perceived Quality (DPQ) is also found to be positive and significant implying that DBI has a positive influence on DPQ. The coefficient of DBI to Destination Brand Loyalty (DBL) is also found to be positive and significant at 1% implying that DBI has a positive effect on DBL and in turn DPQ has a positive effect on DBL. Results also provide evidence of a significant positive path coefficient of Destination Brand Awareness (DBA), Destination's Perceived Quality (DPQ), and Destination Brand Loyalty (DBL) to Consumer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) thus implying that DBA, DPQ, and DBL have a positive influence on CBBE.

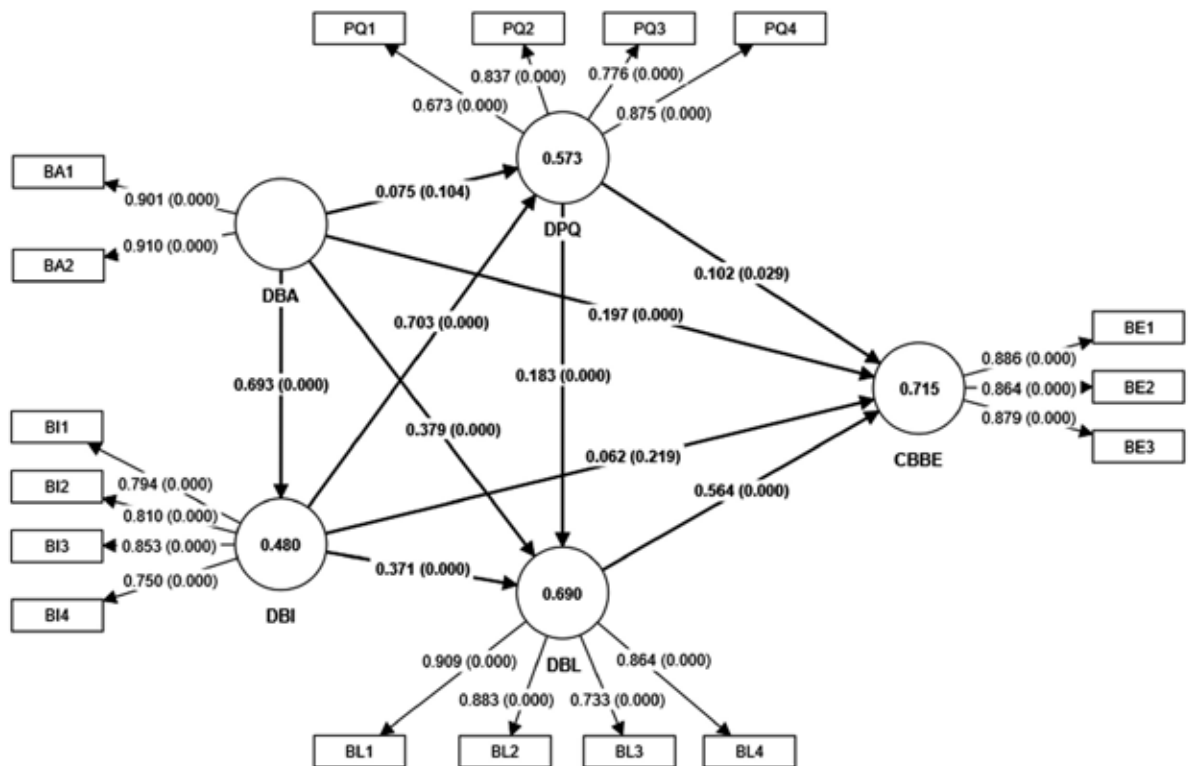
Table 5: Path Coefficients of Structural Model.

Path	Coefficient	T statistics	P values
DBA -> CBBE	0.197**	4.233	0.000
DBA -> DBI	0.693**	23.569	0.000
DBA -> DBL	0.379**	9.604	0.000
DBA -> DPQ	0.075	1.624	0.104
DBI -> CBBE	0.062	1.231	0.219

DBI -> DBL	0.371**	8.376	0.000
DBI -> DPQ	0.703**	16.814	0.000
DBL -> CBBE	0.564**	10.607	0.000
DPQ -> CBBE	0.102*	2.179	0.029
DPQ -> DBL	0.183**	2.179	0.000

Note: *Significant at 5% level of significance

** Significant at 1% level of significance



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study has employed the Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modelling approach for validating the measurement and to estimate the effect of various antecedents on the Consumer Based Brand Equity in the context of India as a tourist destination. The model for this study is based on the key dimensions of brand

equity (perceived quality, brand awareness, brand image, and brand loyalty) as proposed by Aaker (1996); and are measured based on the perception of consumers towards the brand, and brand value (Aaker, 1992, 1996; Atilgan et al., 2009). Results of the PLS Bootstrapping provide evidence of a significant positive path coefficient of Destination Brand

Awareness (DBA) to Destination Brand Image (DBI), Destination Brand Loyalty (DBL), and Consumer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) implying that Destination Brand Awareness has a positive effect on all these dimensions. These results are in line with Aaker (1996) & Keller (1993) who identified brand awareness as an important dimension in building Customer-Based Brand Equity. In order to have a positive brand image, the consumer must possess a satisfactory level of awareness of the brand. Similarly for developing a perception of the brand quality and further loyalty to the brand, it is imperative to first be aware of the brand. The effect of DBA on Destination Brand Image (DBI) was found to be positive and significant by Liu, Liu, and Lin (2013). Similarly, Hem and Iversen (2004) concluded that DBA assists in building the DBI. Most empirical studies have found a positive relationship between Brand Awareness and Brand Image (Baloglu 2001; Ghafari et al., 2017; Liu and Fang, 2018) and hence the results of the present study are supported by the literature. The results suggest that awareness programs related to India as a tourist destination brand are of utmost importance as enhancing brand awareness can

eventually lead to building consumer-based brand equity and increase the visit intention for India among tourists.

The coefficient of DBI to Destination's Perceived Quality (DPQ) and to Destination Brand Loyalty (DBL) is found to be positive and significant in line with previous studies like He & Li (2010) and Cretu & Brodie (2007). One way that perceived quality would be impacting brand equity could be by influencing brand association and brand loyalty (Tong & Hawley, 2009). It was finally observed that Perceived quality is considered an important dimension of brand equity and is positively related to brand equity. This study also found the effect of brand loyalty to be significant in affecting brand equity positively in line with previous literature.

Further research can be directed towards the non-internet-using population to understand and analyze the difference in antecedents affecting the brand equity of India as a tourist destination in this segment of the population to arrive at a more generalized conclusion. With a larger sample size of domestic and foreign tourists, a comparative analysis of the two groups can also be conducted as an extension of this research.

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