

Impact of Perceived Destination Personality on Tourists' Behavior

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Abstract

This research paper attempted to study the influence of tourists' perception about the destination personality traits on their behavior. Fierce global competition in the tourism market and the significant requirement of research contribution to destination branding arena were the primitive motives of this research. Intensive review supporting the objective was carried out and a theoretical model was found. To validate it, Coimbatore – a district in Tamil Nadu, India was chosen. This study was conducted between 2018 and 2019 targeting the tourists who visited the destination. A well-defined questionnaire was designed, perhaps finalized after the pilot study, and was floated to 570 tourists using convenient sampling technique. The questions seeking tourists' personal factors as well as statements measuring destination personality traits and tourists' behavior were contained in the questionnaire. Responses were screened and illegible filled-in questionnaires were removed and thereby 448 was fixed as the sample. To achieve the objective, a three - stage analysis was performed. Data analysis tools such as exploratory factor analysis using SPSS was used for data reduction, confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling of AMOS were used for confirming the existence of individual model in each factor and to validate the theoretical model, respectively. As a key outcome, the model was validated with two constructs measuring destination personality and three constructs measuring tourists' behavior and all the necessary values were in an acceptable range. Also, it was found that perceived destination personality had a significant influence on tourists' behavior. Marketers are suggested to inculcate the key aspects of this research work in their destination marketing, branding, and promotional activities.

Keywords : destination, tourists, personality, behavior, structural relationship modelling, branding

JEL Classifications : L83, M31, Z32

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The tourism industry inculcates wide offerings both in terms of natural and artificial resources such as wildlife, bestowed forests, natural landscapes, mountain chains, river banks, climatical intensive geographical locations, and entertainment theme parks, historical monuments, adventurous places, cultural attractions, religious spots, etc. Being the most lucrative and vibrant sector that contributes to socioeconomic development (Muthukumar, 2009), it serves distinct motives of diverse cohort of tourists. However, the tourism industry's growth and development rely on how well the marketing efforts by the stakeholders, destination marketers, and decision & policy makers, that include governments and bodies, transform to the tourists' inflow. Accordingly, the growing fierce competition in the world tourism market witnesses the destination branding perspective as the most lucrative strategy by the marketers in branding and positioning their destinations (Murphy, Benckendorff, & Moscardo, 2007). Destination marketers, at the outset, need to acquire efficient branding techniques, and thus, successful destination brands are based on how efficient

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marketers understand their target consumers' needs, wants, and motives – tourists in this context. Like product branding, destination branding does inculcate the components such as the name of the destinations, and symbols, logo, or the graphical representations describing the destinations. This strategic branding process facilitates marketers in differentiating their destinations, serving wide tourist motives, needs and wants, conceiving allied business avenues, and boost local economies, etc. Moreover, evidence exists that destination branding elevates the inflow of tourists. However, in the tourism context, the branding process has a huge impact on tourists' behavior perspective too.

Thus, the topic has been framed on producing benefits to the thereof interested on branding destinations, but limiting to destination personality aspects and their influence on tourists' behavior. Destination branding inculcates the two most germane perspectives, that is, destination image and destination personality. The destination image is the sum of beliefs and impressions that tourists possess about the destinations (Crompton, 1979) ; whereas, destination personality is human traits associated with the destinations or significant traits describing the tourism destinations (Chen & Phou, 2013). Eventually, destination personality has been considered as one of the profitable theories in branding and positioning the destinations (Chen & Phou, 2013). Even though numerous studies exist in this arena, the need for further analysis on offbeat aspects pertain as the industry is witnessing an increase in tourists' inflow and changing market behaviors. This research paper aims to understand the tourists' perception about the personality traits that resembles in the destinations and how do those traits influence tourists' behavior through a model. To understand the existing evidence supporting the objective and the intended model, an intensive review of literature related to the personality traits of the destinations, tourists' behavior, and the consecutive impact was carried out.

Review of Literature

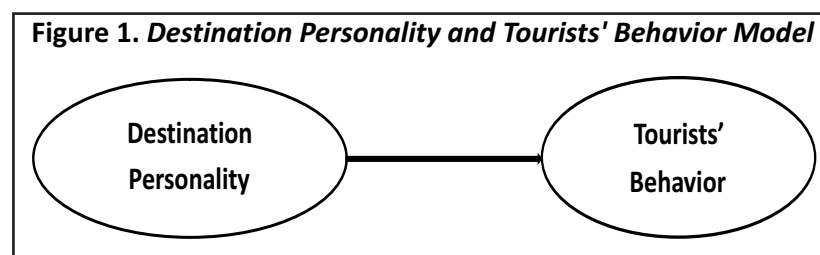
The concept of destination personality emerged from brand personality traits that act as the psychological force in consumer perception about products or services. Destination personality, perhaps a key critical factor in branding, not only differentiates the destinations among competing destinations, but also conceives an emotional bondage between tourists and the tourist places (Murphy et al., 2007 ; Park & Jung, 2010). Like products, destinations do have personality traits, perhaps a component of destination image (Bilim & Bilim, 2014). Understanding the destination personalities are paramount because it facilitates the marketers to enhance the tourists' experiences and post touring evaluations (Papadimitriou, Apostolopoulou, & Kaplanidou, 2015). It was highly seen that the most vibrant or salient destination brands are based on how attractive their personalities are perceived by the tourists (Morgan & Pritchard, 2004). The most trivial definition of destination personality is the set of human characteristics associated to a tourism destination (Hosany, Ekinci, & Uysal, 2006). Ekinci and Hosany (2006) stated that tourism destinations consisted of both the symbolic values and personality traits viewed through a set of tangible and intangible attributes. However, there are studies in the destination management and branding literature which stated that destination image and destination personality are interrelated perspectives (Hosany et al., 2006 ; Murphy, Moscardo, & Benckendorff, 2007 ; Ramkissoon, Uysal, & Brown, 2011). However, destination personality is all about the traits associated with a place or destination.

The approach of using brand personality on tourism destinations was routed through Aaker's (1997) Brand Personality Scale (BPS). The scale consisted of five predominant traits such as sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. Even though this scale was not found for measuring the destination personalities, there were many researchers who used the scale efficiently as the base for understanding the personality characteristics of tourism places (Chen & Phou, 2013 ; Ekinci & Hosany, 2006 ; Gómez Aguilar, Yagüe Guillén, & Villaseñor Roman, 2016 ; Park & Jung, 2010 ; Sahin & Baloglu, 2014 ; Usakli & Baloglu, 2010 ; Xie & Lee, 2013). For example, a study was conducted by Kumar and Nayak (2014) on developing a scale for destination personality

and validating it. The outcome led to six dimensions such as courteousness, vibrancy, conformity, liveliness, viciousness, and tranquility. Some of the BPS scaling components were not significant for the studies conducted by researchers on destination branding perspectives. For example, Hosany, Ekinci, and Uysal (2006) applied Aaker's BPS and found that only three dimensions such as competence, extroversion, and excitement were reflective. A study on understanding the brand personality of a destination also employed the Aaker's BPS and found that the destination had conviviality personality trait (Soundari & Shankar, 2020).

Tourists' attitude and intention could be either favorable or unfavorable; for example, recommend the destinations to others, say positive things about the destination, or generate negative word of mouth. However, it was found that the post experience behavior depended on the satisfaction level that tourists acquired to an extent, and destination personality had a significant role in it (Chen & Phou, 2013). Researchers also found that the destination personality aspect had positive effect on tourists' self-congruity, tourists' behavioral intentions, and attitude of recommending the destinations to others (Murphy et al., 2007 ; Usakli & Baloglu, 2010). Accordingly, a recent research work by Ahmadizad, Kafcheh, and Paryad (2020) found that destination personality had a positive significant impact on tourists' satisfaction and revisiting intention. Positive word of mouth was found as the most predominant factor in behavioral intention (Jalilvand, Samiei, Dini, & Manzari, 2012). However, research found that tourists' loyalty towards the destination was highly seen with greater destination brands (Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, & Evans, 2006), and perceived destination personality induced a critical role on it because positive traits in tourists' minds reflected on tourists' favorable attitude (Fournier, 1998). Supporting to this, a key research on the impact of destination personality traits, cuisine experience, and tourists' psychological well - being on tourists' revisiting intentions conducted by Lee and Kang (2013) found that destination personality had a significant impact on tourists' revisiting intentions towards the destination (Taiwan). However, a study by Xie and Lee (2013) also found that destination personality characteristics influenced word-of-mouth intentions. Accordingly, a research study on exploring the relationship between city image and city personality found that city's dynamic image, excitement, and sophistication personality traits of the city were related (Kim & Lee, 2015).

A study by Xie and Lee (2013) found that destination personality traits such as competence, excitement, and sophistication had compelling impact on behavioral intentions of tourists. Also, it was found that image had impact on tourists' revisiting intentions. Similarly, perceived destination personality traits significantly influenced the tourists' satisfaction (Hultman, Skarmeas, Oghazi, & Beheshti, 2015), intention to revisit the destinations (Papadimitriou et al., 2015), and even tourists' preferences towards the destination (d'Astous & Boujbel, 2007). Moreover, a research found that tourists could differentiate regional tourism destinations through destination brand personalities (Murphy et al., 2007). Overall, the review results in the understating that destination personality traits have a significant role on tourists' behavior, but a void reflects on the components of personality traits and tourists' behavior. However, modeling the factors might not always have consistent measurement constructs, and thus, this model has been framed expecting to produce value to the existing literature. Though the research outcomes collide and produce a major inference, the model-based approach is limitedly seen in the literature. Thus, a model has been formed and shown in Figure 1 and hypotheses constituting to it have been formulated.



Based on the review of literature, the theoretical foundation is laid on the significance of destination personality traits as an influencing determinant for tourists' behavior – attitude and intention.

⇒ H_{a1} : Destination personality significantly influences tourists' behavior.

⇒ H_{a2} : Destination personality does not significantly influence tourists' behavior.

Research Methodology

This portion of study is an extract from a major research work on understanding the image and personality of tourism destination (Coimbatore – Tamil Nadu) and its significance on tourists' behavior. The sample elements consisted of tourists who visited the destination between November 2018 and May 2019. Since this empirical study is based on tourists' responses, convenient sampling technique was followed. A structured questionnaire was derived after iterations based on the outcomes of pilot study and then floated to 570 tourists. Illegible responses were screened and eliminated, and the sample size was fixed to 448.

The questionnaire intended to acquire tourists' responses on their personal characteristics, their perception of image (cognitive and affective), perceived personality traits, and their behavior towards the destination. Since this study focuses on the destination personality and tourists' behavior, the details pertaining to these two commending factors were listed. Destination personality traits such as sincerity, excitement, conviviality, sophistication, ruggedness, and conformity were measured using a Likert 5-point scale, and there were 4, 3, 3, 2, 2, and 3 constructs measuring those traits, respectively. Tourists' behavior included six statements measuring attitude and intention. The reliability of the scales used to measure both the factors were consistent at .855 and .889 ; respectively.

Though this study primarily aims to test the significant impact of perceived destination personality traits on tourist behavior, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) of SPSS is used as the data reduction technique to funnel down the factors for individual model identification. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modelling (SEM) of AMOS are used to confirm the existence of the model in each factor and to identify the structural relationships between the destination personality and tourists' behavior (also to prove the hypotheses framed from the intensive literature review), respectively.

Analysis and Results

Since this study is based on the model identified, a three - stage process of analysis has been carried out to validate it hypothetically. The analysis includes exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling (in the order of the stages of analysis).

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

EFA - a data reduction technique helps to uncover the underlying structure of a relatively large set of variables. As the first step, EFA was performed on destination personality traits – 17 statements constituting sincerity, excitement, conviviality, sophistication, ruggedness, and conformity and tourists' behavior – six statements constituting tourists' attitude and behavioral intentions towards the destination. With Kaizen normalization, Varimax rotation was used and the small coefficients less than 0.3 were suppressed.

Destination Personality

From the KMO and Bartlett's test performed on destination personality traits through EFA, it was found that the

Table 1. Factor Loadings of Destination Personality Traits

Destination Personality Factors	Loading Values
Religious	.868
Friendly	.839
Reliable	.828
Outdoorsy	.819
Charming	.815

significant p - value was 0.000, which was less than 0.05, and hence, there existed correlation among the variables. The measure of sampling adequacy value was 0.796, which is close to 0.8, and thus, adequate sample existed.

The factor loadings of variables (Table 1) such as religious, friendly, reliable, outdoorsy, and charming are .868, .839, .828, .819, and .815, respectively. The values less than .8 were omitted. Henceforth, these high loading variables were grouped together and named as destination personality factor for the further steps.

Tourists' Behavior

KMO and Bartlett's test results stated that the significant p - value of tourists' behavior was $0.000 < 0.05$ and the measure of sampling adequacy was 0.798 – thus, the sample adequacy was found.

Factor loadings less than 0.7 were omitted for consideration, and hence, four behavioral variables are found (Table 2) having values such as .904 – Positive word- of- mouth, saying positive things about the destination, .941 – Post on social media recommending the destination, .879 – Positive attitude as loving the destination, and .773 – Best destination to visit. These four variables were grouped and named as Tourists' Behavior for further analysis.

Table 2. Factor Loadings of Tourists' Behavior

Tourists' Behaviour Factors	Loading Values
Positive word- of- mouth, saying positive things about the destination.	.904
Post on social media recommending the destination.	.941
Positive attitude as loving the destination.	.879
Best destination to visit.	.773

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

The next step is to confirm the existence of the model inside each factor constituting to the objective, and hence, CFA is employed using AMOS. CFA confirms the model based on some components and its acceptance values such as root mean square of error approximation (RMSEA), goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit (AGFI), comparative fit index (CFI), Trucker – Lewis index (TLI), normed fit index (NFI), and chi square value divided by degrees of freedom (CMIN/ df). The respective acceptable values are shown in Table 3. These values are also significantly verified for SEM analysis to validate the hypothetical model.

Table 3. CFA and SEM Model Fit - Acceptable Values and Derived Values

Components	Acceptable Values	DP	TB
RMSEA	less than 0.08	0.08	0.00
GFI	Close to 1	.995	.999
AGFI	Close to 1	.951	.998
CFI	Close to 1	.923	.991
NFI	Close to 1	.930	1
TLI	Close to 1	.912	1
CMIN/df	Less than 5	4.447	1.20

Note. DP represents Destination Personality and TB represents Tourists' Behavior.

Destination Personality

Initially, five variables, those derived from the EFA, were diagrammed to test the model fit. However, the model fit values were considerably falling out of the acceptable range. The second iteration is performed using four variables such as religious, friendly, reliable, and outdoorsy. The variable 'charming' is excluded based on its reliability value and factor loading. However, the model fit is achieved at RMSEA = 0.08, GFI = .995, AGFI = .951, CFI = .923, TLI = .930, NFI = .912, and CMIN/df = 4.447 (Table 3). Covariance is drawn between the errors of religious and outdoorsy variables.

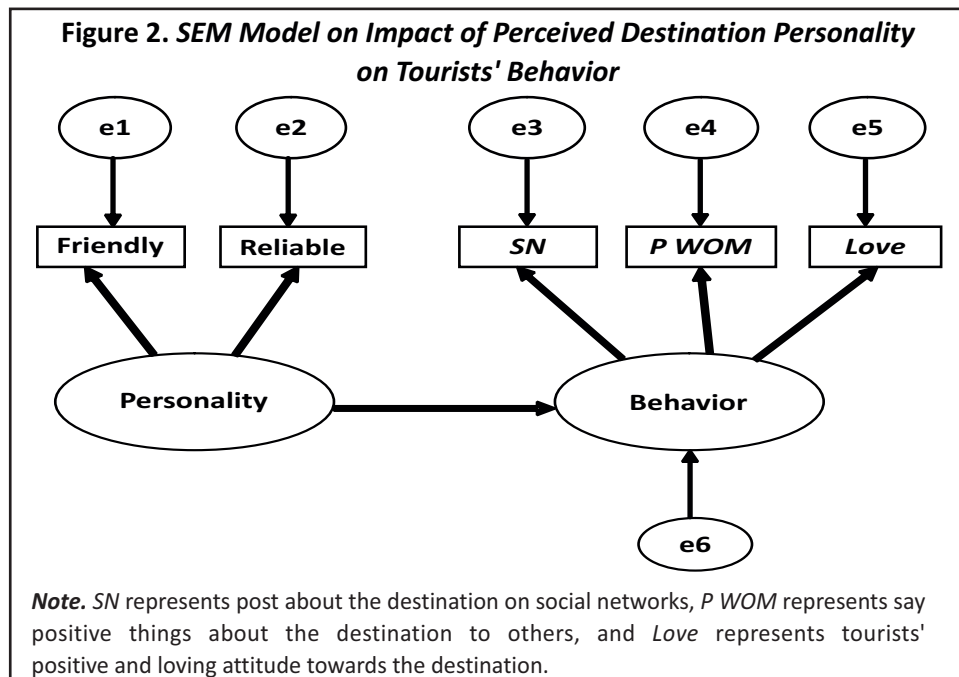
Tourists' Behavior

Four variables measuring tourists' behavior derived from EFA are employed in the AMOS graphical model, and it is found that the acceptable values are not achieved. Modification indices indicate the M.I. value is 21.20 between the errors of variables such as 'Posting on social networks' and 'best destination to visit.' Hence, covariance is drawn between the errors of these two variables and it is found that the model fit values such as RMSEA = 0.00, GFI = .999, AGFI = .998, CFI = .991, TLI = 1, NFI = 1, and CMIN/df = 1.20 are acceptable (Table 3).

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

As a final analysis step, the confirmed individual models are diagrammed to find the structural relationship between the factors, that is, perceived destination personality and tourists' behavior. Initially, both the models with the derived variables are tested for its model fit. However, the values are exceeding the acceptable range, and hence, the variables – outdoorsy of personality traits and best destination to visit of tourists' behavior are removed based on their reliability and factor loadings. In the second iteration, the modification indices show the M.I. value between the error of Post on social network – Tourists' behavior and error of Religious variable – Destination personality to be 42.072. Due to the violation of drawing covariances between errors of distinct factors, the variable 'Religious' is removed from the personality traits.

The AMOS SEM model (Figure 2) consists of two factors of destination personality (friendly and reliable) and tourists' behavior (post about the destination on social networks and say positive things – spread positive word of mouth and positive attitude of loving the destination). The model fit values are RMSEA = 0.033 < 0.08, GFI = .995 – closer to 1, AGFI = .980 – closer to 1, CFI = .995 – closer to 1, TLI = .989 – closer to 1, NFI = .987 – closer to 1, and CMIN/df = 1.498 < 5. Also, the *p*-value is 0.038 < 0.05, stating that perceived destination personality significantly impacts tourists' behavior and the hypothesis H_{a1} framed on the theoretical model is accepted (hypothesis 1) and validated.



Theoretical Implications

Destination brand personalities are predominant in destination branding process and impeccable for constructing destination brand equity. Thus, the concept of destination personality is critical for academic research that intends to contribute to the tourism industry's enhancement. Accordingly, this research paper aims to identify a model theoretically - whether destination personality influences tourists' behavior. The model is identified from the review based on the previous research findings and is validated through the data acquired and analyzed. The outcome of this research paper is similar to the findings of previous research discussed in the literature review (Chen & Phou, 2013 ; Hultman et al., 2015 ; Jalilvand et al., 2012) and adds stringent value to destination personality, destination branding, and the aspects of understanding tourists' behavior. However, the constructs measuring the factors of the study are seen distinct from other studies and thereby highlighted as the limitation. The destination personality constructs such as friendly and reliable and tourists' behavior constructs such as post on social networks, positive WOM, and loving attitude contribute to the best fit of the model values. These values, perhaps arising out of the data, might have significant differences in their relevance and fit - to - contribute when the nature of data is distinct. For example, the demographic characteristics of the respondents intend to influence the objective of the extraction studies. However, this paper has also shown a positive argument, or in other words, the similarities in the arguments that the personality traits of the destination have a significant impact on the behavior of tourists who visit it.

Managerial Implications

From a critical marketer's view, this study indicates the predominance of personality traits of the tourism destinations in their branding strategies. The brand personalities play a vital role in consumer behavior arena and act as a competitive strategy (Ye, 2012). The findings point that the traits – friendly and reliable impact tourists' post experiences such as they post about the destination on social networks – being the most powerful tool to

capture a wider market size and social media has considerable influence on tourists' travel choice or decision making process (Singh & Yadav, 2018) ; tell positive things about the destination – Word of mouth, that enlarges brand salience and positive attitude and also reflects on their revisiting choice process. It is important for the marketers to value these key aspects, perhaps mild in theory but influential in business growth context, inculcate these in their marketing communications, branding, and promotions. For example, including the vocabulary that constitutes to the destination personality traits, perhaps optimizing their communication practices, would attract tourists (Ahmadizad et al., 2020). This could be relevant when destination marketers design their websites that contain the destination's information. It is evident that many countries are working towards a long-term plan on repositioning their destinations for enormous speculations such as to increase the tourist inflow, FDI, and for sustainable development. However, on any of the considerable objectives, inculcating the destination attributes, elements (for example, destination personality traits), and representing visuals in marketing efforts would result in lucrative outcomes because attributes of the destinations act as the factor for satisfying tourists and enhance their revisiting intentions (Bandaru & Venkateshwarlu, 2020).

Conclusion

This paper produces a model determining the destination personality as a significant influencing force on tourists' behavior. Destination personality should be given immense role in branding destinations as not only the cognitive and affective image, but also it undoubtedly intrudes on tourists' motivation too. In product branding, marketers expose their brand image through the elements such as name, logo, symbol, sonic branding, or even differentiating colors through visuals in advertisements, and personalities of the brand do reflect consumers' awareness and brand recall. Similarly, implementing the personality traits of the destinations in advertisements or promotional activities would reflect in diverse tourists' mental mapping, brand recall, and touch points and these marketing efforts would significantly impact the tourism industry's growth and performance (Mishra & Ojha, 2014). On a wider view, contributing to the destination management would also generate opportunities for the marketers to position their destination in the global market, generate revenues, facilitate the governments in efficient development of the tourism sector, and the policy makers for framing policies related to sustainable growth and protecting the resources. For example, one of the research studies pointed out a suggestion that interference of authorities and communities would enhance visitor's recommendations and positive word of mouth in the market (Konwar & Chakraborty, 2015).

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

This study is an extract from a major research work. The limitations of this study stand on the sample size; increasing or decreasing the sample size would produce varied inferences ; extent, applications of identified model and its constructs measuring the study factors on other geographical locations would require overhauling of research design, tools, techniques and approaches, and the period of study ; application of older concepts to modern life would contradict in either ways. Further scope exists as the model can be extended to newer proportion of studies inculcating the digitalization on tourists' behavior, branding strategies, tourist perception, and so on. Also, there is a scope for considering this model as the base to understand the nationwide or diverse tourists' behavior or to specific tourists' population.

Author's Contribution

Dr. Sabari Shankar R. is the sole author of this research paper. All the aspects that include from identifying the

topic, intensive review of literary works, data collection, analysis, and written documenting have been done by him.

Conflict of Interest

The author certifies that he has no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest, or non-financial interest in the subject matter, or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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