Drivers and Consequences of City Brand Love – Unravelling Tourists' Love for Perth, WA

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Introduction, aims and objectives

City branding is an important activity of the governing authorities of the cities around the world. While extant literature on urban governance highlights the significance of residents' role in the development and managing a city band, research focusing on tourists' emotional attachment towards a city is relatively sparse. Specifically, little is known about the drivers and consequences of city brand love and how the governing authorities can exploit the consequences of the same. Based on the existing marketing and tourism literature on brand love, this study examines the drivers and consequences of city brand love in the context of Perth, WA.

Background: conceptual framework

Brand love has its root in the theories of interpersonal love and relationships (Batra et al., 2012). It is defined as the degree of emotional attachment a satisfied customer has for a particular brand (Carroll & Ahuvia 2006). Such emotional attachment toward a brand plays a strong role in continuing the relationship (Drennan *et al.*, 2015; Kudeshia *et al.*, 2016; Nobre, 2011) i.e. to stay with the brand. Similarly, destination brand love is the feeling of deep affection or attachment by the tourists for a destination brand name (Aro, Suomi, & Saraniemi, 2018; Swanson, 2017). Guided by the existing literature this study considers brand image, brand hedonic and utilitarian value and overall brand experience as the key drivers of destination brand love. In this regard, we hypothesize that brand image, brand utilitarian and hedonic values positively influences brand experience, which in turn positively influences brand love for a tourism destination. Aro et al. (2018) identified that one of the behavioural consequences of destination brand love includes positive word of mouth. Swanson (2017) reported that tourists who love a particular destination are likely to revisit the destination as well as spend more at that particular destination. Based on these arguments, this research considers referral and social media engagement as the two key outcomes of destination band love. Therefore, we hypothesize that brand love positively influences tourists' referral intention and their social media engagement about a destination.

Methods

Data were collected through a self-administered survey conducted among the tourists visiting the most popular destinations of Perth including Elizabeth Quay, Kings Park, Fremantle, Rockingham, Mandurah and Hilary's Boat harbour. A total of 227 responses were collected, which were analysed through SEM using AMOS 22.0.

Key findings

The retained data were analysed using the two-step process of structural equation modelling: testing the measurement model followed by structural path analysis (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988). The findings reveal that brand image and brand hedonic value (but not brand utilitarian value) influence the tourists' overall brand experience about Perth, which eventually determines their love towards Perth. In the consequent side, it is found that brand love influences tourists' referral

and social media engagement behaviour. The mediation results show that brand experience fully mediates the relationships of brand image and brand hedonic value with brand love.

Conclusions and policy relevance

This study offers a parsimonious model reflecting the drivers and consequences of destination brand love for Perth, WA. It shows that image and hedonic value creates a positive experience about the destination brand, which eventually produce love or emotional attachment with the destination. Such love also influences the tourists to refer others to visit the destination and share their positive experience in their social media page. Since brand love takes time to develop (Langner *et al.,* 2015), it is imperative for the government agencies especially city councils in consort with the respective stakeholders to enact strategies for developing destination brand love. Thus the findings of the study offer novel and useful insights for the practitioners in terms of adopting specific strategies to engender tourists' love and how best the governance authorities could do to leverage tourists' love towards the city.

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