

INFLUENCING OF BRAND PERCEPTION ON SPORTS TOURISM BRAND LOYALTY IN ZHANGJIAJIE CITY, CHINA

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ABSTRACT

As competition in the sports tourism market intensifies, many sports tourism brands face challenges in maintaining brand loyalty. Zhangjiajie City, as a well-known sports tourism destination, relies on strong brand perception to attract and retain tourists. This study explores the relationship between brand perception and sports tourism brand loyalty in Zhangjiajie. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, the research surveyed 320 respondents to analyze key influencing factors. The findings indicate that brand loyalty includes recommend, attitude and revisit intention. Brand perception consists of multiple dimensions, including awareness, recognition, associations, image. Sports tourism brands that establish a strong and positive brand perception stand out from competitors, earning greater consumer trust and preference, which in turn enhances brand loyalty and encourages positive word-of-mouth promotion. A favorable brand perception significantly strengthens tourists' connection with Zhangjiajie's sports tourism brands, contributing to the sustainable development of the local industry.

Keywords: brand perception, sports tourism brand loyalty, Zhangjiajie City, China

INTRODUCTION

For an outdoor sports mecca like Zhangjiajie, understanding the consumption behavior and preferences of this group can help brands develop more effective marketing strategies, thereby attracting more outdoor sports enthusiasts, enhancing brand awareness and loyalty, and promoting the long-term development of the sports tourism industry. With the improvement of national fitness awareness and the rapid development of the tourism industry, the demand for sports tourism products continues to increase, especially in an outdoor sports paradise like Zhangjiajie. Studying the consumption behavior and brand loyalty of Zhangjiajie sports tourism brands can help to gain a deeper understanding of the consumption preferences of this special group, thereby providing a reference for companies to develop more accurate brand marketing strategies. At the same time, this study will also help promote the construction of Zhangjiajie sports tourism brands, enhance the brand's market competitiveness, and promote the sustainable development of the regional tourism economy [1].

OBJECTIVE

Research question

1. What is the current situation of brand perception on sports tourism brand loyalty in Zhangjiajie City, China?
2. What is the relationship between brand perception on sports tourism brand loyalty in Zhangjiajie City, China?

Research Objective

1. to understand the current situation of brand perception on sports tourism brand loyalty in Zhangjiajie City, China.
2. to analyze the relationship between brand perception on sports tourism brand loyalty in Zhangjiajie City, China.

METHODOLOGY

Sub-Section 1: Research design

This study adopted a mixed research design that combined quantitative and qualitative research methods. First, through a literature review, we understand the existing knowledge and research results in this research field. Through literature review, potential influencing factors and related theoretical frameworks were identified to guide subsequent research design. Based on the literature review, a quantitative study was designed and implemented and a large amount of data was collected. Quantitative research uses questionnaires and statistical analysis to quantify the relationship between brand perception and sports tourism brand loyalty.

Following the quantitative study, focus group validation was used to provide further understanding and interpretation of the findings. Focus groups are a qualitative research method that uses group discussion and interaction to capture the views, experiences, and opinions of participants. Focus group validation can supplement and enrich quantitative research findings, validate quantitative research results, and gain deeper understanding.

In the context of Zhangjiajie's growing sports tourism industry, brand perception plays a crucial role in shaping consumer loyalty. Beyond service quality and tourism experiences, a strong and positive brand perception enhances tourists' emotional connection with the destination, leading to increased satisfaction and repeat visits. Sports tourism brands in Zhangjiajie that establish a distinct and favorable brand image are more likely to gain consumer trust and long-term loyalty, ultimately contributing to the sustainable growth of the local sports tourism sector.

Sub-Section 2: Quantitative methodology

Population and sample

1) Population

The target population of this study is Tianmen Mountain tourists, with an average of 5,000,000 per year. (New Hunan, 2023)

2) Sample size

In determining the sample size, we need to consider the resource constraints and feasibility of the study, as well as the desired level of statistical significance and effect size. This study will choose select tourist samples from the Zhangjiajie Sports Tourism Boutique Route. The variables in this study include brand perception, brand personality, self-congruity and sports tourism brand loyalty. According to related research, 3-5 items are needed to measure each variable, and 16 measurement items are proposed to be selected in this study. Too small a sample size will lead to large errors in the results, which are not statistically significant. On the other hand, considering the feasibility of the study, the sample size should not be too large. In this study, the sample size was designed based on 20 times the number of variable items. According to statistical principles, the sample size is usually 5-10 times the number of questions for the variables. In order to obtain more robust results, the sample size of this study is 20 times the number of variable items, i.e., $16 \times 20 = 320$. (Wang et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2021). which satisfied the need for statistical inference and also considered the feasibility of the study.

Sub-Section 3 Qualitative research methodology:

Population and sample

The target population is sports tourism experts and Zhangjiajie sports tourism tourists, divided into two focus groups, each with 8 key respondents, professors with professional knowledge and theory and tourists as specific participants.

In determining the focus group size and total sample for qualitative research in this study, relevant methodological authorities were consulted and the results with certain scientific validity and reliability were selected.

(1) Population characteristics

In selecting focus group participants, a diverse combination was selected, including individuals of different ages, genders, participation and loyalty levels, in order to obtain rich data with different perspectives and experiences.

(2) Sample size

In the focus group study, each focus group had 8 participants.

RESULTS

Brand loyalty

Definition of sports tourism brand loyalty

Sports tourism brand loyalty refers to consumers' continued choice, emotional dependence, active support and recommendation of a specific city in sports tourism activities. It is not only reflected in consumers' revisit intention of the city's sports tourism brand, but also includes their high satisfaction, trust, emotional identification and positive word-of-mouth communication with the city's tourism brand.

Oliver's Brand Loyalty Model

Oliver's (1997) framework follows this cognition-affect conation pattern but differs in that he argues that consumers can become "loyal" at each attitudinal phase relating to different elements of the attitude development structure.

Specifically, consumers are theorized to become loyal in a cognitive sense first, then later in an affective sense, still later in a conative manner, and finally in a behavioral manner, which is described as "action inertia (Seduram, 2022)."

The dimension of Brand loyalty

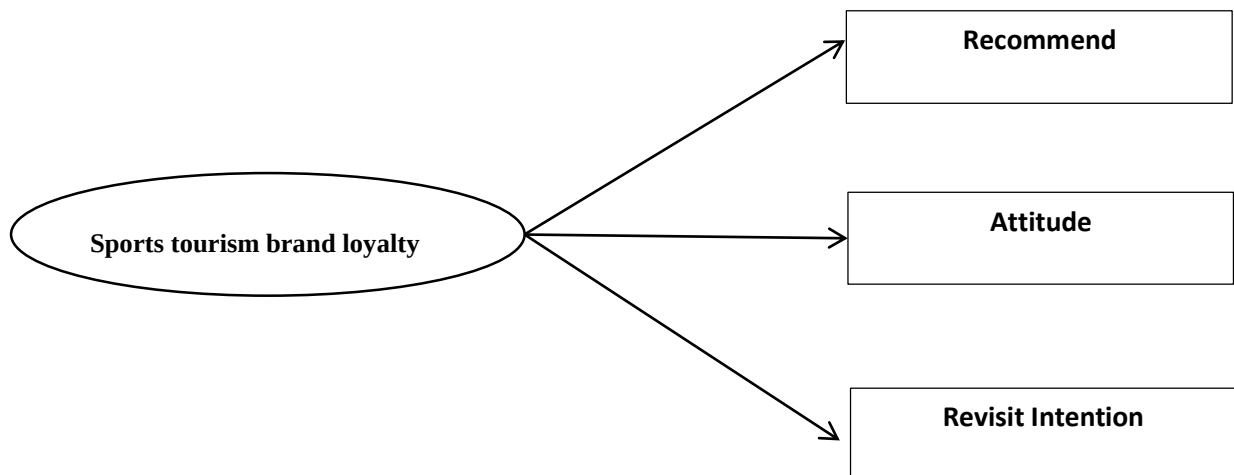
Sports tourism brand loyalty including recommend, attitude and revisit intention.

Recommend: refers to tourists recommending a destination or brand to friends, family and social networks based on their satisfaction with it. This word-of-mouth communication can significantly increase the popularity and attractiveness of a destination, thereby attracting more potential tourists. Tourists tend to trust recommendations from relatives and friends rather than traditional advertising. Positive recommendations can not only reduce the marketing costs of sports tourism brands, but also enhance their market competitiveness and brand loyalty. (Ghorbanzadeh , 2021)

Attitude: In sports tourism, attitude is the overall evaluation and emotional response of tourists to a certain tourist destination or brand. Positive brand attitude can enhance tourists' emotional connection and make them give priority to the brand or place when choosing a tourist destination. Brand attitude directly affects the market image and positioning of the destination, which in turn affects tourists' travel decisions and loyalty. Good brand attitude usually means higher tourist satisfaction and loyalty, which helps the long-term development and continued appeal of sports tourism brands. (Fernandes , 2019)

Revisit intention: In sports tourism, revisit intention refers to the actual actions of tourists to interact with tourism brands or destinations, including booking, participating in activities, repeat visits and evaluations. Loyal tourists will repeatedly choose sports tourism products from the same destination or brand, reflecting their dependence on and trust in the brand. Behavioral loyalty is the ultimate manifestation of brand loyalty. By analyzing tourists' repeat bookings, participation frequency and interactive behaviors, sports tourism brands can better understand and meet the needs of tourists, thereby further consolidating their market position and enhancing brand loyalty.(Chieng , 2022)

Figure1 The dimension of Sports tourism brand loyalty



Brand perception

Definition of brand perception

Brand perception refers to the degree of consumers' understanding and recognition of the same brand, the comprehensive impression and evaluation of the sports tourism brand, their knowledge, impression, attitude and emotional response to the brand, which includes not only consumers' cognition and recognition of the brand, but also their association and overall image of the brand.

Brand perception theory

Brand perception theory explores how consumers form and interpret their perceptions of a brand based on various interactions, experiences, and communications. It is centered around how individuals mentally construct a brand's identity, including the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses that follow (W Aslam , 2018).

Key components of brand perception theory include:

Brand Awareness: The extent to which consumers are familiar with and can recall or recognize a brand.

Brand Image: The overall impression a brand leaves on consumers, shaped by associations, marketing, and experiences.

Brand Associations: The mental connections consumers make between a brand and certain attributes, values, or qualities (e.g., luxury, reliability).

Perceived Quality: Consumers' subjective judgment of a brand's product or service quality based on personal experience or reputation.

Brand Loyalty: The commitment of consumers to a brand, reflected in repeat purchases and advocacy.

Brand perception is crucial in influencing consumer preferences, buying decisions, and long-term brand loyalty (Torsten Teichert, 2016). It helps companies understand how to position their brand to meet consumer expectations and foster positive brand-consumer relationships.

The dimension of brand perception

Brand perception including awareness, recognition, associations, image.

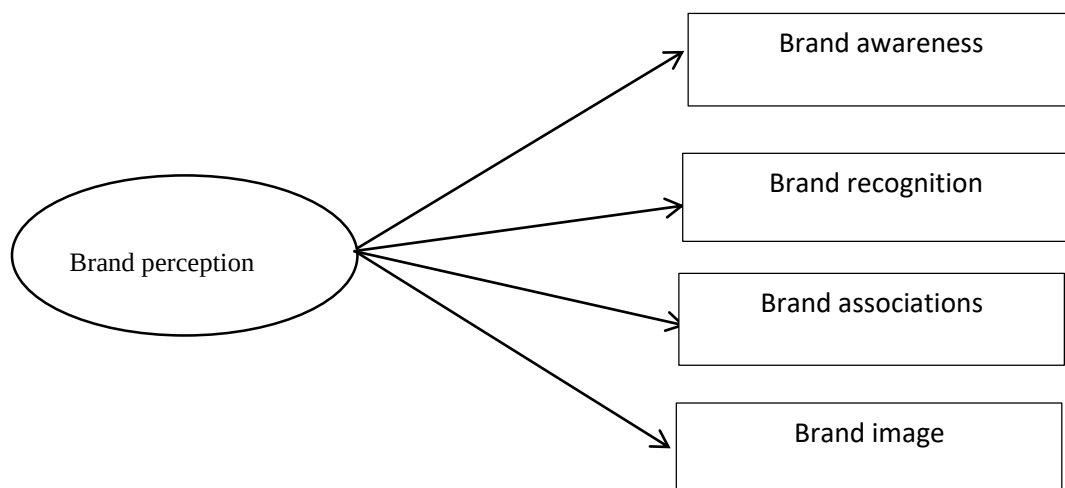
Awareness: Brand awareness refers to the degree to which consumers know and understand the existence of a brand. It is the basis of brand perception because only when consumers know the existence of a brand can they further understand and contact the brand. (Guliyev, 2023)

Associations: Brand associations refer to specific characteristics, images, and emotions that consumers associate with a brand when they hear or see it. Brand associations include the image of the brand in the minds of consumers and the values, attributes, and emotional connections conveyed by the brand. (Onojafe, D., 2011)

Recognition: Brand recognition refers to the ability of consumers to quickly identify and recognize a brand when they see its logo, logo, slogan, or other brand elements. Brand recognition ensures that consumers can recognize a brand among many brands. (Martínez-Cevallos, 2024)

Image: Brand image refers to consumers' overall perception and feeling of a brand, including the brand's reputation, market positioning, and the values it conveys. (Viratthanant, R., 2018)

Figure 2 The dimension of Brand perception



Related research

Brand perception plays a key role in sports tourism brand management, especially in shaping consumer loyalty. For Zhangjiajie's sports tourism brand, brand perception not only affects tourists' initial impression of the brand, but also directly affects their loyalty. Studies have shown that various

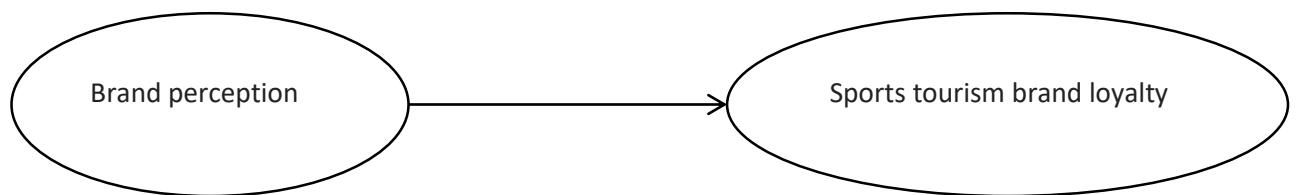
dimensions of brand perception, such as brand image, brand cognition, and brand association, have a significant impact on brand loyalty (Bruckberger, 2023).

First, brand image is one of the main factors affecting brand loyalty. Kumaradeepan (2023) pointed out that a clear and attractive brand image can enhance consumers' trust in sports tourism brands, thereby enhancing sports tourism brand loyalty (Rachmad, 2023). For Zhangjiajie's sports tourism brand, the unique natural landscape and rich sports activities constitute its strong brand image, making the sports tourism brand more competitive.

Secondly, brand cognition also plays an important role in the establishment of brand loyalty. Studies have shown that sports tourism brands with high cognition are usually more likely to attract and retain loyal customers (Nguyen, 2023). As a well-known tourist destination, Zhangjiajie has increased its sports tourism brand awareness through extensive dissemination on social media and other digital platforms, thereby promoting brand loyalty.

Finally, brand association is closely related to consumers' emotional connection, which can further consolidate Zhangjiajie's sports tourism brand loyalty. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Figure 3 The relation of Brand perception & Sports tourism brand loyalty



CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

This study explores the influence of brand perception on sports tourism brand loyalty in Zhangjiajie City, providing valuable insights into tourists' decision-making processes. Using quantitative methods, the research identifies key factors that contribute to consumer loyalty, emphasizing the importance of a strong brand image in attracting and retaining visitors. However, further research is needed to deepen the understanding of aspects such as the relationship between brand perception and tourist satisfaction, the role of marketing strategies, and the long-term effects of brand perception on tourism development. Future studies could also examine how digital platforms and word-of-mouth communication influence tourists' brand loyalty. With the continuous growth of Zhangjiajie's sports tourism industry, this research area will continue to gain attention from scholars, tourism practitioners, and policymakers, contributing to the sustainable development of the region's tourism economy.

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