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Impact of Consumers' Experience and Brand Image on Consumer Behavior in Creative Tourism in Vietnam

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Abstract:
This study aims to investigate and explain the influence of tourists' experience on brand image and their behavior in creative tourism with porcelain industry in Vietnam. A quantitative research was conducted by conducting a questionnaire survey to identify foreign tourists' perception of each factors. A random sampling method was used to collect 300 respondents in five porcelain villages in Vietnam. The final data of 280 questionnaires were used to test the hypotheses. The results show that consumers' experience significant influences brand image (functional and symbolic), and their behavior, which supported all hypotheses. We suggested the companies need to have a deeper insight into consumer behavior and educate consumers' about the brand in order to develop effective marketing strategies. And both creative tourism agency and porcelain firms should organize more activities to take consumers get involved and provide more pleasurable experiences. More recommendations would be provided in detail.

Keywords: Creative tourism, consumer experience, brand image, consumer behavior, Viet Nam porcelain industry

1. Introduction

Tourism is about enjoying and learning through meetings and interactions (Nina, 2017). And customers generally prefer service providers to stage memorable experiences that they should feel satisfied for repeated purchase (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). However, customers consumption patterns often change, service providers have to explore new marketing strategies to ensure customer awareness, satisfaction and loyalty. Therefore, traditional tourism is required to re-invent itself to fulfill the needs of tourist who are searching for a more meaningful experience; thus, the concept of creative tourism has arisen, which is considered to be an extension to cultural tourism (Richards, 2014), and has developed over a number of years in many countries including New Zealand, Austria, Spain, Canada, the United states, Taiwan (Tan, Kung & Luh, 2013). Creative tourism 'offers visitors the opportunity to develop their creative potential through active participation in learning experiences which are characteristic of the holiday destination where they are undertaken (Richards & Raymond, 2000). Many countries and tourism destinations were eager to develop different forms/activities of creative tourism such as traditional crafts/handicrafts, gastronomy, perform-making, porcelain painting, and dancing (Richards & Wilson, 2006).

Creative tourism has been viewed as a strategy to regenerate destinations physically, culturally and socially, contributing to local economies and fostering tourists learning of social and cultural characteristics of the places (Salman, 2010). Therefore, some industries related to art/culture/tradition are also getting involved tourism, taking tourism as a way to promote their products and expand the market. Vietnam, a developing nation in Southeast Asia, also takes advantages of its landscape and tradition to develop their tourism industry. Recently, creative tourism trend is also promoted with focus in village tourism with special craft such as porcelain villages (Bat Trang, Phu Lang, Tho Ha, Chu Dau, Dong Chieu) in northern Vietnam. Despite they are large in number and rich in forms of production, they are yet able to make typical tourism products of Vietnam. Porcelain firms have transformed their manufactures to be a creative tourism destination with hope to enhance their brand in tourists by encouraging tourist learn skills and create products by themselves.

Creating a positive brand image takes marketing programs that link strong, favorable and unique associations to the brand in memory (Keller, 2008). Customers are able to form brand associations in a variety of ways other than marketing activities: from direct experience; through information from other commercial or nonpartisan sources. Thus, these porcelain firms cooperate with travel agents, keep houses with traditional architecture and skilled artisans, collect well-known products, open gallery of historical stuffs and exhibition to let visitors choose craft products of their own interests. More than that, tourists will enjoy their own experience by making a product by their own skills. Most products by porcelain firms in Vietnam are produced for daily household use (bow, cup, plates, pot, bottle...), worship, or decoration purposes. Nowadays, the artists bring into porcelain with innovations in production techniques, and creativity in products'

features, hence many new products with new design are created. Thus, tourists' do-it-yourself products help them memorize about their trip and porcelain brands.

Brand image for tourism industry creates differential effects on customer response to the tourism marketing of the brand (Latif. et al., 2016). This study explores the perception of foreign tourists on porcelain brands in Vietnam through their creative tourism trips. Although the creative tourism market has shown an increasing trend, most of researches have focused on the supply-side (service providers, tourism boards, industry practitioner) (Crouch et al., 2004) without focusing on the perspectives of tourist themselves (Tan et al., 2013). A few relative studies that deal with the tourists' perspective of experiences, but their destinations were only in developed nations. The trend of creative tourism and customers' experience in developing/underdeveloped areas has been not explored, especially how it can help to enhance the related-firm brands.

2. Literature Background

2.1. Creative tourism and customer experience

The term creative is used to attract consumers because it is seen as being 'cool' (Richards, 2011), and has now enjoyed a full decade of increasing popularity, in which anything attained the creative prefix; from the creative industries, creative classes, creative economy, creative cities, creative business, creative governance, to creative tourism (Landry, 2000; Florida, 2002; Daniela & Ana, 2012). The common components of creative tourism are 'participative, authentic experiences that allow tourists to develop their creative potential and skills through contact with local people and their culture' (Richards, 2011). Thus, it depends heavily on tourist's active involvement, who are not just in a place and watching others, but instead interacting and co-creating the whole experience, actively learning about their surroundings and applying this knowledge in order to develop their own skills (Richards & Whilson, 2006). Creativity in services and involvement level by tourists play an important role in defining tourists' perception and behavioral intention, and "has the potential to maneuver the field forward in ways that produce new and valuable sustainable outcomes" (Lim, 2016).

The customer experience originates from a set of interactions between a customer and a product, a company or part of its organization, and the value they the consumer and the company gain is created though that set of interactions (Addis & Holbrook, 2001). It's also the internal and subjective response customers have to any direct or indirect contact with a company (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). Direct contact generally occurs in the course of purchase, use, and service, and is usually initiated by the customer. Indirect contact most often involves unplanned encounters with representations of a company's products, services, or brands. Therefore, consumers' experience is strictly personal and implies their involvement at different levels (rational, emotional, sensorial, physical and spiritual) (LaSalle & Britoon, 2003). Its evaluation depends on the comparison between a customer's expectations and the stimuli coming from the interaction with the company and its offering in correspondence to the different moments of contact or touch-points (Shaw & Ivens, 2005).

In tourism, consumers are offered opportunities to participate actively, to interact with the environment, and giving them first-hand experience with creative activities (Ali, Hussain & Ragavan, 2014). When consumers take part in activities using simple materials and imagination, they develop unique experiences known as "creative experience" (Richards & Wilson, 2006). Therefore, for creative tourists, experiences should be unique, and allow tourists to participate in creating the experience (Hung et al., 2016). Several scholars proposed and tested four dimensions of tourist experience: recognition and escape, peace of mind and relaxation, involvement, and hedonics (Xu & Chan, 2010; Ali et al., 2014). When tourists seek escape, recognition, and relaxation, creative tourism depends heavily on tourists who are actively involved, learning about their surroundings, and applying this knowledge to develop new skills (Richards & Wilson, 2006). But in porcelain related tourism, we will focus on tourists' involvement feeling because they had DIY experience.

2.2. Tourism brand image

Many definitions of brand image have been proposed over the last six decades. Some scholars used the same terminology to refer to diverse conceptualizations of brand image, while others created phrases to refer to similar or identical concepts. For example, following Lee at el. (2014) research, in the beginning of brand research, brand image was defined as the sum of a customer's cognitive and affective perception along with a products' physical attributes (Garner & Levy, 1955, Herzog, 1963). Then brand image was defined, measured, and researched within the framework of a symbolic concept, including messages, meanings (Durgee, 1987), and associations to depict abstract perceptions of their customers' mind. Recently, brand image was portrayed as being separate from product image. Keller (1993) defined brand image based on 'associative network models of memory'.

In tourism, several studies have also focused on the brand image attributes of destinations (Embacher & Buttle, 1989; Walmsley & Jenkins, 1993). Tourist destination brand image is a function of tourist image resulting from their own experience and destination image promoted by marketers (Manhas et al., 2016). Those activities create mental pictures or perceptions representing what tourists observe and feel/experience about the destination.

Brand image could be classified into concrete categories and the majority of the models group the image into two categories, namely functional and symbolic (Park, Jaworski & Macinnis, 1986). Functional image indicates tangible features of a product, and symbolic image represents intangible features, reflecting consumers' social approval, self-expression or self-esteem. Symbolic image is the extrinsic advantage of product consumption, which corresponds to non-product-related attributes and is associated with the basic need for social approval or individual expression (Park et al., 1986).

3. Hypotheses Development

3.1. Customers' Experience and Brand Image

The construct of tourist experience has been typically approached by service providers, destination marketers and organization to design and create experiences for consumers in order to make their experience memorable and get their image about destination or related materials/products (Man has et al., 2016). What tourists primarily seek and consume at destinations is engaging experiences accompanied by the goods and/or service components of the destination. Thus, entire tourist destinations are beginning to be positioned as "experience" (Richards, 2001). Through their experience consuming, they typically matches their perception on product-related attributes such as quality and usage which is constituted to functional image. Tourists with their experience will develop their image of quality, standard for products/brands they get involved. Therefore:

- H1: Customers' creative tourism experiences positive influence their functional image in creative tourism

Moreover, during their DIY participation, tourists often express their feeling, impression, emotion about their experience they get involved, and may improve their social relations, which imply the symbolic image. Thus, symbolic image is related to consumers' perceptions of whether the product could satisfy their self-esteem needs during their experience (He & Lai, 2012).

- H2: Customers' creative tourism experiences positive influence their symbolic image in creative tourism.

3.2. Customers Experience and Their Behavior

Experience is not another marketing concept but constitutes an important aspect of consumer behavior. Consumer experience can create value not only for consumers but also for companies (Gentile et al., 2007). Literature supports various dimensions of customer experience contribute to their satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Ali, 2015; Hosany & Witham, 2010; Oh et al., 2007; Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Tourist experiences are generated in part as a result of travel that fulfils not only satisfaction but also hedonic needs while enhancing knowledge (Kim, 2010). Tung and Ritchie (2011) proved a positive relationship between dimensions of experiences, satisfaction, and revisit intentions. Therefore,

- H3: Customers' experience positive influence their behavior in creative tourism.

3.3. Brand Image and Customer Behavior

Creative tourism experiences are unique events that carry memorable meanings for customers. Positive functional image of quality and usage could satisfy consumers' basic motivations such as solving or avoiding problems so as to increase the perceived benefits from a brand (Johnson et al., 2001). A powerful brand should be perceived as functionally useful so that consumers will satisfy and repeat buying behavior (He & Lai, 2016).

- H4: Customers' functional image positively influences their behavior.

Moreover, a brand is seen as important in creating individual identity and a sense of fulfillment for consumers (He & Lai, 2016), consumers aspire to participate in a relationship with the brand and show his/her loyalty to the brand. Chitty et al. (2007) also empirically proved the dominant role of brand image in predicting customer behavior in the hospitality industry. Thus,

- H5: Customers' symbolic image positively influences their behavior.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Instrument

To measure the experience perceived by the tourists who joined the creative porcelain tourism, the eight items was adopted and revised from experience scale developed by Ali et al. (2015). The authors adapted six items of the functional/symbolic dimension of consumer perceived value in the retailing sector developed by Sweeney and Soutar (2001) to measure the functional image (3 items) and symbolic image (3 items). Consumer behavior should be evaluated by both attitudinal and behavioral criteria. Thus, three items adapted from Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1996) were used to measure consumer behavior. They focused on positive attitude, positive word of mouth and repeat-purchase behavior.

4.2. Sample and data collection

We adopted give porcelain villages (Bat Trang, Phu Lang, Tho Ha, Chu Dau, Dong Chieu) which organize creative tourism to collect the research data. 300 questionnaires were delivered to the foreign tourists in March, April and May 2018. To ensure the validity of the data collected, all the questionnaires were administered in person and face to face. Finally, 280 questionnaires were used, 20 were eliminated due to missing data. Six items were included at the end of the survey to elicit demographic information (country, age, gender, occupation, income, and times of visit) of respondents.

5. Results

5.1. Respondent Characteristics

Table 1 shows the characteristics of respondents in which 69% were male. 52% of the respondents were younger than 35 years of age. Most of them came from ten countries including United states, England, German, Turkey, Austria, Japan, Korea, Singapore, India, and China.

	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Female	107	31
Male	193	69
Age		
< 25	45	16
25 – 35	101	36
35 - 45	80	28.5
Over 45	54	19.5
Occupation		
Student	25	9
Administrative executives	40	14
Sales executives	55	19.6
Engineers	29	10.4
Freelance	38	13.7
Professionals	48	17.2
Others	45	16.1
Income/month		
1000$ or below	116	41.4
1001-3000	87	31.1
3001-5000	45	16.1
Over 5000$	32	11.4
Country area		
America	45	16.1
Europe	130	46.4
Asia	105	37.5

Table 1: Characteristics of Respondents

5.2. Validation of Measures

Before testing the conceptual model, reliability and validity should be addressed. At first, the reliability of the scales was measured by Cronbach's alpha. In this study, all values of Cronbach's alpha are quite high (ranged from 0.756 to 0.893) (Table 2). Usually, Cronbach's alpha of 0.7 or above is considered to be the criteria for demonstrating internal consistency of established scales. Secondly, confirmatory factor analyses were used to assess the convergent and discriminate validity of the measures. The measurement model fit the data satisfactorily (x^2/df = 4.632; CFI = 0.958; RMSEA = 0.082), and all factor loadings were highly significant ($p < 0.001$), which indicated that our model was reasonable.

	Loading	AVE	CR
Consumer experience Cronbach's α = 0.756			
I was involved in something that I really liked to do	0.765		
I did something unique and memorable	0.816		
I had a "once in a lifetime" experience	0.782	0.625	0.893
I did something new and different	0.796		
I had choice and control over the activities and their outcome	0.801		
It was a real learning experience	0.846		
Functional image Cronbach's α = 0.794			
This brand has consistent quality	0.824		
This brand has an acceptable standard of quality	0.862	0.724	0.886
The function of the brand is visible	0.840		
Symbolic image Cronbach's α = 0.853			
This brand helps me feel acceptable	0.866		
This brand makes me leave a good impression on other people	0.808	0.702	0.882
This brand improves my social relations	0.827		
Consumer behavior Cronbach's α = 0.893			
I shall revisit this place and re-experience this creative activity and brand in near future	0.853		
I recommend this creative tourism brand to my friends and relatives	0.915	0.826	0.910
I say positive things about this creative tourism and brand to other people	0.837		

Table 2: Validity and Reliability
x^2/df = 4.632; CFI = 0.958; RMSEA = 0.082

As shown in Table 3 of the correlation matrix of the measures, all of our construct measures achieved the minimum criterion of 0.50 for average variance extracted (AVE), which implied validity for a construct's measure. Therefore, the results showed that the measures in this study possessed reasonably adequate reliability and validity.

Factors	1	2	3	4
1.Consumer experience	1			
2. Functional image	0.385**	1		
3. Symbolic image	0.357**	0.051	1	
4. Consumer behavior	0.105*	0.135*	0.328**	1

Table 3: Correlation Coefficient Matrix
Note: The Numbers in the Cells of Diagonal Line Are the
Square Roots of AVE
* P= 0.1; **P= 0.05; ***P= 0.01

5.3. Structural Model

To test our hypotheses, path analysis was performed. Overall, the model had a good fit with the data (x^2/df = 4.632; CFI = 0.958; RMSEA = 0.082) and all the paths were significant at the level of 0.01. The result of structural equation modeling was shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 showed that consumer's experience had positive influences on both functional and symbolic images (their standard coefficients are 0.432 and 0.458, respectively, with the significant level of 0.01). These findings supports H1 and H2. At the same time, consumer's experience also had a positive influence on consumer's behavior (with standard coefficient of 0.545, significance level of 0.01), which supported H3. Finally, both functional and symbolic images had positive influence on consumer's behavior (with standard coefficients of 0.228 and 0.332, respectively, significance level of 0.01), which supported H4 and H5.
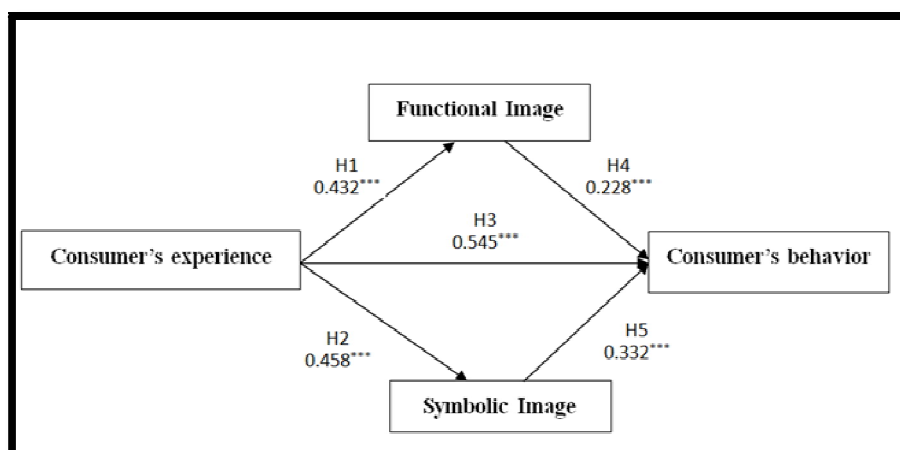

Figure 1: The Result of Structural Equation Modeling
***P=0.01

6. Discussion and Conclusion

6.1. Discussion

This study empirically examined how consumer's experience enhanced brand image and consumer behavior in creative tourism combined with porcelain industry in Vietnam. Our finding demonstrated that consumer's experience was important cues for consumers developing brand image. It's understandable that the main mission of tourism is to help consumers (tourists) enjoy their vacation. Through creative tourism, tourists take part in some "once in a life" events such as designing and producing their own products of porcelain. No matter how their outcome products looks like, they truly enjoyed and aware this kind of brand in both function and symbol. Some other researchers also agreed that consumers' interaction with the brand creates the realization of their ideal vision "the ideal self" (Malar et al., 2011). Therefore, brand meanings will be interacted with consumers lives and inspire their life stories, memories, and experiences (Thompson et al., 2006).

The study results also show that consumers experience positively influence their behavior, which is similar to other previous studies (Sundaram et al., 1998; Ali & Omar, 2014). Ali and Kim (2015) argued that "consumers' memory is triggered to take snapshots of experiences" by specific feelings of involvement, thus when consumers had pleasurable experience, they will create "reward memories" in their mind, and express it in reasonable attitude and behavior. Of course, they will share nicely their experience with their friends and relatives with some suggestions to the place they enjoyed. They may search more about the brand they got involved to understand more about their DIY products.

Moreover, with pleasurable experience, good image about the creative tourism with related brands/products, consumers tend to be more loyal with good attitude. In general, many studies found the relationship between brand image and consumers' behavior (Chang et al., 2005; Chitty et al., 2007). In tourism, He & Lai (2012) also proved that both functional and symbolic image significantly influences consumers' behavior. Thus, brand image has a significant impact on customer attitude and behavior. The congruence between the brand image and customers' self-image would enhance customer satisfaction and customers' preference for the brand (Jamal & Goode, 2001).

6.2. Managerial implication

The study results provide some practical managerial implication for marketers in creative tourism in general, and for porcelain firm in Vietnam in particular. At first, creative tourists' experiences will be created in their minds, who in turn aware, evaluate, engage in actions and form future intentions about the creative activities. Vietnam is on the way to develop its creative tourism, and porcelain villages seem to be the first one to get involved. Those firms, on one hand, supposed to be a part of tourism events to reach the tourist customers, on the other hand, hope to enhance their brand in the international market for extending their market in the futures. Currently, the main market of Vietnam's porcelain firms is local area (Vietnam) and Hong Kong. They still need more efforts to extend their market and compete with Chinese porcelain firms in the work market. To step in other market, the companies need to have a deeper insight into consumer behavior and educate consumers' about the brand in order to develop effective marketing strategies. And creative tourism is one way for Vietnam porcelain firms to let foreign consumers (tourists) aware about their brand at first, then provide it via customer satisfaction service.

Moreover, with the proliferation of brands in the market, consumers make their purchase decisions largely depending on the brand image rather than the product itself. And when the brand image is consistent with the consumers' self-concept, the consumers would give a preference to it (Martinueau, 1957). And developing strong brand image within tourism industry assist customers to build strong mind-set about tourism brand (Katke, 2007). Therefore, both creative tourism agency and porcelain firms should organize more activities to take consumers get involved and provide more pleasurable experiences. They also need to classify the consumers in individual and corporate, focus more on the corporate customers who can be the potential partner in this industry. It should be worthy to notice that consumers who experience feelings of interactivity during a consumption experience derive a send of self worth, then they will have a higher chance of remembering the activity and be motived to spread positive word of mouths to satisfy their desire.

6.3. Research Limitation and Future Research Recommendation

As with all studies, this study has some limitations. Firstly, this study used the sample from tourists in Vietnam only, thus it should be careful to generalize its results. Secondly, although the sample has a large scale of countries where tourists come from, the factor of culture (i.e. Western and Eastern) has not be explored. Father research may focus how different cultures influence consumers' experience, brand image and behavior in tourism industry.

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