

“This City Is Absolutely Fun and Trendy” A Destination Brand Personality Analysis in a Web 2.0 Setting

Astrid Dickinger and Lidija Lalicic

Abstract The emerging technological dynamics and increasing consumer power requires pro-active strategies by Destination Management Organizations (DMOs). Furthermore, positioning a destination around the feelings it generates, and its ability to offer visitors unique experiences, relationships, meanings and self-expressions is a strong competitive advantage. This study analyzes a city’s brand personality as reflected in online reviews from different service settings such as accommodation, sights, and restaurants. In addition, the study compares the results with tourists’ connotations with the same city as collected in a conventional survey. The combination of content analysis and comparative analysis provides recommendations for DMOs on how to develop emotional links and use consumers’ information exposed in an online setting.

Keywords Destination branding • Web 2.0 • Comparative study • Brand personality

1 Introduction

The new generation of Web 2.0 tools have revolutionised the way destination image is projected and how tourists search and gather information about tourism destinations (Camprubí et al. 2013). The obvious fact that social media websites, such as TripAdvisor, are becoming increasingly popular and are likely to evolve into primary online travel information sources, cannot be ignored by Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) (Jalilvand et al. 2012). Moreover, DMOs are realizing that actual costs for a destination occurs, when unsatisfied tourists share their experiences in Web 2.0 platforms, and potential visitors become deterred by the unsatisfactory comments (Camprubí et al. 2013). The need to understand the technological dynamics as well as the development of pro-active strategies to capture a strong position in the highly competitive tourism market is called for.

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DMOs can treat social media spaces as a new opportunity to reach out on the marketplace and hereby perceive it as a mechanism to learn about tourists' opinions about the destination (Boulin 2008). However, the functional attributes of tourist destinations alone no longer help destinations to attract travellers, mainly because of the high product similarity and growing substitutability of destinations (Pike and Ryan 2004; Usakli and Baloglu 2011). Therefore, positioning a destination formulating around the feelings it generates, and its ability to offer visitors unique experiences, relationships, meanings and self-expressions is a strong competitive advantage (Papadimitriou et al. 2013). Keller (2009) states that it is more critical as well as beneficial for destinations to understand what associations of a brand are advantageous over competitors (e.g. points of difference). The point of differentiation helps consumers to positively evaluate the brand and attach to the brand (Aaker 2009). Therefore, DMOs need to strive to develop a distinctive destination personality that meets travellers actual and symbolic needs. This also implies that research approaches need to be adapted accordingly. Despite the fact that companies increasingly draw on content created by tourists as a source for market research, we need to investigate if the content provided there is comparable to associations and opinions usually expressed in surveys to allow for an application of established theory in this new context. Previous research by Dickinger and Költringer (2011) investigating the perceived image of Vienna of tourists and non-tourists, revealed different dimensions and connections tourists make with the city of Vienna as a tourist destination. However, as Kötlinger (2012) argues, there is still a lack of understanding in which ways tourists connect themselves with Vienna, subsequently referring to brand personality. This requires an integrated approach understanding tourists' emotional experiences (Garcia et al. 2012; Blain et al. 2005). Subsequently, the main objectives of the study are (1) to explore the destination brand personality of Vienna expressed by tourists in social media spaces, (2) to compare the results with tourist connotations with Vienna from a conventional survey for a more holistic view (3) to provide recommendations how Vienna as a tourist destination can develop emotional attachments. The focus of this study will be social media spaces that give tourists the opportunity to review different elements of their experiences about sights, restaurants and accommodations in Vienna.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Destination Branding

Ritchie-Brent and Ritchie (1998) introduced the topic of destination branding as a hands-on marketing tool for DMOs to coordinate the different stakeholders in one theme, and support the values that destinations have to offer. The destination brand can act as an overarching role, providing an identity which links the various service

organisations together under a shared set of associations (Hankinson 2010). Destination branding enables the management of the intangibility of tourism products in a more efficient way, especially when communicating the tourism destination as an experience (Pike 2008). Therefore, Munar (2010) argues that the DMOs’ lack of ownership of the destination products makes the taglines, slogans, logos and commercial campaigns the focus of the destination brand, and represents the formal elements of the brand. This will enable the tourist to make the associations between the different attractions, service and agglomeration services. Effective destination branding can, thus, give visitors an assurance of quality experiences, reduces visitors’ search costs and offers destinations to establish unique selling propositions (Blain et al. 2005). However, destination branding is more than creating a catchy advertisement, slogan or logo (Ekinci et al. 2007). A strong destination is recognized instantly and establishes deeper connections with travellers’ values and self-concept (Ekinci et al. 2007). Destination branding is, on one hand, a way to communicate the expectations of a satisfying travel experience that is uniquely associated with the particular destination (Blain et al. 2005; Pike 2008; Qu et al. 2011). On the other hand, destination branding is a way to communicate a destination identity uniquely by differentiating a destination from its competitors (Qu et al. 2011).

The process of branding starts with carefully choosing one or more brand elements to serve as trade makeable devices (e.g. logos) (Murphy et al. 2007). The trade makeable devices need to distinctly identify the destination and begin the formation of strong and consistent brand associations reflecting the attribute, affective, and attitude components of an image (Murphy et al. 2007). Attributes are defined as perceptual tangible and intangible features, characterising the destination. The affective components are representing tourists’ personal values and meanings, deriving from the attributes. Attitudes are the overall evaluations based on attributes and affective feelings, acting as a basis for actions and future behaviour. The customer should remember the right attributes from a destination’s perspective (Aaker 2009). Brand associations which aid the consumer information processing have been identified as anything linked in a memory to a brand (Aaker 1991, p.109). The aim should be to increase familiarity with the brand through repeated exposure and strong associations with the product category (Keller. 2003b). Keller (2003b) in addition argues that brand associations need to be strong, favourable and unique in order to increase the level of responses of consumers.

2.2 Destination Brand Personality

Brand personality, a rather anthropomorphic metaphor, is commonly used in organization studies, defining personality as enduring traits that differentiate individuals (Murphy et al. 2006). The theory of animism suggests that people have the need to anthropomorphize objects in order to facilitate interaction with the nonmaterial world (Murphy et al. 2009). Geuens et al. (2009) argue that consumers

use brands with a strong personality to build relations with the brand and to show their own personality. Therefore, consumers choose brands that fit with their personal style, or that can even compliment their status (Aaker 1996). Moreover, consumers have the tendency to view brands having human characteristics using words such as “cool” and “young”, for example to describe brands such as Coca Cola (Usakli and Baloglu 2011). In fact, the brand personality has the possibility to create symbolic effects for consumers (Aaker 1996). Moreover, a well-established brand personality influences consumer preferences and patronage (Sirgy 1982). Eventually it can be argued that brand personality has a positive effect on intention to return and intention to recommend (Ekinici and Hosany 2006; Ekinici et al. 2007). Given that consumers can use destination personality as an avenue for self-expression and/or helps them experience emotional benefits that the destination offers them. Studies on destination image explicitly show how self-congruity supports tourists’ self-expression leading to higher level of satisfaction and intentions to return (Sirgy and Su 2000). Destinations can, thus, pose a personality that consumers use for self-expression or to experience the emotional benefits that differentiate the destination from competitors.

Different authors argue that brand personality becomes a representation for building destination brands for understanding tourist perceptions of the destination (Caprara et al. 2001; Ekinici and Hosany 2006). In fact, the brand destination personality has been used in different studies to explicitly illustrate tourists’ attachment to a destination (Morgan and Pritchard 2004). Ekinici and Hosany (2006) define destination personality as the set of personality traits associated with a destination (Ekinici and Hosany 2006, p.127). According to Ekinici (2003) the development of a successful destination brand should involve establishing a positive relationship between destinations and tourists by satisfying their emotional needs (i.e. visit places that are relaxing and beautiful). Morgan and Pritchard (2004) claim that building a powerful destination brand is about developing a rich and appropriate brand personality. Hsu and Cai (2009) even claim that only branded destinations are able to establish an instant emotional link with customers, which can lead to greater loyalty. An individual who is satisfied with a brand might have an emotional attachment to it (Thomson et al. 2005), so the formation of emotional relationships between customer and destination can increase customer loyalty (Palmatier et al. 2006).

2.3 Brand Personality Scale in Tourism Studies

Aaker (1997) developed the Brand Personality Scale (BPS) where five personality dimensions based on sources of personality scales from psychology were selected. The BPS represents five dimensions; *competence, excitement, ruggedness, sincerity and sophistication*. Table 1 provides a detailed overview of key-words Aaker developed. Ekinici and Hosany (2006) examined BPS in the context of tourism destinations, and argue that tourists ascribe personality characteristics to

Table 1 Brand personality dimensions and related key-words (Aaker 1997)

Competence	Excitement	Ruggedness	Sincerity	Sophistication
Reliable	Daring	Outdoorsy	Down-to-earth	Upper-class
Hard-working	Trendy	Masculine	Family-oriented	Good-looking
Secure	Spirited	Tough	Small-town	Charming
Intelligent	Cool	Rugged	Honest	Feminine
Technical	Young	Western	Sincere	Smooth
Corporate	Imaginative		Wholesome	Glamorous
Successful	Unique		Original	
Leader			Cheerful	
Confident			Sentimental	
			Friendly	
			Real	

destinations based upon three salient dimensions: sincerity, excitement and conviviality. They argue that sincerity and excitement were found to be the main factors, and conviviality specifies destinations. However, there are only a few studies on brand personality of the tourist destination. This also implies that there is no valid instrument for measuring tourism destination brand personality (TDBP). In fact, the different studies are using different scales to validate the personality construct. Ekinci and Hosany (2006) established a three dimensional scale, based on Aaker’s industry-based neutral personality scale. d’Astous and Boujbel (2007) found six dimensions (agreeableness, wickedness, snobbism, assiduousness, conformity and obtrusiveness) through unstructured interviews. Hereby, they developed a scale on a country level predicting tourists’ choice for travel destination. Ekinci et al. (2007) employing Aaker’s (1997) scale, found three dimensions (sincerity, excitement and conviviality). They state that host image has an important impact on brand personality perceptions and subsequently on future intentions. Murphy et al. (2006) also applied Aaker’s (1997) scale and used open-ended questions comparing two destinations. Both destinations received different dimensions. Murphy et al. (2007) provide evidence for a link between brand personality and travel motivations. Their study provides four main dimensions (sophistication and competence, sincerity, excitement and ruggedness). Sanin and Baloglu (2009) drawing on Aaker’s work (1997) analysed travel brochures and internet sites and found five dimensions: competence and modernity, originality and vibrancy, sincerity cool and trendy, and conviviality. They state that perceptions however do differ across nationalities. Murphy et al. (2007) established a three dimensional scale in one destination, and in another investigated destination, they found a TDBP of four dimensions. Chen and Phou (2013) also used Aakers (1997) scale and discovered five dimensions of excitement, sincerity, sophistication, ruggedness and contemporary. They found that brand personality has a positive effect on destination satisfaction. Moreover, destination personality mediates the relationship between destination image and future intentions (Chen and Phou 2013). De Moya and Jain (2013) performed a correspondence analysis based upon Aaker’s

(1997) scale and found the four dimensions of popularity, sincerity, excitement and sophistication. Papadimitriou et al. (2013) used 16 items from Hosany et al. (2006) to test urban tourism and the brand personality concept. They found two main dimensions of sincerity and excitement, postulating that destination personality is an antecedent of destination image. Seljeseth and Korneliussen (2013) used Murphy et al.'s (2007) scale aiming to understand how the brand personality concept enhances co-creation. Their study found four dimensions (ruggedness, sophistication, naturalness and activeness) illustrating how tourists associate themselves with a destination, and subsequently co-create the experiences through the concept of brand personality. Conclusively, the use of Aaker's (1997) scale to measure brand personality can be perceived as reliable also for tourism studies.

2.4 DMOs Online Strategies

Tourists create many forms of content related to their experiences such as blogs, reviews, photos and videos. In fact, the content created can inform brand management for many products and also for destinations (Seraj 2012). However, destination branding tailored mainly by the wishes and desires of tourists can be problematic; tourists express their feelings and emotions which can be out of context and not feasible for DMOs (Munar 2010). However, travellers co-create the brand through their online comments (Presi et al. 2014). Accordingly, consumers' power is increasing and often marketers do not know how to react to this (Labrecque et al. 2013). Marketers may even ignore this form of social media because they do not understand what it is, the various forms it can take, and how to engage with it and learn (Pitt and Berthon 2011). However, DMOs have different options to deal with these challenges (Munar 2010; Marchiori et al. 2012; Morgan et al. 2011). Munar (2010) refers to the mimetic strategy where DMOs can copy the style and e-culture of social network sites to create their own web site. This type is a rather conservative strategy which is characterized by the organization keeping the main locus of control of web content on the organization (Munar 2010; Marchiori et al. 2012). The mimetic strategy is a rather easy and inexpensive way to participate in Web 2.0. In addition, it allows DMOs to keep control of the tourist generated content that is displayed; DMOs can remove unwanted and/or inappropriate content (Munar 2010). Morgan et al. (2011) state that DMOs can also re-direct ads and follow a rather static approach of online content management. Munar (2010) refers it as advertising strategies, illustrating how these strategies do not support DMOs to benefit from the pool of information provided by tourists. As Marchiori et al. (2012) state, DMOs can monitor and regulate their online reputation. Munar (2010) refers to this option as the analytic strategy where DMOs benefit more from tourist information than the other two dimensions, steered by activities of prevention and knowledge creation (Munar 2010). The analytic strategy is based

upon monitoring and trend analysis and can act as a valuable tool in forecasting for destinations (Munar 2010; Marchiori et al. 2012). Moreover, DMOs can transform a large amount of unstructured tourist created content into strategic knowledge by examining, selecting, classifying, monitoring and evaluating (Marchiori et al. 2012). This can support a DMO’s understanding of image formation for their destination (Marchiori et al. 2012; Morgan et al. 2011). This also implies that DMOs need to enhance their skills and competences related to destination branding. This study therefore applies destination personality as a concept and investigates how it is reflected in a) online user generated content and b) a conventional study on a destination in form of an online survey. Accordingly, we compare what customers provide online in their reviews for free with what customers provide in terms of connotations with a destination triggered through a survey. Research on social media heavily draws on theory generated in other empirical settings employing survey research as means for collecting data. Therefore, researchers need to be cautious when employing theory in a social media context and critically reflect if it can be applied.

3 Method

3.1 Sample Selection

The data collected for this study is based on TripAdvisor reviews. TripAdvisor is a third-party review website used by millions of users daily to write reviews as well as to find relevant information for a new holiday. TripAdvisor allows consumers to write reviews on several elements of a holiday. This study focuses on three main service settings supporting the tourists’ experiences in the city of Vienna: accommodation, sights and restaurants. In total 1,092 TripAdvisor reviews are collected in April 2014 and equally distributed among the three service settings, using the quota sampling technique. In order to aim for a candid reflection of customer opinions the same numbers of reviews range between negative, average and positive scores. Moreover, two open ended questions connected to the connotations of a traveller with the city of Vienna were included in a survey which yielded 599 respondents. The survey focused on visitors of the city of Vienna (Kötlinger 2012). Users report about their experiences in a destination may differ when provided in an anonymous social media platform as compared to an online survey.

3.2 Content Analysis

A computer-assisted content analysis is carried out in this study. Previous studies show that computer-assisted content analysis is useful for analysing large quantities

of data, and is more reliable than human coding. In addition, the word count has a preferred measure when to ascertain the importance of a topic in text (Pollach 2011). By the use of the software package WordStat the content analysis is supported. The programme allows various analyses and tests, reduces words in canonical form, and enables univariate frequency analysis and bivariate comparison between any textual field and any nominal and ordinal variable (e.g. age, of respondents). WordStat compares a list of words selected by the researcher (dictionary) against the text loaded into the software and returns the frequencies with which these words occur in the text (Pollach 2011).

4 Results

4.1 Brand Personality Dimensions

Table 1 provides an overview of the main dimensions and linked key-words originally from Aaker's (1997) BPS. Based upon Table 1, in total 555 words spread across the five dimensions with an average of 20 % represented in each brand personality dimension supported the computer-assisted analysis. This means the number of words are equally distributed and do not favour one personality dimension.

Table 2 provides an overview of the results based on the reviews reflecting the brand personality dimensions represented in social media compared to the results from the open-ended survey questions. The first dimension, Sincerity has been mentioned more often in the questionnaire than online (51.1 % and 39.9 % respectively). Whereas ruggedness does nearly not show up for the questionnaire. It seems that a different language is used in a formal setting of data collection like a survey than when travellers express themselves freely in a review. All other dimensions such as sophistication, excitement and competence are significantly different in the two settings but with significantly more difference in the social media spaces.

Table 2 Comparisons of brand personality dimensions in social media and questionnaires

Brand personality dimensions	Social media (%)	Questionnaire (%)	P-value
Sincerity	39.9	56.1	0.000
Sophistication	20.6	17.0	0.000
Excitement	18.8	16.4	0.000
Competence	12.7	10.6	0.000
Ruggedness	7.9	0.2	0.000

4.2 Comparison of Service Settings

Table 3 displays the presence of the respective brand personality dimensions for hotels, sights and restaurants as identified on TripAdvisor. The results are significantly different for all dimensions apart for ruggedness. Ruggedness is present for all three service products which implies that some travellers use critical or even negative language when talking about those three sectors. Sincerity is most present for hotels with 47.4 % whereas sights only receive 27.3 % and restaurants 40.7 %. Sophistication and excitement are most present for sights with 26.8 and 25.6 % respectively. For these two dimensions restaurants are following on the second place and hotels on the third place. Finally, competence is the highest by hotels, followed by restaurants and sights. The presence of the various brand personality dimensions provide an understanding of which service setting supports the presence of a specific personality dimension for the overall destination brand.

Considering the fact that different service settings provide different experiences the need to understand the specific service settings can be of great relevance. In Table 4 explicit examples are provided. In the case of sincerity, sights in fact support the dimensions the least. This can be considered as a point of attention. For the dimension sophistication the category of accommodation supports the dimension the least. For excitement sights received the highest percentages, whereas accommodation the lowest. This finding is intuitive as sights are usually the main attractions in a destination and a major contribution to the overall travel experience. Competence is equally divided, however, sights received the lowest percentage and thus attention needs to be paid to that.

5 Conclusion

The importance of consumer attachment to a brand and the emotional links to a product and or service have been proven to successfully develop a brand among competitors. Also, in the field of tourism this trend has been recognized and the call for DMOs to respond to this is needed. Considering the pertinent role of ICT and the networked position of consumers in their daily lives as well as their role as tourists

Table 3 Service setting and presence of brand personality dimensions

Brand personality dimensions	Social media				Questionnaire
	Restaurants	Sights	Hotels	p-value	Connotations with Vienna
Sincerity	40.7	27.3	47.4	0.000	56.1
Sophistication	20.5	26.8	16.8	0.012	17.0
Excitement	17.7	25.6	15.2	0.001	16.4
Competence	12.4	11.6	13.6	0.000	10.6
Ruggedness	8.7	8.7	6.9	0.192	0.2

Table 4 Examples per service category and brand personality dimensions

Brand personality dimensions	Restaurants	Sights	Hotels
Sincerity	“So, good service, friendly and HOSPITABLE”	“The museum is a GENUINE AND REALLY CHARMING slice of eccentric modern Vienna”	“The rooms were VERY MODERN & clean and it seems each room has a funky theme to it”
Sophistication	“ABSOLUTELY AMAZING. Even my picky kids were so satisfied that we had to go back”	“Such a STUNNING PLACE, palace is as GRAND AND BEAUTIFUL ENTRANCE to a building anywhere in the world”	“The staff members were mostly NICE AND COURTEOUS”
Excitement	“This was a great find and a REALLY COOL atmosphere!!”	“This zoo was FANTASTIC’s and very ENJOYABLE considering the limits on expansion”	“VERY FRESH, HIP HOTEL WITH a super cool bar on the top floor”
Competence	“The service was very prompt, COURTEOUS, and intensely precise and proper”	“I felt SAFE walking around doing the tourist thing everywhere”	“We ENJOYED our stay in shermin hotel, its intimacy and smart design”
Ruggedness	“The two MALE staff members were RUDE and boorish at an enquiry about the menu”	“The staff is KIND OF RUDE and make the place seem UNCOMFORTABLE, but it wouldn’t be a proper art museum if it wasn’t uncomfortable”	“VERY BAD IDEA if you want return customers. We also HATED the pillows”

does make this topic more significant. Consumers do want to aim for unique experiences with value, and subsequently emotions do play an important role. The confirmation of emotional experiences can function as an important part of DMOs marketing strategies as well as for higher levels of consumer satisfaction, positive word-of-mouth and future intentions. On the level of brand personality dimensions, the study provides insights in the fact that tourists do feel and mention them, and subsequently consider it as an integral part of their experiences. In fact, the critical and self-aware tourists are becoming more active in an online setting reflected in the continuously growing numbers of blogs, reviews, and posts. Consumers aim to develop products that fit their needs and are the best is the current state-of-art. Both, researchers and practitioners have to keep in mind that travellers are co-creating online content and accordingly co-branding destinations with their postings. Accordingly they influence the brand personality communicated. Moreover, this study shows that consumers have a rather straightforward way of expressing their actual experiences in social media spaces which often is not in line with the language imposed by measurement theory. Therefore, theoretical

concepts have to be cautiously transferred to new contexts such as social media. The comparative element used in this study shows the significance for marketers to consider both research approaches enhancing their understanding of consumer behaviour and subsequently develop emotional attachments. The study illustrates that by employing innovative methods a diversity of information can be retrieved from and about consumers. However, many marketers do not (yet) know how to deal with the quantity as well as the quality of the information provided. Consumer engagement is an important element for marketers. Not only considering the fact that consumers are active actors in their experiences, but also the diverse devices (i.e. tablets, smart phones) support the development of consumer engagement even more. This study shows a rather passive form of consumer engagement into marketing strategies. Research on brand personality is further developing and only up till now a few studies have included this topic into destination co-branding. Therefore, there is a need for more studies including destination brand personality as represented in diverse online sources as well as traditional survey. Moreover, considering the fact that the dimensions are closely interlinked and can be expressed intertwined, a qualitative perspective would enrich the understanding how the different brand personality dimensions are exposed in social media spaces.

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