The relationships between satisfaction, loyalty, spending and tourist attraction images: the moderating role of label sensitivity

Abstract

This article proposes a model that tests the influence of the image of touring sites as well as labels' sensitivity on satisfaction, loyalty and visitor spending. These relationships are tested via a structural equation model on a sample of 200 people (N = 200). The results confirm the idea that both image and labels are important determinants of satisfaction and visitors' loyalty. More specifically, the findings confirm that the image of tourism sites has a positive influence on satisfaction and loyalty. The results also emphasize that labels' sensitivity positively moderates the relationship between the image of tourism sites and satisfaction and loyalty, implying the fact that labels are an important source of differentiation and performance of tourism attractions. The article provides theoretical and managerial implications as well as fruitful avenues for future research.

Key words: image, label sensitivity, satisfaction, loyalty, spending, tourism, tourist sites

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Introduction

Labels are increasingly used by both merchant and non-merchant organizations. Products or services that highlight these labels are different in nature. Thus, one can find labels applied to food, tourism, heritage, etc. For example, to date, just over 2800 buildings or urban areas have been awarded "The 20th century Heritage" label. Generally speaking, the label can be considered as a credible sign or communication tool, distinct from the brand which, not only comes from a third entity and is independent of the company or organization, but also aims to inform consumers about the intrinsic dimensions of a product or service (Chameroy and Chandon 2010, Larceneux 2003). The intrinsic dimensions of a product or service are thus communicated through a multitude of signals including brand, price, packaging, origin or label. Previous research has investigated the effect of these information tools on consumer perceptions and preferences toward a product. For example, Chameroy and Chandon (2010) carried out an exploratory study based on the content analysis and lexical method, thanks to an interview guide developed from 18 interviewees in order to explore consumer attitudes, their perception and their sensitivity towards labels. This study showed that labels are a choice criterion that varies according to product category (research, experience and belief) and that labels have a positive influence on the expenses incurred for "certification or guarantee labels". Despite the interest generated by the exploration of labels, the number of studies devoted to this field remains limited (Chameroy and Chandon 2010, Marcotte, Bourdeau and Leroux 2011). In addition, little academic research has focused on tourism labels including heritage labels.

The aim of our research is to study the influence of the brand image of tourism sites and labels on the attitude and behavior of visitors. More specifically, we focus in particular on how labels moderate the relationship between tourist sites' image and satisfaction, loyalty and tourists' expenses. Studying labels is very important as it can allow site managers to increase their attractiveness and develop derivative products or services that meet the performance requirements of visitors and stakeholders. This article is organized as follows: we will first present the theoretical framework and develop the hypotheses. We will then explain the methodology. After this part, we will present the results of the study. Finally, we will discuss the implications of the findings and propose future research avenues.

Theoretical framework

The main tenet of this research is that marketing actions and consumer characteristics play a crucial role in visitors' attitudes and behavior towards tourist sites. Tourism destinations create or rely on brands (e.g. co-branding) to mark their identities and differentiate themselves from competitors (Morrison and Anderson 2000). The brand image of a tourist destination is one of the elements intended to influence the customer. A tourism destination brand image is the perception that consumers develop towards it. In the field of tourism and its literature, brand image is apprehended by cognitive, affective and conative elements (Baloglu and Mangaloglu 2001; Pens & Andronikidis 2013). If the cognitive factors consist of the beliefs and the knowledge and the affective factors represent the feelings, the conative elements refer to the dynamic consideration of a site as potential destination (Pensos et al. 2016). The conative aspect can also refer to the uniqueness of the destination as a desired image by those responsible for the latter.

Indeed, to be effective in a competitive world, brand image is to be "unique" and needs to be considered as an important association of a brand (Qu et al. 2011). Thus, a positive brand image will be an important stimulus in the way the visitor will form his perceptions and behave towards the tourist site. This is explained by the "signal theory", and therefore, brand image acts as a signal in this context (Erdem and Swait 1998, Spence 1974). Moreover, we consider that the associative network theory of memory can explain the associations (attributes, attitudes, perceived value) that consumer forms about a tourist site (Keller 1993). Previous studies have shown that the brand image of a tourist destination can influence the performance of the latter, i.e. satisfaction (Chi and Qu 2008), loyalty (e.g. intention to revisit) and visitor spending (Amendah and Park 2008, Matzler, Füller and Faullant 2007).

Labels have several functions. They can act as risk reducers. By reducing the perceived risk, label contributes to increasing the utility of visitor with regard to the information asymmetry theory. Thus, label can not only positively influence the intention to purchase or recommend, but also the visitor behavior, particularly the willingness to pay and mostly the expenses incurred. Through his sensitivity to labels, the visitor expresses his involvement. As a signal in the same way as the image of the tourist site, label can reinforce the influence of the latter insofar as it is taken into account in the decision-making process and positively influence the perceived quality, the perceived uniqueness, and the consumer associations (Chameroy and Veran 2014; Larceneux 2003; Robert-Demontrond 2009). Therefore, we propose the hypotheses (direct and moderator effects) below:

Hypothesis 1: The brand image of tourist sites has a positive influence on visitor satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2: The brand image of tourist sites has a positive influence on visitor loyalty.

Hypothesis 3: The brand image of tourist sites has a positive influence on visitor spending.

Hypothesis 4: Sensitivity towards labels has a positive influence on the relationship between the brand image of tourist sites and the satisfaction of visitors.

Hypothesis 5: Sensitivity towards labels has a positive influence on the relationship between the brand image of tourist sites and the loyalty of visitors.

Hypothesis 6: Sensitivity to labels has a positive influence on the relationship between brand image and visitor spending.

Methodology
Presentation of the sample
This article is based on a sample of 200 people who self-administered the questionnaire via the Internet concerning tourist sites (e.g. Château de Chambord, Château de Versailles, Mont Saint-Michel, etc.). Respondents come from several departments and major cities of France. This sample consists of 29.50% men and 70.50% women and represents all ages (Table 1): 18-24 years (2.50%), 25-34 years (7.50%), 35-44 years (27.50%), 45-54 years (55.5%), and 55 years and over (7%).

Table 1. Summary statistics of the sample

Gender		Age		Socio-professional categories	
	%		%		%
Men	29.50	18-24	2.50	Farmers	1.50
Women	70.50	25-34	7.50	Workers	4.50
		35-44	27.50	Supervisors, technicians	15
		45-54	55.5	Liberal professions	10
		55 and over	7	Retirees	38
				Crafts-persons	9
				Executives	22

Moreover, these people represent most among the socio-professional categories of the French population, in particular: farmers (1.50%), workers (4.50%), supervisors, technicians (15%), liberal professions (10%), retirees (38%), crafts-persons (9%), executives (22%), etc. These different percentages indicate how all categories of the population are concerned by the tourism industry and its environment, in particular labels.

Variables the study

The instruments for measuring variables have been adapted from previous research. The items used have, for the most part, been evaluated on a Likert-type scale. We used the brand image of tourist site as an independent variable and the sensitivity towards labels as a moderator variable. To measure the brand image of tourist sites, items were borrowed from Qu, Kim and Im (2011). Label sensitivity is measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale and comes from Chameroy (2010, 2013).
We used three main dependent variables. The first variable is satisfaction. Its scale comes from the work of Bigné et al. (2005), Mansouri (2009), Oliver (1997), and Williams and Soutar (2009). The second variable is visitor loyalty. To measure this variable, we used the scales proposed by Arnett, Laverie and Meiers (2003), Back and Parks (2003), Baloglu (2002), Odin, Odin and Valette-Florence (2001) and Yoo and Donthu (2001). The last dependent variable is the expense incurred by the visitor. We built the latter by drawing inspiration from the works of Díaz-Pérez et al. (2005), Wilton & Nickerson (2006), and especially the scale used by Matzler, Füller and Faullant (2007).

Results

Before performing the analyses of direct effects and moderating effects, we first checked that all the items relating to a construct really measure the latter. Table 2 shows the items' coefficients of each construct and Cronbach's alpha. We examined the one-dimensional nature of the extracted factors. The coefficients range from 0.31 to 0.86 and Cronbach's alpha from 0.73 to 0.85, which implies that the data fit satisfactorily with the model of our work.

Table 2. Measure and reliability of the constructs

Construct	Item	Score	Cronbach Alpha
Label sensitivity	LABSENS1	0.604	0.854
	LABSENS2	0.580	
	LABSENS3	0.689	
	LABSENS4	0.764	
	LABSENS5	0.684	
	LABSENS6	0.569	
	LABSENS7	0.460	
	LABSENS8	0.383	
	LABSENS9	0.464	
	LABSENS10	0.602	
	LABSENS11	0.683	
	LABSENS12	0.734	
	LABSENS13	0.637	
Brand image	BRIMAG1	0.413	0.809
	BRIMAG2	0.338	
	BRIMAG3	0.626	
	BRIMAG4	0.581	
	BRIMAG5	0.562	
	BRIMAG6	0.576	
	BRIMAG7	0.576	
	BRIMAG8	0.618	
	BRIMAG9	0.638	
	BRIMAG10	0.612	
	BRIMAG11	0.633	
	BRIMAG12	0.604	

Satisfaction	SATIS1	0.343	0.825
	SATIS2	0.396	
	SATIS3	0.633	
	SATIS4	0.686	
	SATIS5	0.712	
	SATIS6	0.553	
	SATIS7	0.372	
	SATIS9	0.317	
	SATIS10	0.449	
	SATIS11	0.517	
	SATIS12	0.541	
	SATIS13	0.583	
	SATIS14	0.635	
	SATIS15	0.682	
	SATIS16	0.608	
Loyalty	LOYAL1	0.687	0.737
	LOYAL2	0.599	
	LOYAL3	0.869	
	LOYAL4	0.812	

After checking the unidimensionality of the constructs, we analyzed the relations between brand image of the tourist sites and its consequences thanks to the Stata 14 software using a structural model.

The effects of the brand image of tourist sites

Table 3 shows that the brand image of tourist sites has a positive influence on satisfaction (β = 0.687, p <0.001) and loyalty (β = 0.321, p <0.01). On the other hand, it does not influence expenditures (β = 0.033, p = ns). Thus, while hypothesis H1 and H2 are validated, hypothesis H3 is not validated.

Table 3. Direct effects of brand image of tourist sites

Hypotheses	Coef. (z)	Summary
H1 : Brand image of tourist sites → Satisfaction	0.687 (15.59) ***	*Validated*
H2 : Brand image of tourist sites → Loyalty	0.321 (3.44) **	*Validated*
H3 : Brand image of tourist sites → Expenses incurred	0.033 (0.34) ns	*Not Validated*
Model quality (fit)	Nbr. Obs : 200 LR chi2(4) = 10.633 Prob > chi2 = 0.031 SRMR = 0.031 CFI= 0.981 R² = 0.627	

Note: ***< 0.001; **< 0. 01; *<0.05

When we look at Table 4, we find that the sensitivity towards labels positively increases the influence of the brand image of tourist sites on satisfaction in case of strong sensitivity (β = 0.576, p <0.001) or weak (β = 0.569, p <0.001). Hypothesis H4 is validated. Hypothesis H5 predicted a positive influence of label sensitivity on the influence of the brand image of tourist sites. This is partially validated (β = 0.397, p <0.05) because the effect is only significant for the "low" sensitivity. As with direct effects, the sensitivity towards labels has no influence on the effects of brand image on visitor spending. In addition, we note that income has a positive influence on loyalty (β = 0.125, p <0.01) and the committed expenses (β = 0.294, p <0.001) in case of strong sensitivity towards the labels.

Table 4. Effects of label sensitivity on satisfaction, loyalty and expenditures

Hypotheses	Coef. (z)		Summary
	High sensitivity	Low sensitivity	
H4 : Label sensitivity → Brand image of tourist sites and satisfaction	0.576 (8.85) ***	0.569 (6.77) ***	*Validated*
H5 : Label sensitivity → Brand image of tourist sites and loyalty	0.175 (8.85) ns	0,397 (2.46) *	*Validated*
H6 : Label sensitivity → Brand image of tourist sites and expenses incurred	-0.066 (-0.43) ns	0.079 (0.60) ns	*Not Validated*

Income → Satisfaction	-0.022 (-0.69) ns	0.006 (0.13) ns	
Income → Loyalty	0.125 (2.94) **	0.108 (1.38) ns	
Income → Expenses incurred	0.294 (4.92) ***	0.086 (1.35) ns	
Model quality (fit)	Nbr. Obs : 200 LR chi2(4) = 10.673 Prob > chi2 = 0.000 SRMR = 0.035 CFI = 0.987		
	R² = 0.558	R² = 0.409	

Note: ***< 0.001; **< 0.01; *<0.05

Discussion and conclusion

The objective of our research was to study the impact of the brand image of tourism sites on satisfaction, loyalty and the expenses incurred on the one hand, and to examine the moderating influence of the tourist labels on these last relationships on the other hand. The results found open perspectives on both theoretical and managerial implications.

From a theoretical perspective, one of the merits of this work is to have proposed a model that integrates simultaneously three major consequences of the brand image of tourism sites and labels. To date, this orientation has not yet been taken into account by tourism studies (Stylos et al. 2016). We have shown that brand image of a tourist site positively influences satisfaction and loyalty. This research corroborates the results of previous studies regarding the effects of the image of tourist destinations (Chi and Qu 2008). However, it does not confirm the studies that showed the influence of the image or the labels on the expenditures made by visitors (Chameroy and Veran 2014). This implies that an increasingly strong image does not necessarily imply a high price to be paid by visitors. The visitor may become more demanding about the perceived value of image factors and eventually become accustomed to viewing the quality of the image as normal. This result calls for tourist sites to build and improve their images in terms of unique brands. Our research is the first to show that sensitivity toward labels interacts positively with the image in the context of satisfaction and loyalty concerning strong and weak sensitivity. In this respect, these results contrast with previous studies because they had never studied the moderating effect of labels in the relationship between image and satisfaction and fidelity (Chameroy 2013). In addition, we have applied both the theory of signal and the associative network theory of memory for a better understanding of the role of site image and labels which exert an impact on customer attitude and behavior towards tourist sites. This may lead researchers and managers to take an interest in other potential drivers of sites' attractiveness.

From a managerial point of view, these results call on the managers of tourist sites to consider labels as sources of differentiation and performance of the concerned sites. However, these managers should pay attention to the fact that when the sensitivity, and therefore the expertise, of visitors towards labels increases, their loyalty becomes more "elastic". As mentioned above, it is imperative that tourist sites become unique or differentiated brands by adapting to specific segments of visitors. Indeed, we have shown that income has a positive

influence on loyalty and the expenses incurred in case of strong sensitivity. This result should allow site managers to offer premium products/services to the extent that there are visitors who agree to pay the high price. One of the limitations of our research is that it is mono-sectoral. It would be interesting to perform studies that make comparisons between different sectors of activity (e.g. tourism vs. food) and cultural contexts (e.g. inter-country). That being said, this work has shown that labels play a vital role in determining satisfaction and loyalty towards the tourist site.

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