Elements of destination brand equity and destination familiarity regarding travel intention

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\footnotesize{A R T I C L E  I N F O}

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\footnotesize{A B S T R A C T}

In a highly competitive market, marketing staff are always looking for solutions to strengthen what can be called their destination values (unique place, services, and human resources, etc.). They do this by concentrating on vital factors which can enhance their brand equity. Nevertheless, there is a shortage of studies about how destination brand evaluations are related to visitor appraisals. Using the opinions of 531 foreign tourists visiting a destination in Vietnam and a partial least squares (PLS) approach, this study examines four elements of destination brand equity (perceived quality, loyalty, awareness, image) regarding travel intentions and the moderating effect of destination familiarity. Results revealed that brand equity is positively related to travel intentions. Additionally, destination familiarity has positive moderating effects on destination awareness and perceived quality of travel intentions. This study offers some managerial insights into the effective building of destination brand equity.

1. Introduction

Unlike tangible products, destinations are multidimensional and can deliver different tourists different experiences. Destinations are seen as intangible products, and thus, subjective, and depending upon the route of travel, culture, purpose of the visit, educational level and past experience of visitors. For this reason, destination brands become higher risks because much of what creates the brand can be changed sometimes by quite simple human-induced influences, natural events, or, sometimes, purposeful intervention. Another factor here is that destinations are unique and not traded in the market. Thus, other destinations cannot directly determine the destination brand equity. Rather, the brand equity must be assumed as based upon expenditures, tourists’ revisit versus renewal ratios and visit rates overall (Szymanski and Hise, 2000).

It can be argued that globalisation and global tourism have meant increasingly fierce competition within the travel industry (Tasci et al., 2007). In those countries where tourism is one of the key contributors to the economy, it seems important that vendors differentiate their destination brand and value. To improve competitiveness, vendors in countries with popular travel destinations are likely to not only promote tourism by emphasizing attractive natural resources, but also to attempt to market unique tourism experiences through a differentiated branding strategy (García et al., 2012). Measuring the effectiveness of destination branding upon visitors’ perception is seen as an important tool to evaluate intent to visit a place (Pike and Bianchi, 2013). However, a lack of research on destination brand measurement has revealed the complexity of such evaluations.

Most empirical research has proposed that familiarity has a positive correlation to destination image (Baloglu, 2001). Indeed, previous visitation itself is a key factor for recurrent trips, assuming return entry is relatively easy. First-time visitors often have different observations to recurrent visitors in that they are more driven by novelty than familiarity (Li et al., 2008). Notwithstanding, excessive familiarity also provides travelers with emotional attachment rather than the feeling of newness (Kastenholz, 2010) Several scholars have suggested that familiarity and experience contribute greatly to the visitors’ destination planning. (Gursoy and McCleary, 2004; Prentice and Andersen, 2000). Maestro et al. (2007) pointed out that destination familiarity is considered as a procedure to assess the information. Awareness of the quality of service or satisfaction can have an impact on the procedure to evaluate destination familiarity and then demonstrate the attitudes and intentions of visitors regarding the destination. Moreover, post-trip evaluations by tourists are also important to destination marketers as these evaluations can directly affect return visits (Petrick et al., 2001).

Pike and Bianchi (2016) stated that destination brand equity is a potential research gap and researchers needed to do more, suggesting that future research should extend to the measurement of re-positioning...
and re-branding strategies. However, most empirical and conceptual tourism studies have concentrated only upon destination image (Kim and Perdue, 2011; Elliot et al., 2011; Blain et al., 2005; Konecnik, 2004; Gnoth, 2002; Cai, 2002). Konecnik and Gartner (2007) and Gartner and Ruzzier (2011) suggested that while destination images play an essential role in brand measurement, other dimensions were needed to accurately evaluate the dynamics of destination brand equity. The aforementioned researches supported Cai’s (2002) study that images were important to brand equity and brand evaluation, however other elements were needed to accurately evaluate destination brand equity. Furthermore, diversified quantitative methods are necessary to effectively recognize constituent elements of brand equity dynamics (Chan and Marafa, 2013). Hence, this study to extend a perceived academic gap that can be said to be due to measuring destination brands from the perspective of tourists.

2. Literature review

2.1. Destination branding

Destinations are seen as products, and the concept of tourist destination branding is a created or manufactured one (Pritchard and Morgan, 1998). However, there are certain obstacles when determining destination branding. Differentiated from service products, the destination of travel involves many factors, such as accommodation, attractions, tourism policy, tourism industry (Cai, 2002). The name of a destination is almost predefined by the current name of the place (Kim et al., 2009) and therefore, the definition of destination brand is quite small and dispersed in theory. One of the most cited definitions of destination brands is the definition introduced by Ritchie and Ritchie (1998). Accordingly, the destination brand is a name, logo, or graphic used to identify and distinguish the differences between places. As well as conveying a promise about potential experiences in that place for tourists, the destination brand must contribute to enhancing and consolidating positive memories associated with a place (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998). Researchers have emphasized the importance of branding as a component of marketing to create the image, logo, and perception of visitors. Blain et al. (2005) argue that branding simultaneously reinforces the uniqueness, supports the formation, development and displays positive image of the destination to the target market (Baker & Cameron, 2008).

In most countries, creating destination brand awareness and value has become a significant strategy due to increased competition between destinations (García et al., 2012). A literature survey shows that the terms “branding” and “brand” are frequently discussed in tourism studies. (Kaplanidou and Vogt, 2003) reported that a combination of all dimensions related to the travel site creates branding, demonstrating the personality and identity of a destination, which differentiates itself from its competing brands. Destination branding is important as it plays a major role in facilitating tourists’ pre-trip planning from its competitors (Murphy et al., 2007) Additionally, destination branding might support visitors in enhancing their awareness of a destination after their tourism experiences (Qu et al., 2011). García et al. (2012) proposed that the success of destination branding can be shown in the format of a pyramid consisting of four constructs as follow: awareness, image, perceived quality, and loyalty.

2.2. Brand equity and destination brand equity

The emergence of brand equity has provided a focus for researchers and managers and increased the important role of marketing strategy (Keller, 2003). The definition and meaning of brand equity have been debated from many different perspectives for different purposes, and no common viewpoint has emerged.

Brand equity was defined as four primary elements: perceived quality, brand association, brand awareness, and brand loyalty (Aaker, 1991). Keller (1993) was among the first researchers to identify brand equity as “the different effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand.” However, Keller did not use brand loyalty as an element in her study, Yoo et al. (2000) further argued that distribution intensity, store image, price, and advertising should also be treated as antecedents of brand equity. Mishra and Datta (2011) and many other researchers have considered brand equity as an independent element associated with the value of the brand and have explored other brand-related dimensions, such as perceived quality, brand awareness, brand personality, brand associations, brand communication, or brand name as significant components of brand loyalty.

The literature has been widely split (Gartner and Ruzzier, 2011) between conceptions of ‘brand equity’ and ‘brand loyalty’ that have been defined with a widespread background within marketing (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000; Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993) although later studies show relatively minimal attention related to destination brand equity in the tourism field (Pike, 2007; Konecnik, 2006; Harish, 2010; Dooley and Bowie, 2005). The research has essentially incorporated findings based on product brand equity into the field of destination brand equity (e.g., Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2001 and 2002; Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1991). Kim and Kim (2005) defined destination brand equity as perceptual equity (perceived quality, image, awareness). Consequently, Kim and Kim (2005) treated destination loyalty (behavioral equity) as one of the derivatives of perceptual equity. Travelers’ viewpoints relied upon their knowledge of the destination brand and its particular elements, enabling them to discuss brands as well as destination brand equity.

Destination marketers have realized the growing importance of brand equity in promoting their destinations. As noted in some marketing materials, the elements of a product brand are not applied directly to the services (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2003). Therefore, the individual components of a brand will change, depending on the composition of products or services. Boo et al. (2019) stated that the development and measurement of brand equity are challenging due to the complexity of a destination. Theoretically, a destination brand consists of both intangible and tangible elements. Visitors sense these components by the combination of the functions (measurable and physical) and psychology of the dimensions of a destination brand. Therefore, the value and interest of a destination brand can change in light of how tourist perceive the service or products. There are numerous methods used for measuring elements of a destination brand. The method recommended by Kim et al. (2009) employed six factors: perception, interest, price, popularity, uniqueness, value; those by Konecnik and Gartner (2007) employed four dimensions: quality, loyalty, awareness, and image; and Boo et al. (2009) applied three dimensions: quality, image, and awareness.

2.2.1. Destination brand awareness (DBA)

Brand awareness is related to the possibility that consumers recall and are aware of a brand. Therefore, awareness is a necessary and special aspect of brand equity (Tasci, 2018; Lu et al., 2015; Lee and Back, 2008; Pike et al., 2010; Boo et al., 2009). It is the first step in forming and developing brand value. In other words, consumers can distinguish a brand that has been seen or heard before. In tourism, awareness has a key role in tourists’ travel intentions (Yuan and Jang, 2008). Therefore, an important issue is how to create travelers’ awareness of a destination through specific emotions and connections to the destination (Murphy et al., 2007). Destination marketing purposes are to increase the destination awareness of tourists by advertising and creating a distinctive brand (Jago et al., 2003). Destination choice is made from the choice set, based on the evaluation criteria of travelers. More specifically, destination marketers must raise awareness of visual images associated with the destination as a means to embedding awareness about the destination brand. For a place to have potential as a destination, it must be known widely by possible visitors.
2.2.2. Destination brand image (DBI)

Destination brand image refers to a collection of connections associated with the brand in consumers’ minds, requiring consumers to recreate the brand correctly from memory. The more positive exposure, hence, familiarity, a consumer associates with a brand, the more brand equity increases. Besides, the more unique and favorable images the consumer holds in his/her memory, the stronger can be the connection a consumer has with the destination. Images are used to generate awareness and diminish risks for travelers considering a destination about which few people know (Gartner, 1994). Destinations widely use images in promotional materials to foster awareness of attributes setting them apart from competitors. Cai (2002) reported that building of a destination brand image has great significance for a destination brand model. Moreover, destination brand image is considered as consumer awareness or sentiment associated with a specific brand (Keller, 2003). There have been many approaches to measuring destination brand images (Gómez et al., 2015; Baloglu et al., 2014). For instance, a scale of examining Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) was developed in Lassar et al. (1995) in which the image element was preferred over any social aspect.

2.2.3. Destination brand quality (DBQ)

Perceived quality is a vital attribute of brand equity in the sense that it creates value for consumers by differentiating the brand from competitors and giving consumers a reason to buy (Allahem et al., 2015). A destination quality brand is defined as the perception of travelers regarding the possibility that the destination can meet their expectations (Konecni and Gartner, 2007). Tourism researchers frequently use perceived quality as a construct in conceptualizing a brand equity (Baalbaki and Guzmán, 2016; Gartner and Ruzzier, 2011; Pike, 2010; Boo et al., 2009). When discussing destination brands, environmental factors such as service infrastructure are usually considered in measures of perceived quality. Quality is difficult to define precisely because it is subjective; however individuals internally assess quality all the time. The quality of evaluations can frequently change as comparative standards increase the level of experience of travelers. Quality simply meets or exceeds the travelers’ expectations. Therefore, to maintain or enhance quality is a prerequisite for developing brand equity.

2.2.4. Destination brand loyalty (DBL)

According to Sheth and Parvatiyar (1995), previous research from marketing scholars shows customer loyalty achieved constant interest as the marketing paradigm relationship emerged. Customer loyalty has received considerable attention for over forty years (Oppermann, 2000). However, in tourism, hospitality and recreation leisure, destination brand loyalty research is a new phenomenon, relatively mentioned for approximately the last 10 years (Chanrithy, 2007). In particular, tourism and hospitality scholars have identified “loyalty” as a priority in research (Shoemaker and Lewis, 1999). Thus, destination loyalty has become a critical topic for scholars permitting discussions of its relationships perceived value, brand quality and consumer engagement (Boo et al., 2009; Yuksel et al., 2010; Han and Back, 2008). In this paper, the description of brand loyalty is taken as equivalent to the intention of a tourist to visit a destination. Of the various indicators of brand loyalty, tourists’ recommendations based on their personal experience/visits are considered a key attribute (Oppermann, 2000; Chen and Gursoy, 2001). Researchers have referred to repetitive visits in terms of behavioral loyalty (Yousaf et al., 2017; Wu, 2016).

Brand loyalty was described as the consumers’ commitment to a particular brand (Aaker, 1991). The main objective with which brand managers are concerned is the creation of customer loyalty. Generally, loyalty measurement is based on two different approaches (Russell-Bennett et al., 2007; Oppermann, 2000), emphasizing the observations of loyal customers (Bennett et al., 2000) and examining repurchase intentions and commitment attitudes to brands.

2.3. Travel intention

Laroche and Teng (2001) suggested that the process of choosing a brand is sequential and continuous; therein the brand understandings are shaped first, followed by three specific elements, ranking via order of importance, including attitudes, confidence levels, and purchase intentions. Bian and Forsythe (2012) demonstrated that a personal trait influences his or her behavioral intentions; supposed that trait directly impacts on intentions regarding a behavior (Szymanski and Hise, 2000). Awareness from visitors’ previous experiences results in their future travel intentions. Tourism motivation can be considered as an indicator of their actions as travel thinking can have a big influence on their future travel decisions (Jang and Namkung, 2009). This finding underlines the significance of tourism awareness measurement and brand equity’s element identification affecting travel intentions (Stokburger-Sauer, 2011; Kim and Kim, 2005; Boo et al., 2009).

2.4. Destination familiarity

Familiarity is often defined in terms of repetition of previous visits (Milman and Pizam, 1995), the number of earlier visits (Tasci et al., 2007; Sun et al., 2013), or it is used to contrast first visits and revisits (Prentice, 2006). In other words, familiarity is the basis for explaining the differences in the various aspects of travel behavior among regular visitors and first time visitors. According to Chen and Lin (2012), destination familiarity allows us to understand how individuals shape the image of a destination. Prior studies on tourism found that many visitors feel secure in familiar environments, on the contrary, novel environments are likely to be riskier for the visitors (Lepp and Gibson, 2003), although one of the main motivations for tourism is that tourists often search for the unfamiliar (Ryan, 2003). An important existing literature showed that the degree of familiarity or novelty sought on vacation are different amongst tourists, which could in turn be understood as different levels of risk that they are willing to perceive or endure (Lepp and Gibson, 2003).

Milman and Pizam (1995) suggested that destination familiarity significantly impacts travel intentions and can potentially play an important role in the travelling decisions. However, tourists with low familiarity relied more upon external information to decide their travels than tourists with high familiarity (Murphy et al., 2007; Mawby, 2000). Visitors can attain a definite level of familiarity created by contact with other individuals, travel guides, mass media, and through education (Prentice and Andersen, 2003; Gursoy, 2011).

2.5. Hypothesis development

2.5.1. Brand equity and travel intention

Previous studies suggested that highly perceived quality of brands plays a significant role in increasing value to brand loyalty and consumers’ purchases (Low & Lamb, 2000). Murphy et al. (2000) found that the quality of a trip has a positive effect on the perception of the trip, as well as the travel intentions of tourists. Brand perceived quality is defined as key aspect of brand equity in regards to a destination (Deslandes, 2004; Boo et al., 2009).

Destination brand image is relevant to brand perceptions in consumers’ minds (Arendt and Brettel, 2010; Keller, 1993). As of the perspective of travel intentions, destination brand image is seen as the fundamental repository, reflecting the significant indicators of customer segmentation, as well as potential of marketplace, and provides insights into the functions and society and a sense of the destination image of the tourism industry. Accordingly, destination marketers aim to build a distinct, efficient and strong identity image to encourage travel intention in tourists, with of course the expectation of making them loyal return visitors (Camarero et al., 2010).

The concepts of loyalty have been widely applied in marketing strategies to assess the repurchase ability or consumers’
recommendations (Flavian et al., 2001), Yoon and Uysal (2005) stated that brand loyalty creates benefits to tourist destinations because visitors can revisit or suggest the location to other potential visitors. Visitors might be loyalty to a destination or a specific brand and might show their intentions to revisit a destination in various ways. Ferns and Walls (2012) studied tourism and showed that loyalty and travel intentions have a positive correlation.

The aforementioned evidence shows a positive relationship between brand equity and travel intentions. Therefore, the features of brand equity could serve as suggestions for potential tourists in determining their destination choices. Brand equity perception positively impacts on the overall tourism purposes of foreign tourists. As the literature has been reviewed, this study proposes hypotheses as follow:

H1. Perceived quality will have a direct and positive influence on travel intentions.
H2. Destination brand image will have a direct and positive influence on travel intentions.
H3. Brand loyalty will have a direct and positive influence on travel intentions.
H4. Brand awareness will have a direct and positive influence on travel intentions.

2.5.2. Moderating role of destination familiarity

Previous studies proposed that increased destination familiarity has a positive affect the decision-making process and destination’s image (Lee et al., 2008; Prentice and Andersen, 2000; Baloglu, 2001). Lin et al. (2014) contended that destination familiarity has moderating effects on the relationships amongst retail destination image and awareness and franchise purchase intentions. The majority of tourists tend to gain particular knowledge about a destination that they will be more familiar with it. This knowledge can bring them a sense of comfort and security, leading to an increase in their confidence in choosing a destination (Lee et al., 2008). Similarly, Lee and Lockshin (2011) suggested that the more destination familiarity increases, the less destination images visitors are likely to depend on to create product beliefs. In the meantime, Horns et al. (2012) stated that greater destination familiarity has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between perceived quality and loyalty in travel intention within culinary tourism. Henthorne et al. (2013) concluded that repeat tourist visitors present higher levels of comfort with their surround environments than do first-time tourists, which leads to a constraint of purchase behavior. Hence, it is proposed that destination decisions might rely on the degree of tourists’ destination familiarity. This study acknowledges the following matters:

H5. Destination familiarity has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between brand awareness and travel intentions, indicating brand awareness will have a significantly greater influence on travel intentions for travelers with greater destination familiarity than that for travelers with less destination familiarity.
H6. Destination familiarity has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between destination brand image and travel intentions, indicating that destination brand image will have a significantly greater influence on travel intentions for travelers with greater destination familiarity than that for travelers with less destination familiarity.
H7. Destination familiarity has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between brand loyalty and travel intentions, indicating that brand loyalty will have a significantly greater influence on travel intentions for travelers with greater destination familiarity than that for travelers with less destination familiarity.
H8. Destination familiarity has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between perceived quality and travel intentions, indicating that perceived quality will have a significantly greater influence on travel intention for travelers with greater destination familiarity than that for travelers with less destination familiarity.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study settings

Since the end of the Vietnam-America War in 1975, Vietnam has been recovering from damage consequent upon the war. Vietnam is the latest country in Asia to state the significance of tourism to its national development (VNAT, 2005). As tourism enlarges and develops rapidly in Indochina, Vietnam has been attempting to determine its own position so as to take advantage of an emerging industry (Agrusa and Prideaux, 2002). With the combination of natural resources, history and cultural patrimony, Vietnam has been recognized as an attractive potential destination for tourism (Cooper, 1997). In 2017, the number of tourists who came to Vietnam was estimated to be 12,922,151 arrivals, representing a 29.1% growth as compared to the previous year. There is potential to attract 20 million international tourists, with the growth of tourists coming to Vietnam in 2020 if the government continues to maintain investment in development of the tourism industry (Galaviz, 2007; VNAT, 2015).

3.2. Data collection and sample

This research performed the first phase of a larger project evaluating the varied features of destination branding. Pre-testing was needed for the questionnaires to ensure clarity of the questionnaires, to guarantee the questions are understandable, and check if changes were necessary before the survey was to be fully deployed. A group of fifty respondents, who had the reasonably similar characteristics with the survey population, were sufficient for the pre-testing. After that, the questionnaire was reviewed and confirmed through the pretest results. The pre-test was undertaken with visitors who had previously traveled to Vietnam. The aims of the pretest were to determine the reactions of international tourists to the questionnaire, validate the translation of key technical terms used, estimate the time needed to complete the interview, ascertain whether the sequence of the questions solicited the desired information, and to determine whether respondents could understand any of the technical terms. All Cronbach’s alpha values were higher than 0.7. After the pretest procedure, the research used quantitative data from a mailed survey questionnaire to classify factors and examine their significance in influencing or determining the impacts of destination brand equity and familiarity regarding travel intentions.

In the second phase, a sampling plan was developed to ensure that certain types of respondents would be included. The study adopted convenience sampling method. The main data were collected from a survey conducted between February and May 2018. The questionnaire was executed individually to respondents in three big cities in northern, central and southern Vietnam, being Hanoi, Danang, Ho Chi Minh City, respectively. Survey respondents were interviewed in shopping malls, tourism sites and main streets in each city. Respondents were identified as foreign visitors and asked about their intentions in visiting Vietnam and if they would agree to participate in the survey, they were informed that all responses would remain anonymous. Additionally, the survey was conducted face-to-face on site so that any potential confusion could be clarified right away. A total of 750 survey questionnaires were delivered, but the total valid sample was 531. This sample can be representative if comparing to the general profile of international tourists to Vietnam, because foreign tourists come to Vietnam mainly from Europe and Asia. As shown in Table 1, the characteristics of international visitors involved age, education, gender, marital status, occupation, income, main travel purpose, nationality, travel days and travel times. In particular, the percentage of participants varied among female
tourists (53.1%), male tourists (46.9%), business people (27.3%), students (13.6%) or government officers (12.2%) from countries in Europe (34.3%), Asia (28.1%) or the Americas (19.6%) with a university level of education (56.3%), younger than 50 years old (84.9%), and with the main sightseeing purpose (27.1%).

3.3 Measures

In Table 2, all of the items used in this study were measured using 7-point Likert-type scales, ranging from strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 7. The measurement of Destination awareness composed of six items, relied on the studies of Pappu and Quester (2006); Yoo and Donthu (2001); Arnett et al. (2003); and Konecnik and Gartner (2007); Sweeney and Soutar (2001); and Boo et al. (2009); perceived quality was calculated using a five-item scale to estimate the destination’s quality; and the calibration of loyalty was adapted from Bianchi and Pike (2006). Finally, this research used a five-item scale to estimate destination familiarity based on Gursoy and McCleary (2004).

3.4 Data analysis

Principal component analysis was used to investigate the role of destination familiarity and the elements of brand equity in travel intention. Partial least squares analysis was employed to test the hypothesized model of destination branding. The data were processed with the SmartPLS version 3.0 statistical software package (Ringle et al., 2015) for several reasons: (1) Unlike CBSEM, PLS avoids issues related to small sample size, non-standard data; (2) can estimate complex research models with many intermediate, latent and observable variables, especially structural models; (3) is suitable for studies that are predisposed toward prediction (Henseler et al., 2009).

4. Results

4.1 Evaluation of the measurement model

Based on the results of CFA, two items were deleted due to low factor loadings including DA6 (I can quickly recall the marketing about the destination) and DQ5 (Considering what I would pay for a trip, I will get much more than my money’s worth by visiting this destination). Table 2 showed that all of the item loadings were greater than the recommended value of 0.7 (Chin, 1998) and were acceptable for further analysis. From Table 2, composite reliability estimates (Hair et al., 2012) were greater than the suggested threshold of 0.70 (ranging from 0.88 to 0.96), which indicated that the measurements were reliable.

Comparing all of the correlation coefficients with square roots of AVEs in Table 3, the results show strong evidence of discriminant validity. Henseler et al. (2015) reported a new procedure called the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) to test the discriminant validity. Besides, the HTMT approach has shown overcomes bias and reliable performance to compute the parameters of the structural model. Table 3 showed that the value of HTMT was less than 0.90, indicating that discriminant validity has been established between two reflective variables (Henseler et al., 2015; Hair et al., 2017).

4.2 Structural model and hypothesis testing

As a result, travel intention (R² = 0.55) can be described as moderate. For the whole model, the Goodness-of-Fit value was equal to 0.63, which is found to be greater than the cutoff value of 0.36 for large effect sizes (Wetzels et al., 2009). In total, the results proposed that the structural model displayed sufficient explanatory power. This study used a bootstrap re-sampling procedure (5000 additional samples were added as bootstraps to obtain meaningful statistics for hypothesis testing) (Hair Black et al., 2005).

To test attributes of destination brand equity and travel intention, as expected, the results demonstrate that brand equity positively relates to travel intention. The path coefficient (β = 0.15, t = 3.69, p < 0.01) is significant, therefore H1 is supported, which shows that perceived quality positively related to travel intention. The findings verify the hypotheses connecting destination image (β = 0.33, t = 6.15, p < 0.01) and destination loyalty (β = 0.12, t = 2.92, p < 0.01) to travel intentions. Lastly, as suggested in the hypotheses, the relationship between destination awareness and travel intention is significant and positive (β = 0.22, t = 4.24, p < 0.01). Unsurprisingly, the results indicate that four components of destination brand equity are significant predictors of travel intention, consistent with the arguments of prior researchers that image, perceived quality, awareness, and loyalty are key variables for organizations interested in the value of brand equity when examined from the perspectives of consumers (Boo et al., 2009; Kandampully et al., 2011).

To test the moderating effect, Hypothesis 5, which postulated that destination familiarity has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between awareness and travel intentions, was supported (β = 0.12, t = 2.74, p < 0.01). Previous studies have supported this finding. Enhancing brand familiarity through continuous exposure creates brand awareness, which is important to potential visitors to understand the brand name, symbol, logo, and character of the destination (Keller, 2003). Milman and Pizam (1995) also explained that, as potential tourists change their awareness to the familiarity stage regarding specific destinations; it causes their interest in it and their intention to visit to increase as well.

Regarding Hypothesis 6, destination familiarity was significant, and there is a negative interaction effect between destination image and...
and negative eformation (Sönmez and Sirakaya, 2002; McCartney et al., 2008). Adpositive destination image. In contrast, some research has indicated actual visitation and information about the destination adds a more Sharifpour et al., 2014). The increased familiarity of people regarding that the more that familiarity increases, the more positive that a destination might not match the perceived image (Andreu et al., 2000). Travel intentions (β = -0.19, t = 3.96, p < 0.01). That is, the high destination brand image and destination familiarity has a significant and negative effect on travel intentions. Previous studies have found that the more that familiarity increases, the more positive that a destination image is (Kerstetter and Cho, 2004; Beerli and Martin, 2004; Sharilpour et al., 2014). The increased familiarity of people regarding actual visitation and information about the destination adds a more positive destination image. In contrast, some research has indicated that negative images of a destination can be created by certain information (Sönmez and Sirakaya, 2002; McCartney et al., 2008). Additionally, travelers have personally shaped destination images based upon their travel experiences. However, the tourist destination’s reality might not match the perceived image (Andreu et al., 2000).

In addition, the results show that destination familiarity has a negative moderating effect on the relationship between brand loyalty and travel intentions (β = -0.08, t = 2.23, p < 0.01). Therefore, destination familiarity will be the moderating variable which affects the relationship between destination loyalty and travel intention. Destination familiarity enables visitors to have positive or negative loyalty to a destination, as well as helping to evaluate a destination’s attractiveness. The more that destination familiarity increases, the more attractive that the destination is; nonetheless, after a certain point, the destination familiarity becomes less attractive, causing a decrease in brand loyalty (Um and Crompton, 1990). Thus an important finding of this research is that it identifies another area in which both further empirical investigation is needed to attempt to identify the tipping point at which familiarity shifts towards decreasing loyalty, and to evaluate measures that could be taken to counteract this decrease. For example, based upon these results, marketers should undertake greater efforts to provide opportunities for tourists to experience themselves in Vietnam in different ways that supplement familiarity so as to maintain tourists as repeaters.

The last hypothesis was H8, which hypothesized that destination familiarity has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between perceived quality and travel intentions (β = 0.13, t = 3.02, p < 0.01). Research suggests that, increased familiarity helps tourists in deciding on their vacation spots. Gursoy (2001) stated that a tourist whose perceived quality based on their existing knowledge will make travel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Assessment of the measurement model: reliability, convergent and discriminant validity.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Items</td>
<td>Standardized loadings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Destination awareness</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I can picture what the destination looks like in my mind</td>
<td>0.828</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am aware of the place as a travel destination</td>
<td>0.822</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can recognize the destination among other similar travel destinations</td>
<td>0.789</td>
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<tr>
<td>The characteristics of this destination come to my mind quickly</td>
<td>0.773</td>
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<tr>
<td>When I am thinking about travelling, this destination comes to my mind immediately</td>
<td>0.811</td>
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<tr>
<td>Destination image</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>This destination fits my personality</td>
<td>0.808</td>
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<tr>
<td>My friends would think highly of me if I visited this destination</td>
<td>0.869</td>
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<tr>
<td>The image of this destination is consistent with my own self-image</td>
<td>0.888</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visiting this destination reflects who I am</td>
<td>0.842</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived quality</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>This destination provides tourism offerings of consistent quality</td>
<td>0.795</td>
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<tr>
<td>This destination provides quality experiences</td>
<td>0.822</td>
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<tr>
<td>From this destination's offerings, I can expect superior performance</td>
<td>0.774</td>
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<tr>
<td>This destination performs better than other similar destinations</td>
<td>0.830</td>
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<tr>
<td>Destination loyalty</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I consider myself a loyal traveler to this destination</td>
<td>0.780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If there is another travel destination as good as this one, I prefer to visit this destination</td>
<td>0.800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The destination would be my first choice of a travel destination</td>
<td>0.777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will visit this destination instead of other travel destinations if they are similar</td>
<td>0.841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would advise other people to visit this destination</td>
<td>0.781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Intention</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the following year, I may visit this destination again for tourism</td>
<td>0.915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the following year, I plan to visit this destination again for tourism</td>
<td>0.882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish to visit this destination again for tourism</td>
<td>0.899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destination Familiarity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compared to an average person, I am very familiar with a wide variety of vacation destinations</td>
<td>0.941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compared to my friends, I am very familiar with a wide variety of vacation destinations</td>
<td>0.918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compared to people who travel a lot, I am very familiar with a wide variety of vacation destinations</td>
<td>0.918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often spend time gathering information about the destination</td>
<td>0.935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am very familiar with information on the destination</td>
<td>0.927</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** Significant at the 0.01 level; CR = Composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted; N/A = Not available.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3</th>
<th>Mean, standard deviation, inter-construct correlations, HTMT values.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destination Awareness</td>
<td>5.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destination Image</td>
<td>4.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Quality</td>
<td>5.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destination Loyalty</td>
<td>5.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Intention</td>
<td>5.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destination Familiarity</td>
<td>5.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Below the diagonal elements are the correlations between the construct values. Above the diagonal elements are the HTMT values.

*** p < 0.001.
decision using their internal information. An elaboration of this point in future research might explore where existing knowledge itself becomes familiar to the point of tipping decisions towards other locations. Or perhaps testing the further hypothesis that existing knowledge, as is true of all knowledge, including survey results, is always partial and so an awareness of this, and desire to increase familiarity further, can be a reason to repeatedly visit a destination that offers the new and mysterious within the familiar.

For further understanding of the moderating effects, this research followed the guidance of Aiken et al. (1991). Fig. 1 show that both destination awareness and familiarity positively influence on travel intentions, for instance, an increase in travel intentions is associated with an increase in familiarity. In particular, as shown in Figure 2, compared to tourists with low perceived quality, those with high perceived quality enjoy more growth in travel intentions with an increase in familiarity, indicating that high familiarity has a stronger influence on travel intentions than low familiarity.

### 5. Conclusion

The acknowledgment of this paper is to examine the assessment of travel intentions through various elements of brand equity. Specifically, these dimensions include the following: (1) use of conception of destination brand equity (loyalty, quality, image, and awareness) to measure travel intentions; and (2) the positive moderation by destination familiarity of the relationship between destination brand equity and travel intentions. As a result, these hypotheses differentiate the extraordinary attributes of the destination brand equity evaluation from the travel intention assessment. As these hypotheses, this empirical research used a PLS approach from the perspective of international tourists regarding Vietnamese tourism to examine the model of brand equity in a destination setting and test four dimensions of brand equity in the suggested model. Some important conclusions were drawn (Tables 4 and 5).

First, the travel intentions of foreign tourists are created by the perceived brand equity of tourists’ vis-à-vis destination brand equity.
Hence, the travel intentions of tourists will be influenced by brand equity. The moderator, destination familiarity, has an impact on this bias; thus, when visitors have greater familiarity with a destination, the visitors’ travel intentions change their evaluations of brand equity vis-à-vis awareness, and the perceived quality increases, up to a point. Second, the findings demonstrated that brand equity can be seen as an important indicator and a key determinant of travel intentions. Therefore, to gain a better understanding of what encourages visitors to visit particular destinations and why brand equity significantly affects travelers’ decision is critical. The research was conducted within the framework of consumer behavior to better understand the significance of brand equity, especially for international destinations. The implications of familiarity, and the tendency for this to reach a tipping point, after which new strategies for marketing may be required, is identified as an area for subsequent research.

This paper has contributed to both theoretical and practical implication. Theoretically, tourism scholars will have greater awareness of the magnitude of destination branding, which is a rising variety of tourism to which researchers have applied the theory of brand equity (Williams et al., 2004; Woodside et al., 2007; Koncnik and Gartner, 2007). Nevertheless, until now, by concentrating on different influence of brand equity on travel intention, very limited studies have investigated the brand equity mechanism. This research attempted to bridge the academic gap due to the lack of research about the inter-relationships among dimensions of travel intentions and brand equity from travelers’ perspectives. Therefore, this insufficiency is serious, as brand equity is one of the most powerful factors increasing differentiation. Additionally, that differentiation is one of the important marketing strategies (Hoitho and Champion, 2011). Prior researches have highlighted the influences of brand equity regarding the tourist perspectives of culinary tourism (Hörng et al., 2012), artistic and cultural activities (Camarero et al., 2010). Under the conditions of foreign tourists’ perceptions, this research clearly emphasized the differential effect of brand equity dimensions. This study suggests a direction for future researchers with which they can apply brand equity perceptions in circumstances where marketing strategists take into account familiarity as a moderator, and measures to maintain and enhance the attachment aspects of this moderation.

Regarding practical implications, the results are particularly valuable to targeted marketers and planners who focus more on enhancing, improving and developing their brand equity. By checking the perceptions and familiarity of foreign visitors about destinations, managers can build destination brand equity, and they will need to focus not only on visual components but also on ensuring that potential visitors perceive destination as a feasible tourism destination, with further interests and experiences to offer beyond the familiar, and that this might lead to an increase in travel intention. Understanding the elements and metrics of destination brands in travel intentions can clarify the solutions, therefore, providers must adopt to raise and extend the awareness of visitors.

It is suggested that this research may have at least three limits. First, the limitations highlight the evidence not considering the roles of different sociodemographic variables, such as income, education level or behavioral traits of tourists, and the influences of previous destination experiences (repeat travel) when performing the research. Further experimental studies are necessary to attempt to combine the factors not tested in this study to attain a more accurate perception of travelers’ intentions regarding destinations and familiarity over longer time frames. Second, this present study only gathered questionnaire data from tourists to reflect accurately the evaluations, perceptions, and attitudes of tourists. Consequently, that the study incorporates the customers’ viewpoints might not be sufficient to manage destination brands. Therefore, further work must be performed to incorporate the employees’ viewpoints, which could create a greater holistic perspective predictive of destination brand performance. Third, to create destination familiarity might be considered over a shorter time to attract visitors, but over a longer time a different dynamic will need to be considered. It is important that the memory of past experiences forecasts future commitment with brand equity. Therefore, a question becomes: how to create good remembrances about a visiting destination and a promise of more unanticipated positive experiences. A concentration on increasing good remembrances associated with elements of destination brand equity can be a vital issue for future research. Finally, further research can compare prospective, first-time, and repeat visitors from the viewpoint of destination branding.

Appendix A. Supplementary material

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found in the online version at doi:10.1016/j.jretconser.2018.12.012.

References


