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Destination Brand Positioning Theme Development Based on Consumers' Personal Values

Filareti Kotsi

Zayed University, filareti.kotsi@zu.ac.ae

Steven Pike

Queensland University of Technology

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Destination brand positioning theme development based on consumers' personal values

ABSTRACT

This research note reports an investigation into the personal values that are salient to consumers when considering stopover destinations during long haul travel. The findings, from personal interviews using the Repertory Test and Laddering Analysis, present destination marketers with potential brand positioning themes based on personal values. One of the greatest challenges facing destination marketers is developing a succinct brand positioning theme representative of a multi-attributed entity that effectively differentiates from competing places offering similar attributes and benefits. It is argued the development of a brand identity based on personal values, which subsume a myriad of attributes and benefits, has potential to appeal to a broader range of travellers. This study, in the context of international stopover destinations for Greek travellers, replicated a similar investigation undertaken in the context of Australian domestic short break holidays. The commonality between the findings of the two studies supports the development of a proposition that a relatively small number of personal values are relevant across different destination travel contexts. This could represent a solution to the challenge of developing a brand positioning theme that will be relevant across different markets, and which will appease the diversity of stakeholders at the destination.

KEY WORDS:

Destination marketing; travel context; destination image; positioning; brand identity;

Personal construct theory; Repertory test; Laddering analysis

INTRODUCTION

The principle role of a destination marketing organisation (DMO) is to enhance competitiveness in markets crowded with places offering similar attributes and benefits (Pearce, 1992). Since the 1990s, DMOs have increasingly been using branding campaigns in an effort to differentiate the destination from the competition; typically spearheaded with the communication of logos and slogans (Lim, Chung, & Weaver, 2012). Branding a destination is a complex process from both the supply and demand perspectives (see Pike, 2005). On the supply side, destinations are multi attributed, featuring a diverse and eclectic range of stakeholders who have differing market interests. Developing a brand theme that succinctly captures the essence of a multi-attributed place, differentiates from competitors, and appeases all stakeholders is problematic. On the demand side, the global travel market is not homogenous in terms of needs and wants. Marketers must not only attempt to identify and meet the needs of a diversity of target market segments, but also consider how needs vary across different travel different travel contexts. However, the influence of travel context on destination image has been neglected in the tourism literature (Snepenger & Milner 1990, Hu & Ritchie 1993, Gertner 2010). An important question, as yet unanswered in the tourism literature, is whether one destination positioning theme is relevant to stakeholders' multiple markets and travel contexts of interest?

As mentioned, the public face of a destination brand is typically a short slogan, which is usually propositional, and based on one or a few attributes or benefits the destination marketers regard as strengths. The aim of the slogan is to succinctly cut through the clutter of competitive noise in the market place, and portray the brand identity. The brand identity sets out the vision and values of the brand and the image desired in the market place (Aaker 1996, Keller 2003). The aim of this study was to replicate Pike's (2012) investigation into the use

of personal values as potential destination brand positioning themes. Underpinned by Personal Construct Theory (Kelly, 1955), it was proposed a positioning theme based on personal values would subsume multiple attributes and benefits, and therefore have the twin benefits of appealing to a broader range of travellers and appeasing a greater number of destination stakeholders. While that study interviewed Australian consumers in the context of domestic short break holiday destinations, the current study is interested in Greek consumers in the context of international stopover destinations during long haul travel. As mentioned, there has been little research interest in the effect of travel context on destination preferences. Perhaps surprisingly, research investigating aspects of the phenomenon of stopover destination attractiveness only commenced recently, relative to the volume of destination image research since the 1970s (see Masiero, Qiu & Zoltan, 2019). The three research objectives were:

- To identify salient attributes that differentiate stopover destinations
- To explore the consequences (benefits) of these attributes and the personal values that underpin such information processing
- To identify the linkages between the attributes, benefits and personal values

LITERATURE REVIEW

Destination brand identity and brand positioning

Destination branding is a co-creative process involving the development of a brand identity and a brand positioning theme by the DMO, and the formation of a destination image by consumers. The brand identity is the image aspired to in the market, while the brand

positioning theme is a succinct communication of this to consumers, led by a slogan and logo (see Aaker 1996, Keller 2003). In the tourism literature, Cai (2002) was the first to highlight the importance of brand identity development for destinations, for underpinning marketing communications to achieve differentiation from rival places. Many DMOs now publish a brand identity blueprint online, with the twin aims of justifying the rationale for the brand positioning theme to stakeholders, as well as encouraging stakeholders to reinforce the theme in their own marketing communications (Pike & Page, 2014). Anholt (2010) emphasised the major challenges inherent in designing a brand identity for destinations as large identities, primarily centred on the difficulty in gaining the support of the diverse and eclectic range of destination stakeholders. Typically, the majority of brand positioning slogans developed to communicate these brand identities are based on terms that represent tangible destination attributes or affective benefits, and these are easily imitable by rivals (see for example Shanka 2001, Pike 2004, Lehto, Lee & Ismail 2012). Another option that has not attracted much attention in the destination marketing literature is the opportunity to develop brand positioning themes based on consumers' personal values.

Since the tourism literature commenced in the early 1970s, destination image has been the most researched construct in the destination marketing domain (Pike & Page, 2014). Since the early destination image studies (see for example Hunt, 1975), it has become a tourism axiom that due to the intangible nature of travel planning, the image of a destination is as important as the tangible features; and therefore an inherent part of destination competitiveness. Thus it behoves all DMOs to gain an understanding of how their destination is perceived in target markets (Pearce, 1992). Destination positioning, however, is more than image building as it requires a frame of reference with the competitive set of destinations in the target market (see Goodrich, 1978). What is required is a succinct positioning theme that

reinforces positively held perceptions, in a way that is different to rivals (Trout & Ries, 1979). In this way the chosen position stands for something important in the consumers' minds, by "establishing and maintaining a distinctive place in the market for an organisation and/or its individual product offerings" (Lovelock, 1991, p. 110). The role of market positioning is to enhance congruence between the desired image (brand identity) and the actual image in the target market (Aaker 1996, Keller 2003).

Personal values

There are two types of personal values, which are "*modes of conduct and end-states of existence*" (Rokeach, 1968, p. 550). Rokeach described modes of conduct as *instrumental values*, such as behaving responsibly, while end-states of being are *terminal values* such as the desire for pleasure. A personal value represents a belief that a particular mode of conduct or a particular end-state is preferred to the alternatives. A value system is a hierarchy of values, or ranking, on a continuum of importance, and Rokeach proposed we all have an instrumental value system and a terminal value system, and that the purpose of these value systems is to help us choose between alternatives in everyday decision making. Rokeach also proposed an interconnected attitude-value system of links between an in attitudes and their values. Such a system is inherent in the development of the Laddering Analysis technique by Hinkle (1965) and Means-end Theory by Gutman (1982), which are discussed in the next section. This study was interested in terminal values scales developed by Rokeach, which are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 – Rokeach's 18 terminal values

Comfortable life
Exciting life
Sense of accomplishment
A world at peace
A world of beauty
Equality
Family security
Freedom
Happiness
Inner harmony
Mature love
National security
Pleasure
Salvation
Self esteem
Social recognition
True friendship
Wisdom

Source: Adapted from Rokeach (1968)

For marketers, an important implication of Rokeach's (1968) findings in his values research is the significant relationships between individuals' personal values and their behaviour. Therefore it could be proposed an understanding of a consumer's personal values might serve as indicators of destination preferences. A small but growing stream of tourism literature has explored personal values is summarised in Table 2, where it can be seen market segmentation is a common theme.

Table 2 – Tourism research investigating aspects of personal values

Research context	
Traveller segments	Pilgrim travellers (Kim, Kim & King, 2016) Japanese travellers (Watkins & Gnoth, 2011) Norwegian travellers (Mehmetoglu, Hines, Graumann & Greibrokk 2010, Thrane 1997) Tourist behaviour (McIntosh & Thyne (2005) Ecotourists (Higham & Carr 2002, Blamey & Braithwaite 1997) Museum visitors (Thyne, 2001) English speaking visitors to Scandinavia (Madrigal & Kahle, 1994) International travellers (Muller, 1991)
Decision making criteria	Green restaurants (Jeng & Yeh, 2016) Short break holiday destinations (Pike, 2012) Major attractions (Pitts & Woodside, 1986)
Travel mode choice	Paulssen, Temme, Vij & Walker (2014)
Local residents	Hosts attitudes to tourism (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2009)
Tourism information sources	(Fall, 2008)

Personal Construct Theory, the Repertory Test, and Laddering Analysis

Many marketing studies interested in eliciting personal values have been grounded in Gutman's (1982) Means-end theory, which proposed a chain linking product attributes, perceived consequences of the attributes (benefits), and underlying personal values. This study was however grounded in Kelly's (1955) Personal Construct Theory (PCT) and the development of laddering analysis by Hinkle (1965). PCT holds that individuals' decision making is guided by a personal construct system that is developed through life experiences. We use personal constructs to make evaluations of alternative choices much in the way a scientist makes predictions about the outcomes of future events. Kelly referred to this as constructive alternativism, where individuals creatively interpret their environment, rather than going through life a stimulus-response manner. The world is viewed through patterns that we individually construct, and without such patterns the environment would be difficult to make sense of. Kelly referred to these patterns, which allow us to make decisions, as personal constructs. Kelly developed 11 propositions underpinning PCT, and while all are relevant in the context of this study, two are particularly important to note. The first is that as individuals we all develop our own unique personal construct system, and the second is that there will be a commonality of constructs across the population. Kelly developed the Repertory Test to operationalise PCT, and so the relationship between technique and theory has strong face validity (Downs, 1976). In Kelly's field of clinical psychology, elicited constructs were in the form of bipolar opposites, which in marketing are recognised as benefits that can be quantitatively measured using semantic differential scales. One of Kelly's PhD students (Hinkle, 1965) developed the laddering analysis technique, where for example we can ladder down from a benefit, which is referred to as a consequence of an attribute, to an attribute or ladder up from an attribute to a benefit and then to a personal value. This technique was later popularised in the marketing literature by Gutman (1982) as a means-end

chain. To reiterate, the three objectives of this study were to identify the attributes, consequences and personal values used by travellers to differentiate stopover destinations during long haul international travel.

METHOD

A series of personal interviews was held with a convenience sample of 15 Greek consumers in Athens and Thessaloniki during July 2018. Participants were contacts of one of researchers who sent out an email invitation to a network of contacts in Greece. It was requested that participants had previously travelled long haul internationally, and that they intended to do so again in the near future. All participants were well travelled, and familiar with the concept of a stopover during long haul travel. All had previously flown long haul, and all intended to fly long haul again in the future. Ten participants were female, and five male. Their occupations were: travel blogger, academic (3), film maker, economist, teacher, dancer, restaurant owner, notary, media presenter, researcher, insurance agent, physiotherapist, and lawyer. Nine participants were married, and six were single or divorced. Eight interviews took place in Thessaloniki and seven interviews were held in Athens. Two researchers conducted the interviews using a mix of Greek and English languages.

The most common approach used to elicit constructs with the Repertory Test is the triad card method. This is because a personal construct is “a way in which things are construed as being alike and yet different from others” (Kelly, 1955, p. 105). Destination names were presented to participants on white cards in sequential sets of three at a time. A pool of nine stopover destination names was developed as representing a diverse but reasonable range of options that would be considered by Greek consumers when travelling to Australia: 1) Abu Dhabi, 2) Bangkok, 3) Dubai, 4) Hong Kong, 5) Kuala Lumpur, 6) Los Angeles, 7) New York, 8)

Singapore, and 9) Tokyo. In a separate study involving a large sample who completed an online survey, an unaided open ended question did not elicit any other popular preferred stopover destinations (Reference with held for review) The balanced incomplete design developed by Burton and Nerlove (1976) was used to reduce the number of possible triad combinations of the nine destinations from 84 $(n(n-1)(n-2)/6$, where n = number of elements) down to a more manageable 24. On presentation of each triad, and in keeping with the definition of a personal construct at the beginning of this paragraph, the same question was asked: “In what important way are two of these destinations alike but different to the third”? Participants were advised that once a response was made it could not be repeated in ensuing triads. Previous research eliciting constructs related to destinations has shown when the no-repeat rule is not used, there can be as many as 5000+ total statements elicited (see Young, 1995). Laddering analysis, either up or down depending on the response, was then used to elicit attributes, consequences and personal values. This requires the interviewer to be aware of the differences between the three response categories. Interviews were terminated when the participant could think of no new similarity/difference statements. The mean length of interview time was 34 minutes.

FINDINGS

The 15 interviews generated a total of 100 raw attribute statements, with a mean of seven per participant. These statements were coded by one of the researchers to develop themes containing attributes with similar wording. This resulted in the development of 14 attribute themes. Reliability of this coding was verified by a co-researcher who examined the themes using guidelines proposed by Guba (1978), which require each theme to be internally homogenous and externally heterogeneous. This process was also used to develop the consequences themes and values themes. A total of 66 raw consequence statements,

representing a mean of four per participant, was reduced to six themes. The 59 raw values statements, representing a mean of four per person, was reduced to seven themes.

The attribute themes, consequence themes, and values themes are listed in Table 3. Six of the seven personal values themes were the same as those identified by Pike (2012) in the context of domestic short break holidays, highlighted in the table with an asterix: ‘happiness’, ‘fulfilment’, ‘broaden my mind’, ‘safety’, ‘happy family’, ‘healthy life’. The numbers in brackets indicate the number of participants that statements in each theme were elicited from. The summary implication matrix is presented in Table 4 where the numbers of linkages between attributes, consequences and values are indicated. For example, in the top left of the table, five people who mentioned the attribute ‘different culture (A1) laddered up to the consequence ‘relaxing’ (B15), and so forth. The implication summary matrix is a common graphic for tabling the number of linkages (see for example Pike 2012, Kerr & Kelly, 2019). These linkages between the attributes, consequences and values themes are graphically illustrated in Figure 1, the hierarchical value map. This enables a visual interpretation of the nature and strength of the linkages between attributes, consequences and values.

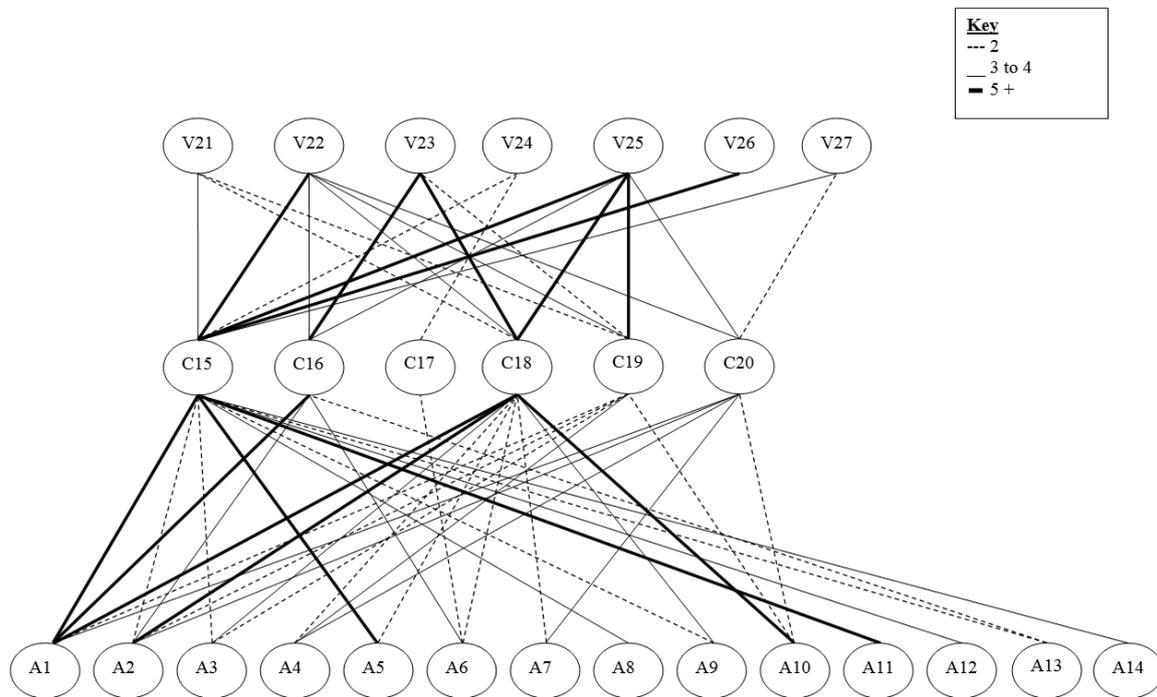
Table 3 – Summary of values, consequences and values themes

Values	<p>*V.21 Happiness (12/15) *V.22 Fulfilment (12/15) *V.23 Broaden my mind (11/15) *V.24 Safety (7/15) *V.25 Happy family (6/15) *V.26 Healthy life (6/15) V.27 Freedom (5/15)</p>
Consequences	<p>C.15 Relaxing (13/15) C.16 Learn new things (11/15) C.17 Nice atmosphere (10/15) C.18 Experience something different (9/15) C.19 Exciting (8/15) C.20 Inspiring (6/15)</p>
Attributes	<p>A1. Different culture (13/15) A2. Lots to see/do (10/15) A3. Good food (10/15) A4. Famous sights (10/15) A5. Nature (8/15) A6. Historic sites (6/15) A7. Nightlife (6/15) A8. Good climate (5/15) A9. Clean (5/15) A10. Good shopping (5/10) A11. Better flights (4/15) A12. I know someone there (4/15) A13. Never been there (4/15) A14. Good accommodation (3/15)</p>

Table 4 – Summary Implication Matrix showing linkages between the attributes, consequences and values themes

	C1 5 Re lax ing	C16 Learn new things	C17 Atm osp here	C18 Experience something different	C1 9 Ex cit ing	C2 0 Ins pir ing	V 2 1 H ap py	V.2 2 Ful fil me nt	V.23 Broa den min d	V. 24 Saf e	V.2 5 Hap py	V.2 6 Heal thy	V.27 Free dom
A1. Different culture	5	5	1	6	2	3							
A2. Lots to do/see	2	4		4	2	2							
A3. Good food	2	1	1	4	2								
A4. Famous sights		1		2	3	3							
A5. Nature	5	1	1	2									
A6. Historic sites		4	2	2									
A7. Nightlife	1	1		2	1	2							
A8. Good climate	4			1									
A9. Clean	2			3									
A10. Good shopping				7	2	2							
A11. Better flights	5												
A12. I know someone there	4				1								
A13. Never been there	2	2		1		1							
A14. Good accommodation	3												
C15. Relaxing							4	5		2	7	9	3
C16. Learn new things							1	3	6		3		
C17. Nice atmosphere										2	1		1
C18. Experience something different							2	4	8	1	6		
C19. Exciting							2	4	2		5		
C20. Inspiring								3		1	4		2

Figure 1 – Hierarchical value map



In summary then, there are a total of 14 attribute themes, six consequence (benefits) themes, and seven personal values themes. Each of these represents an indicator of how Greek travellers differentiate between stopover destinations when considering long haul international air travel. These findings represent options for positioning a stopover destination in this market. Previous investigations of destination slogans have revealed a commonality of themes based predominantly on attributes or benefits. The value of the findings in this study are: 1) the identification of a small range of personal values for consideration as positioning themes, and 2) the linkages between these personal values and the broader range of consequences and attributes they subsume. For example, the personal value ‘happy family’ subsumes five consequences: ‘relaxing’, ‘learn new things’, ‘experience something different’ ‘exciting’ and ‘inspiring’. These five consequences in turn subsume all 14 attributes.

CONCLUSION

This study attempts a contribution to four aspects of the destination marketing literature where there has been a dearth of published research. The first is the extent to which consumers' destination preferences might vary across different travel contexts. The second is the exploration of personal values in relation to destination brand positioning themes. The third is the general lack of replication studies. Fourth, the phenomenon of stopover destinations has surprisingly only appeared recently in the literature. In relation to these four areas of literature, this study identified linkages between 12 stopover destination attributes, six benefits sought at stopover destinations, and seven personal values. In comparison to Pike's (2012) study in the context of Australian domestic short break holidays, six of the seven personal values themes were the same as those identified in this context of international stopover destinations. One important implication of this is that while preferences for specific attributes and benefits of destinations might vary across different travel contexts, the findings here suggest that personal values appear to be consistent across two quite different travel contexts from two quite different groups of consumers. However, it must be acknowledged the duration of domestic short break holidays, defined as a trip away of between one and three nights (Reference withheld for review), and stopovers during long haul international air travel, defined as a stay at an intermediary port of between one and three nights (see Kotsi, Pike & Gottlieb, 2018) are shorter than many other travel contexts. The similarity of the personal values elicited in the two studies might be a function of the same length of stay. Therefore the proposition that personal values are consistent across travel contexts, might not be found to be supported in studies of other travel situations that have a longer duration. Given that another limitation of this study and that of Pike (2012) is the findings were generated from small qualitative samples, it is suggested further replications of the method be applied in other markets and travel contexts. Also, while there are many reported studies of

how destinations are perceived to be positioned on the basis of attributes and benefits, we were not able to find any that have investigated either destination image or destination positioning based on personal values. This is recommended future research.

The proposition underpinning this research is that personal values present options for DMOs to develop positioning themes; and that these values-based themes can be relevant across target markets and travel contexts and be relevant to the diversity of interests of stakeholders at the destination. It is proposed DMOs should consider the efficacy of incorporating personal values into the development of destination brand positioning themes. In this regard, Rokeach (1968) proposed public opinion research should be used to try to awaken people to their personal values. In relation to the supply side of consumer behaviour, a personal value can influence decision making because it serves as a standard of what to want, how to judge, and how to act. From the supply perspective, a personal value is a potential standard by which marketers might try to influence what consumers' want (need arousal), how to judge (attitudes towards alternative brands/decision set), and how to act (purchase decision making). For example, the hashtag #Metoo was used virally on social media to create a movement against sexual harassment, which is a mode of conduct.

A key finding of the present study is that the same personal value can subsume different attributes and consequences depending on the travel situation. This is in keeping with one of the postulates underpinning Kelly's (1955) PCT, which is that personal constructs have a range of convenience. So for example, while the salience of a destination attribute, and related consequence, might vary across different travel contexts, the range of personal values might not. Furthermore each personal value might subsume different consequences and attributes depending on the travel situation. Therefore, it is proposed a positioning theme

based on a personal value will have a broader range of convenience, or relevance across different travel situations and target markets, than positioning themes based on an attribute of consequence. If a destination brand positioning theme was developed based on personal value, DMOs could also encourage destination stakeholders to use such an umbrella brand in their own marketing collateral; by emphasising the attribute(s)/benefit(s) provided in their service offering, which are subsumed by the personal value theme.

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