Tourism Destination Brand and an Explanation of its Shaping Factors in The city of Kashan

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Introduction

In recent years, an increase in the growth of tourism and its performance as a major economic activity in the world has led to the emergence of competition among major tourism destinations. In the same way, it is necessary to develop a coherent framework for using the theory of tourism destination branding. Kashan, one of Iran's tourism hubs, is located between two other prestigious destinations, Tehran and Isfahan. This city has many tourist attractions such as the Damask rose essential oil extraction industry, historical tourist attractions such as historical houses, Fin Garden, the old market, natural tourist attractions such as Niasar Waterfall and Maranjab. Among the important and influential issues on the development of tourism in Kashan is its evaluation and explanation based on the special value of the brand. In this article, an attempt was made to examine the status of the factors affecting the special value of the brand in Kashan and, then, to rank it. Finally, the model used for the tourism destination of Kashan was evaluated.

Materials and Methods

The current research is an applied research which is descriptive and analytical in terms of its purpose and quantitative in terms of its approach. The method of collecting information is a combination of survey and library methods. The statistical population of the research is the domestic tourists visiting Kashan, of which 173 people have been estimated and questioned as a sample size using the Sample Power software and with the

test power of 0.8. The research tool is a researcher-made questionnaire with 8 general questions and 39 specialized questions, which was extracted through using theoretical studies, surveys of professors and experts, and a review of the research background. In order to measure content validity, face validity was used. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to check the reliability of the questionnaire; a value greater than 0.7 for all indicators and the entire research questionnaire indicates the acceptability of the questionnaire and its appropriate reliability. In line with research objectives and testing research hypotheses, the data obtained from questioning were analyzed by structural equation modeling (SEM) and using SPSS and AMOS Softwares. The basis for examining the fit in the research was referring to the fit indices. It is worth mentioning that in addition to quantitative research such as the present research, conducting qualitative research and systematic review can be useful in achieving the research objectives.

Results

The brand image of Kashan tourist destination in the second-order factor model used in the research was evaluated with two other hidden factors. According to it, the brand climate image with a factor load of 0.99 and the brand environmental image with a factor load of 0.96 explained the tourists' mental image of the tourist destination in Kashan. Among the investigated variables, the commercial position of Kashan, local foods, the hospitality of Kashan's people, and the desirability of Kashan's climate were average compared to the reality and the mental image of tourists. Of course, the attractiveness of cultural attractions, the beauty of nature and the landscape, the uniqueness of handicrafts and the beauty of historical attractions were above average. The perceived quality of the destination brand with a regression weight of 0.86 had a significant correlation with its higher level variable. According to the tourists in Kashan, there was no proper information about the entertainment and tourism places. Therefore, improving the introduction of tourist attractions and the formation of travel packages with emphasis on lesser-known cases can improve the perceived quality of Kashan's tourism space. Improving the quality of service in Kashan and the ease of access to resources and facilities can also help in this direction and raise it from an average evaluation status to above average. According to the findings, tourists received a positive feeling from their trip to Kashan. Therefore, according to the significance level obtained in the T-test and the factor loading of the brand's special value with a factor load of 0.82, it can be said that Kashan has been able to have its own position and brand value as a tourist destination. Brand loyalty is one of the powerful indicators in explaining Kashan's tourism brand. The regression weight of 0.81 indicated that loyalty to the tourism brand could play a high role in its creation; however, the status of this index was not favorable. It is worth mentioning that the location of Kashan between the cities of Tehran and Isfahan and also in the vicinity of the city of Qom, as the tourist, industrial and religious poles of the country has been a factor to attract tourists. In this way, it can be expected that a cluster activity will be formed in the path of tourism development. In fact, Kashan can be a part of the network and cluster of shared efforts and cooperation of tourism destinations of Isfahan, Kashan, Qom, and Tehran in line with the development of regional tourism.

Conclusion

Branding of tourist destinations is a new phenomenon that has recently received attention in marketing literature. This concept is of particular importance in understanding travel behavior and developing effective marketing strategies in the field of tourism. The current research model showed that the variables of brand image, perceived quality, special brand value, brand loyalty and brand awareness have the greatest effect in promoting Kashan tourism brand. In this regard, due to the existence of old houses in Kashan, efforts have been made to brand this destination as a city of historical houses. Gulabgiri, as a cultural event of a long history, can create a successful performance in the direction of deepening and creating the Kashan tourism brand at the national and international level. Of course, the design of the brand symbol is also one of the requirements that cannot be overlooked to achieve this goal, and it must be carefully considered and diligently pursued in the future.

Keywords: tourism brand, brand identity, brand image, perceived quality, Kashan.