

CONCEPTUALISING TOURIST BASED BRAND-EQUITY PYRAMID: AN APPLICATION OF KELLER BRAND PYRAMID MODEL TO DESTINATIONS

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Abstract

Purpose – Different scales available for measuring the brand-equity of destinations are found to be much tourist centric and did not present a holistic view regarding building sustainable customer based brand-equity for destinations. Current study aim at conceptually addressing this important issue and present a modified framework for developing and measuring the customer-based brand equity of tourist destinations using Keller (2001).

Design – Extensive literature review was done and 84 articles published in the domain of brand-equity in tourism and related areas were downloaded from various known databases to support arguments. In addition, UNWTO reports were also used. Cooper (1980) guidelines were used for exploring relevant articles.

Findings – It is argued that the first step for building strong brand-equity of destination starts with identification of destination' salience followed by destination performance and destination imagery, destination judgements and feelings, and destination brand resonance. Consequences of having high brand-equity are also discussed.

Originality – The tourist based brand-equity pyramid is the very first framework which is using Keller (2001) for explaining sustainable brand-equity formation of tourist's destinations. Current framework not only give a deep understanding of how to build brand-equity of destinations but also on how to develop strong, emotional bonds with the tourists and hence sustaining the brand-equity.

Keywords brand equity, branding, brand-equity pyramid, destination based brand equity, destinations, tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of developing brand-equity for destinations is not new and has been adopted by destination planners from time to time (Rico, Lopez & Collado, 2015; Ruzzier, Antoncic & Ruzzier, 2015). With increase in disposal income, travelling has increased across geographical borders with International tourist arrivals up by 4% with a record 1.2 billion in 2015 (UNWTO, 2016). The contribution of tourism industry in global GDP has been recorded as high as 9% and is increasing with every passing year (UNWTO, 2015). As a result, competition between destinations to attract more tourists is intensifying (Gartner, 2014).

Destination branding helps to create a unique identity for any destination and is considered as one of the most important aspect of its marketing irrespective of destinations size (Pike & Bianchi, 2016; Mar, Carmen & Arturo 2015; Smrekar & Ruzzier, 2014). In order to find a distinguishable place in tourism market, it is very fundamental for destination planners to develop effective destination branding strategies so as to stand out in potential tourists' mind as a viable choice (Freire, 2016; Atadil, Turk & Altintas, 2015). The concept of tourist based brand equity is gaining acceptance from service marketers who are arguing in favour of treating destinations as brands, thus, highlighting importance of branding as a powerful differentiation strategy for tourist destinations even for small destinations (Freire, 2016; Pike & Bianchi, 2016; Kashif, Samsi & Sarifuddin, 2015; Mar, Carmen & Arturo, 2015).

Different scales / frameworks available for measuring the brand-equity of destinations are found to be much tourist centric and focus on various aspects of destinations brand image, brand awareness, perceived quality, loyalty etc and application of same for creating strong brand equity for destinations (Mok, Kim & Man, 2010; Mar, Carmen & Arturo, 2015; Pike & Bianchi, 2016; Smrekar and Ruzzier, 2014; Konecnik 2005, Konecnik & Ruzzier, 2011;). These scales / frameworks focus only on investigating the image concept of destinations and did not present a holistic view regarding building sustainable customer based brand-equity for destinations (Konecnik & Ruzzier, 2007; Blain, Levy & Ritchie, 2005). Also, these scales had a very narrow view of the brand-equity dimension and restricted themselves only to Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993).

In-depth literature review revealed Keller (2001) brand-equity pyramid as the most realistic and robust framework arguing that building brand-equity does not depends solely on brand awareness or brand knowledge but also on important parameters like brand salience, brand performance, brand imagery, judgement and feelings of tourists coupled with brand resonance for leveraging long-term loyalty of the customers.

Current study aim at conceptually addressing this important issue and present a modified framework for developing and measuring the customer-based brand equity of tourist destinations using Keller (2001) and aims at applying it to tourist destination perspective for building / enhancing their brand-equity. It is argued that the first step for building strong brand-equity of destination starts with identification of destination' salience followed by destination performance and destination imagery (destination meaning), destination judgements and feelings (destination responses), and destination brand resonance (destination relationship with tourists).

In addition, discussions are also held regarding consequences of building strong destination brands and provide useful insights to administrators / destination managers to build tourists based brand equity for their destinations. Originality of current framework lies in its ability to focus not only on measuring destinations brand-equity in a unique way but also on discussing ways for sustaining destination brand equity over a longer period of time. To our knowledge this is the only framework that has applied Kellers' (2001) concept of customer based brand equity pyramid for destination branding that will help planners to build sustainable customer based brand equity for their destinations. It is also argued that destinations having high tourist based brand-

equity will be better positioned among competing destinations, thus, impacting tourists consideration set and their choices.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Our search targeted article/dissertation/conference paper reporting an empirical or conceptual investigation of brand-equity concept as a major tool in destination marketing and we limited our review to application of brand-equity in context of destinations and few papers on antecedents and consequents of destination branding. In addition, only articles in English (*language understood by the researchers*) were included. Cooper's (1980) guidelines were followed for collecting secondary data which has been used by many other researchers for developing conceptual frameworks. Primary and secondary channels of information were used to explore relevant literature for the current study (Cooper, 1980).

Review of available journals (ancestry approach) was used to explore primary channels of information to find relevant articles and their citations (Cooper, 1989, pp.43). Secondary channels were also used to explore relevant literature which include explored indexing and various databases including JSTOR, Springer, EBSCO, Google, Google Scholar, ProQuest, the Dissertation Abstracts International (DAI), Emerald, Scopus Indexing, Thompson Reuter Indexing, Social Sciences Citation index (SSCI) covering a wide variety of publications.

The following journals were scanned to download research papers: *Annals Of Tourism Research, Journal Of Tourism, Leisure And Hospitality Management, Journal Of Travel & Tourism Marketing, Journal Of Travel Research, Journal Of Vacation Marketing, Journal Of Hospitality And Tourism Research, Journal Of Management & Economic Management Strategy, Journal Of Marketing Research, Journal Of Marketing Theory And Practice, Journal Of Marketing, Journal Of Place Management And Development, Journal Of Product & Brand Management, Journal Of Small Business Management, Management And Marketing Challenges For The Knowledge Society, Organizations And Markets In Emerging Economies, Place Branding, Procedia-Social And Behavioural Sciences, Revista De Administração De Empresas, The Journal Of American Academy Of Business, Tourism Management, Annales-Anali Za Istrske In Mediteranske Studije Series, British Journal Of Management, Business And Society Review, Business And Management Horizons, European Journal Of Marketing, Industrial And Commercial Training, International Journal Of Contemporary Hospitality Management, International Journal Of Culture, Tourism And Hospitality Research, International Journal Of Research In Marketing, International Marketing Review, Journal Of Advanced Research In Social And Behavioural Sciences, Journal Of Brand Management, Journal Of Business And Management Journal Of Business Ethics, Journal Of Business Research, Journal Of Cleaner Production, Journal Of Consumer Marketing*. The search uncovered a total of 84 published articles (including dissertations, books, articles published as chapters and paper presentations in international conferences) in a variety of journals, books and conference proceedings in many countries.

2.1. Brand-Equity, Branding, & Destination Brands

The concept of brand-equity is not new. It has been put forth by different researchers in their own way. The most prominent and well known thoughts on brand equity are of Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) who argued brands as the most valuable asset for managers and explained its importance to create strong brands having strong brand-equity to influence customer loyalty. Keller (1993) conceptualizes customer-based brand equity using associative network memory model as “the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand” and holds the view that brand familiarity coupled with strong and favorable positive associations forms the brand-equity of a brand. Yoo and Donthu (2001) argued different consumer perceptions toward brands that add value to it in comparison with generic product (Park & Srinivasan, 1994).

The concept of brand-equity has been applied to different contexts and destinations are no exception (Ruzzier, Antoncic & Ruzzier, 2015; Smrekar & Ruzzier, 2014; Gartner, 2014). Essentially, the concept of brand equity emphasises the importance of branding in the development of marketing strategies for destinations and deal with the emotional value arising from tourist’s relationship with destination (Pike, Gentle, Kelly & Beatson, 2016; Kashif, Samsi & Sarifuddin, 2015). Branding a destination is not solely responsible for bring it in the consideration set of travellers to travel but also help destinations to acquire non-tourists related inputs such as residents, businesses and foreign direct investments (Dinnie, 2011; Konecnik, 2010). This will result into the development of the destination, thus, making it popular and a more preferred destination (Popescu, 2012; Freire, 2005).

Destination marketing researchers in particular have challenged the replication of brand theory to investigate tourist destinations (Kashif, Samsi & Sarifuddin, 2015; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014, b; Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011). Researchers are of the opinion that destination brands are complex to explore and brand managers have very little control due to the involvement of many other stakeholders including government, international funding bodies, and the society (Kashif, Samsi & Sarifuddin, 2015). Unlike products, place branding is quite compound as there are so many attributes to a destination for branding given the economic, social, cultural, political and technological issues associated with destinations as products (Kashif, Samsi & Sarifuddin, 2015; Giannopoulos, Kladou, Mavragani, & Chytiri, 2012; Anholt, 2004; Kerr, 2006). Despite this opposing view concerning replication, investigation of destination brands has been well acknowledged in the literature (Pike, Bianchi, Kerr & Patti, 2010; Morgan, Pritchard & Piggott, 2003).

For example, Ruzzier, Antoncic and Ruzzier (2015) presented a robust and cross-culturally comparable customer-based brand equity model for tourism destinations (CBBETD) of Slovenia and Austria from the perspective of two culturally heterogeneous tourist groups (Croatians and Germans) using Aaker (1991). Results revealed that the potential tourist’s evaluations as well as the tourism destinations do not impact destinations brand equity. However, in a cross-cultural set-up, the conditions for configural and metric invariances are satisfied whereas for scalar invariance are partially satisfied. Following the same line, Kladou and Kehagias (2014,

a) also used Aaker (1991) and developed a five dimensional brand equity path model that was found significant in context of brand Rome. This work holds more importance to researchers and practitioners since the destinations brand value was assessed and measured also using the same (Giannopoulos, Kladou, Mavragani & Chytiri, 2012). In the same year, Kladou and Kehagias (2014, b) investigated the structural relationships between the brand equity dimensions, after incorporation of cultural brand assets as a new dimension, and validated the traditional five dimensional brand equity measure of Aaker (1991) using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling in context of destinations including Athens and Rome. They also found significant differences across the brand equity dimensions of different destinations that were taken for comparisons.

Physical components of the city, individual components of the city and organizational elements were called as the three main elements that should be taken into consideration for destination branding by Hadrikurnia (2011). Physical components of the destination includes available buildings and infrastructure whereas individual components include the residents and tourists of a destination. Physical components affect opinions, culture, society and personal as well as psychological factors. However, on the other hand the third component, organizational element includes the stakeholder objectives and beliefs in a city. Destination branding has been called as a challenging task for destination planners owing to the creation of long-term trust and developing strategies to protect destination stakeholders and tourist (Giannopoulos, Kladou, Mavragani & Chytiri, 2012; Kavartzis, 2008). Dinnie (2011) suggested that such a complexity can be reduced by fostering core brand position statements in fit with the destinations.

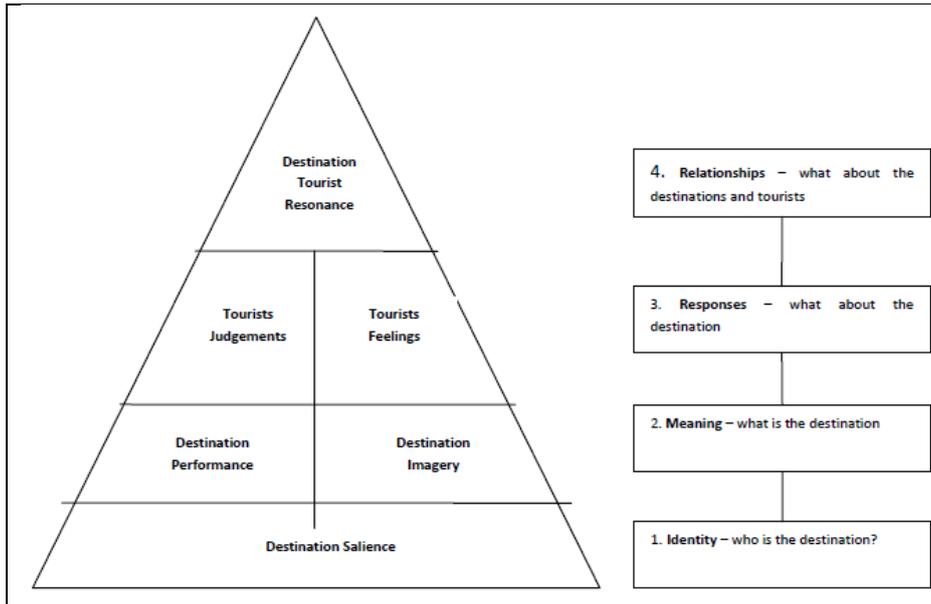
Konecnik (2006) and Gartner and Ruzzier (2011) have been the initiative takers in the area of measuring the customer based brand equity for destinations using Aaker (1991). Pike (2007) developed another CBBETD framework using brand salience and brand resonance in addition to the dimensions of awareness, loyalty, perceived service quality. Im, Kim, Elliot and Han (2012) differentiates brand equity from brand image and proposed a multidimensional consumer-based brand equity scale for application within a tourism context.

2.2. Conceptualizing Tourist Based Brand-Equity Pyramid (TBBEP)

For destinations to create a distinctive place, marketers need to follow a planned sequence so as to ensure a strong and competitive place in the market. Keller (2001) customer based brand-equity pyramid was purposely applied in context of tourist destinations since all the scales, discussed above, have not taken a sustainable view of developing the brand-equity of destinations (Gartner, 2014). The application of Keller (2001) brand equity pyramid model to destinations make it easy for destination planners to recognize crucial factors that contribute for developing sustainable destination based brand equity. For the same it is very imperative for the marketers be able to understand and answer six fundamental questions, known as '*brand-building blocks*', for a destination brand to form and formation of a pyramid like structure. Destination planners need to reach the top of the pyramid for creating strong brand-equity for destinations by placing building blocks at appropriate place. Figure 1 shows the destination based brand-equity pyramid involving six brand-building blocks at

different levels while Figure 2 gives a detailed and a clear picture of each block. The framework is a complex of interrelated stages, with each stage being quite complex and deeply associated with others.

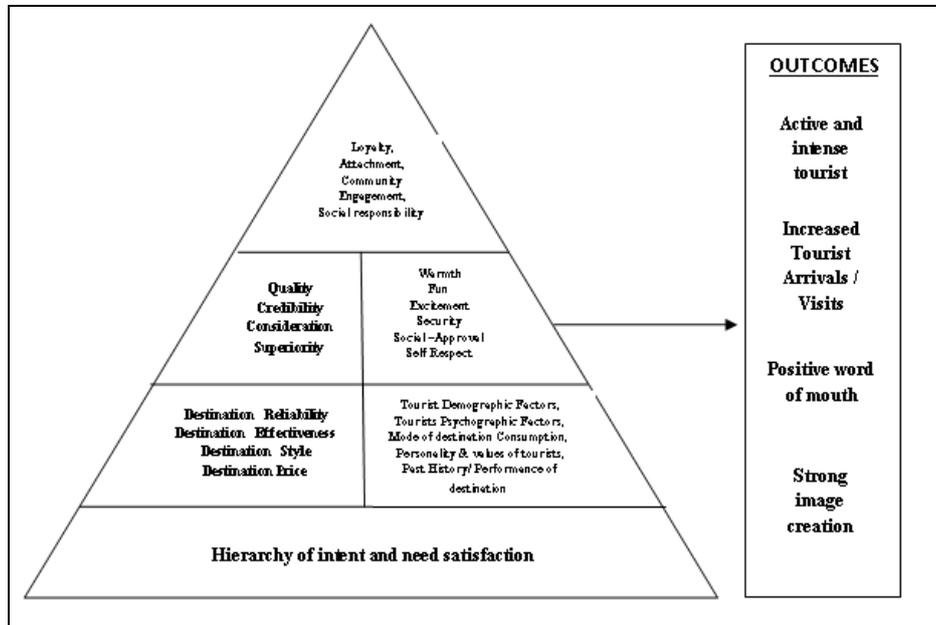
Figure 1: **Conceptualizing Tourist Based Brand Equity Pyramid (TBBEP)**



Source: Based on Keller (2001) Brand-Equity Pyramid

Like any other marketing offering building destination based brand-equity involve sequence of vital stages (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014, a). The first stage relates to brand identity and use brand salience as a measure of the awareness of the brand and we renamed it as destination brand salience (Keller, 2008). Formally destination brand awareness refers to tourist's ability to recall and recognize the destination in terms of the brand followed by other crucial step such as defining the destination meaning, destination response and finally destination relationships with the tourists (Im, Kim, Elliot & Han, 2012). The application of destination brand equity has been extended to almost all places, as it helps to understand the various dimensions that are important for a destination to sustain in the long competitive word (Theodhori & Qirici, 2014).

Figure 2: **Dimensions of TBEP**



Source: Conceptualized by Authors

Destination Identity / Awareness

Brand awareness is centered on brand recognition which takes place when a customer has once seen the brand and brand recall is the ability of the customer to name a certain brand when exposed to a product category at any given point in time (Liu, Liston-Heyes & Ko 2010:195). The construct of brand identity has been given utmost importance by previous branding literature arguing that strong brand identity ensures employee retention (Wheeler, Richey, Tokkman & Sablynski, 2006), creating and designing corporate logos as well as marketing communications (Cornelissen, Haslam & Balmer, 2007), competitive advantage and a strategic edge (Balmer & Gray, 2000), favorable brand awareness (Keller, 1993), successful brand extensions (Pitta & Katsanis, 1995), and enhanced firm performances (Craig, Dibrell & Davis, 2008; Harris & Chernatony, 2001). Brand awareness refers to the strength of brand's presence in consumers mind and is an important constituent of brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993).

Brand awareness has been cited as the first and the foremost component for building the brand equity of a product or service (Keller, 2001). The same can be applied in context of destinations too (Chon, 1992). Tourists visit only those destinations which falls in their 'awareness set' of destinations and whom they recognize (Pike, Gentle, Kelly & Beatson, 2016; Yuwo, Ford & Purwanegara, 2013; Kashif, Samsi & Sarifuddin, 2014; Kotler, Haider & Rein, 1993). Destination planners need to understand the importance that brand awareness has for their destinations branding that

could impact brand recall, brand knowledge and brand recognition. These components are also called as the determinants of brand awareness (Pike, Bianchi, Kerr & Patti, 2010). Thus the construct of brand awareness in terms of the destination refers to the level of knowledge and information a tourists hold about a particular destination. Awareness can be regarded as the first step towards achieving brand loyalty that can be built if it is crafted considering various stakeholder (Chigora & Zvavahera, 2015).

Keller (2001) focused on the ways identity can be maintained for creating brand awareness to form brand salience with customers having more detailed information about the brand like the product / service category in which the brand competes and which need of the customer the brand is going to satisfy. While using 'destination salience', destination marketers and planners should have a clear understanding of the wide offerings (natural and manmade) a destination has to offer (Chigora & Zvavahera, 2015).. Thus, defining destination 'hierarchy of intent' as well as the fact that tourists visiting a particular destination are also well aware of destination product category, its logo, symbol, brand name resulting a relationship between the destination and the tourists where destination forms a dominant name in the tourists consideration set even if they have not previously visited the destination (Chigora & Zvavahera, 2015; Kashif, Samsi & Sarifuddin, 2014).

Destination salience can be understood on the basis of two key terms: breadth and depth. Brand salience depth simply connotes the meaning of brand awareness i.e. how easy tourists recall or identify the destination whereas brand salience breadth provides a more complex scenario of tourists mind including tourist's top-of-mind, mind share, purchase, and consumption related behavior (Im, Kim, Elliot & Han, 2012; Konecnik, 2010). It is, thus, argued that Destination marketers/ planners desirous of building a strong foundation for the next building block of their customer based brand-equity pyramid should focus strongly on 'depth' and 'breadth' that finally contributes to teams' salience.

Destination Meaning

Destination salience gives a logical rationale to tourists to understand the reason a particular destination is developed as a tourism product and in which category it falls (Konecnik, 2010). Notably, for some tourists this is not sufficient to get attracted/ associated to a destination. Other parameters like destination meaning and destination image play their important role in creating a favorable and respectable image in the minds of the tourists (Dinnie, 2011; Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011). Destination image is the core construct in modelling of any destination branding performance and has a direct and significant influence on the destination brand salience, image and resonance (Pike, Gentle, Kelly & Beatson, 2016).

Like Keller (2001), we categorize destination meaning into two broad categories: destination performance and destination imagery. Both these categories represent different ways in which a tourist is associated with the destination e.g. destination performance includes the functional and performance related tourists associations whereas destination imagery represents the abstract and imaginations related associations.

Similar to Keller (2001), both were included under brand meaning. We are also of the similar view that the destinations with high service deliverance will have a positive and prolonged impact on the tourists who attach particular meaning to the destination meeting their functional needs, thus leading to tourist repeated visits and loyalty (Dinnie, 2011). Interestingly, tourists can rate / compare destination performance on the basis of associated attributes and/or benefits such as destination reliability (consistency of performance), destination effectiveness (how effective a destination satisfy the tourists entertainment needs), design and style (intangibles like color, logo and other dimensions impacting tourists sensory aspects) and price of the facilities available at the destination.

On the other end of the destination gamut is the abstract or imagination related intangible associations from which a tourist derive meanings based on his imaginations (Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011). Destination image has a very significant effect on tourists physiological connection with the host destination and his intentions to revisit (King, Chen & Funk, 2015; Iyer & Kuksov, 2010). It typically depicts the abstract thinking of the tourists and is supposed to fulfill tourist's psychological and social needs. Intangible and abstract meanings can be broadly classified into categories dependent upon tourists demographic factors (tourist gender, race, ethnicity, income, marital status), tourists psychographic factors (attitude towards destination, social issues, possessions, careers or political interest), visit to destination (length of stay, type of accommodation etc) tourist personalities and their values and finally the past history or performance of the destination visited.

Importantly, whichever is the type of brand meaning tourists are generating for the destination professional executives should always assess the strength (How strong is the destination identified?), uniqueness (How different is the destination identified via generated meaning?) and favorability (How valuable is the association/meaning for the tourists?) of those associations. They should be more interested in producing these different associations and then assessing these questions in a sequential order for creating a strong tourist based brand-equity, thus, generating a larger pool of loyal tourists (King, Chen & Funk, 2015; Iyer & Kuksov, 2010). A destination with strong brand equity is indeed positively and significantly related to tourism strength and tourist loyalty (Mikulic, Milicevic & Kresic, 2016). Thus, brand equity of the destination is the major key player in attracting the tourist traffic towards a particular destination.

Tourist Responses

Whereas the previous stages talks about how proper and planned destination management can garner strong and favorable brand associations, current section put more emphasis on exploring what tourists thinks of a destination and emphasize on evaluating tourists responses towards previously undertaken marketing activities from tourists perspectives so as to have an understanding of tourists feelings or judgments towards the destination, thus, exploring whether the destination lives in the 'heart' or 'head' of the tourists.

Responses towards destination can be broadly categorized into two categories: tourist judgments and tourist feelings about the destination. Tourist judgments reflect rational and personal thoughts of tourists towards the destination created as a result of different functional/performance or imagery related to destination performances (King, Chen & Funk, 2015). In simple term, tourist judgments simply reflects the feelings or responses originating directly from the head and do not take into consideration the heartily decisions. A tourist can make different types of judgments like destination quality (destination resources, destination infrastructure, current performance of destination), destination credibility (perceived expertise/professionalism, trust on destination, entertaining, and worth spending the time and value for visiting the destination), destination consideration (extent to which tourists considers the destination into the set where he would love to visit), and destination superiority (extent to which a destination is viewed as superior and better than the other destinations).

On the other hand, destination feelings refer to responses originating from the heart and are basically taken on the basis of emotional reactions towards the destination. A tourist will have positive emotional attachment with the destination depending on the level of emotions they hold towards the destination (Liu, 2016). In addition, tourists holding a strong positive image of the destination are satisfied and loyal towards the destination (Lu & Tian, 2015). Sometimes, social acceptance and relationships with others also induces a sort of feelings within the tourists. Tourist's feelings can be categorized into types such as:

- 1) *Warmth*: feelings that make the tourist to feel a sort of calm or sentimental or affectionate about the destination.
- 2) *Fun*: Tourists may feel amused, cheerful, joyful, playful or even lighthearted after visiting the destination.
- 3) *Excitement*: feelings that make tourists feel more energetic and may feel cool or excited.
- 4) *Security*: Tourists may feel as if negative feelings like sadness, worries are being eliminated and occurs when the destination produces a sense of security for the tourists.
- 5) *Social Approval*: occurs when tourists feel that supporting a destination is viewed as socially acceptable and most of his peer-group, friends, and family members support the same destination.
- 6) *Self Respect*: occurs when tourists feel a sense of pride and respect by supporting a destination.

Recent researches on consumers feelings and their judgments had also contributed in favor of the argument that both plays an important role in consumers evaluation of products/services and enhanced tourist loyalty and firms revenues (Laros & Steenkamp, 2005; Iyer & Kuksov, 2010).

We, thus, argue that managers /destination planners of the destination should leverage and take into consideration these two dimensions by not worrying about their place of origin, head or heart, but should be more evaluative about how positive these feelings

are and efforts should be made to convert negatively formed feelings about the destinations into favorable positive feelings.

Destination –Tourist Relationships

The final building block in the tourists based brand-equity pyramid is named as ‘destination resonance’ and takes into consideration leveraging relationship between tourists and the destination. Destination resonance gives a clear indication to the tourists that the destination is in synchronization with them and is committed for their welfare by developing a strong psychological bond (Pike, Gentle, Kelly & Beatson, 2016). As per Keller (2001), various dimensions of destination resonance can be broken down into different categories as:

- 1) *Behavioral loyalty*: degree to which tourists repeatedly visit the destination and visit the destination again and again whenever they have a choice. Behavioral loyalty directly impact destination revenues (Somaskanthan & Rosmalina, 2016). To ensure tourist loyalty it is very imperative for the destination planners to satisfy them with best of the experiences, thus ensuring tourists repeated visits to the destination and high loyalty (Somaskanthan & Rosmalina, 2016; Chiu, Zeng & Cheng, 2016:).
- 2) *Attitudinal attachment*: degree to which the tourists love or describe the destination as an important part of their life.
- 3) *Sense of community*: Keller (2001) argues that by associating with communities brands can leverage the association for transferring meaning to them. However, the application of this practice in tourism context is also feasible where the destination can associate with a community or generate their own global communities and generates broader meaning and tourist’s base who, thus, feels associated with the destination.
- 4) *Active engagement*: This step is considered to be the litmus-test for assessing the effectiveness of all the previous building blocks. It is argued that tourists would be willing to invest their time, money, energy, and other resources in visiting a destination ‘when they are highly loyal and view the team as reliable and worth the investment made. Tourists will be interested in participating only when all the previous blocks had been placed at their respective positions and destinations have worked hard by making sufficient investment on them. An active engaged tourist would resemble in the promotion of the destination, communicate about the destination via word-of-mouth, interaction and exchange of information with other loyal tourists, acting as a brand ambassador for the destination and hence strengthening the ties with other non (loyal) tourists.
- 5) *Social responsibility*: Keller (2001) stops at active engagement when explaining the various categories of brand resonance and does not take into account the important role played by ‘corporate social responsibility’ in tourism marketing. There are plenty of researches focusing on the issue of CSR in tourism industry also (Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007; Blowfield & Murray, 2008, Jamali & Mirshak, 2007). A number of initiatives have been carried out globally resulting in associations such as Business Ethics Network, Global Compact, Global Reporting Initiatives, The World Business Council for Sustainable Development, The Croatian Business Council for Sustainable Development, etc. Even in 2009

roundtable conference of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) focus was more on assessing the responsibilities of multinational companies towards consumers. When applied in context of tourism sector, it was advised that the tourist should be respected and tourism product should also be respected taking into consideration the local community, the environment and the culture requiring MNC's to focus on a CSR issue. Responsible tourism is one of the best types of tourism where a tourist undertakes his role in the development of the tourist destination (Mihalic, 2016). Golja and Nizic (2010) also argued corporate social responsibility practices in tourism as significant and in the introductory phase and advised corporate hotels, tourism companies or destinations to undertake CSR activities like supporting and restoration of cultural sites, sponsoring tourism events/research projects, supporting / implementing climate change and/or energy efficiency measures, making environmental supportive infrastructure supporting energy and waste management. It was discussed that such an investment can lead to a win-win situation for all stakeholders involved with tourism as well as for the destination. Previous literature had also argued that corporate social responsibility has a positive impact on brand strength, brand value, brand credibility, competitive positioning, and hence global brand-equity (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2007; Munilla & Miles, 2005). In the light of the above studies it is, thus, argued that getting engaged with any socially responsible cause, by the hotels or tourism company(ies) of a destination will help a destination to generate higher tourist based brand-equity in long-run when compared to destinations without any social cause.

3. OUTCOMES OF HIGH TOURIST BASED BRAND-EQUITY

Some of the previous brand-equity frameworks (Konecnik & Ruzzier, 2007; Boo, Busser & Baloglu, 2009; Kladou & Kehgias, 2014, b) also suffer a major limitation by not looking at the consequences of building high/low brand-equity. In this framework we had discussed important consequences (Figure 2) indicating why destination marketers / planners should be interested in building high tourist based brand-equity of their destinations. Some of the important outcomes are suggested as below:

Active / Intense Tourist Loyalty

Marketing scholars have investigated loyalty in different contexts but very limited studies have defined loyalty in context of destination branding. Pike Bianchi, Kerr and Patti (2010) argued that researches regarding loyalty among destination planners are still in their infancy stages. The selection of a destination by tourists, among the set of available options, is influenced by tourist loyalty towards the destination (1992). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) argued that loyalty can be measured via dimensions of attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. In the context of destinations, the attitudinal loyalty consists of the revisit intentions of the tourists (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Attitudinal loyalty impacts tourists satisfaction which further leads to development of positive tourists attitudes toward the destination. Behavioral loyalty can be defined in terms of the repeat revisit intentions of the tourists (Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2005). As an

important component of brand equity, it encompasses brand attitude, performance, image and awareness (Chen & Gursoy, 2001) and has been called as the outcome of high brand equity (Oppermann, 2000). In tourism context, the term destination loyalty has been defined as consisting of tourists' re-visit intentions and their positive word-of-mouth (Baker & Crompton, 2000).

Increase in Tourist Arrivals / Visits

A destination having strong image and delivering best of its standards is able to attract more and more of potential tourists thus resulting in the increased tourist inflow which eventually adds to the overall infrastructural and overall development of the destination. For example, 17.38 million tourists visited London in 2014 followed by Singapore which attracted 17.09 million international visitors.

Positive word of mouth

With the destinations being able to deliver at best standards, it thus leads to the creation of the positive image of the destination. A destination with a strong image is able to spread positive word-of-mouth enhancing destinations brand-equity (Virvilaite, Tumasonyte & Sliburyte, 2015). Social media plays a very critical role in maintaining the positive relationship with brand quality and strengthens the relationship between the two (Hudson, Huang, Roth & Madden, 2016).

4. CONCLUSION

Previous frameworks of brand-equity measurement in destination marketing had focused only on the brand awareness and brand association dimensions highlighting only how to build destinations brand-equity but fails to explain how to develop strong psychological commitment and retain tourists engagement in the destination activities. Importantly, we argue that destination marketers/ planners should focus on sustainable development of destinations' brand-equity and should view themselves as a part of tourism industry satisfying the needs of their tourists.

To our knowledge, the tourist based brand-equity pyramid is the very first framework using Keller (2001) for explaining brand-equity formation of the tourist's destinations which needs to be sustainable in nature. Sustainability, developed initially as a management concept (Hall, 2012), is now a key issue for governments these days for formulating tourism development policies (Mihalic, 2016; Walz & Koehler, 2014), environmentally responsible tourists' destinations (Ruzzier, Petek & Ruzzier, 2015; Mihalic, 2013; Leonidou, and Leonidou, 2011) and in tourism research (Budeanu, Miller, Moscardo & Goi, 2016). For example in New Zealand, more importance is given to sustainability to protect and sustain the amenity values in National parks and other iconic destinations (Tourism-NZ, 2005). Recently, Ruzzier, Petek & Ruzzier (2015) also explored the sustainability issues related with "I Feel Slovenia" brand and argued that sustainability aspect should be stitched around both the visible as well as invisible elements of the destination brand 'Slovenia'. Citing the importance of sustainability in tourism, emphasis of destination planners, thus, should be on

developing sustainable based brand-equity for their destinations which lies at the core of our discussion.

In addition, the pyramid also talks about adopting a social cause to give something back to the society by focusing on 'doing something by doing something good'. Importantly, this concept has not been mentioned by previous brand-equity frameworks. In tourism industry destinations have adopted a social cause and are working selflessly with the aim of benefitting the needy people which can be subjected to future researches for assessing if indulging in a socially responsible cause helps to enhance the brand-equity of destinations. There are plenty of researches focusing on the issue of CSR in tourism industry also (Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007; Blowfield & Murray, 2008, Jamali & Mirshak, 2007). A number of initiatives have also been carried out globally resulting in associations such as Business Ethics Network, Global Compact, Global Reporting Initiatives, The World Business Council for Sustainable Development, The Croatian Business Council for Sustainable Development, etc. Even in 2009 roundtable conference of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) focus was more on assessing the responsibilities of multinational companies towards consumers. When applied in context of tourism sector, it was advised that the tourist should be respected and tourism product should also be respected taking into consideration the local community, the environment and the culture requiring MNC's to focus on a CSR issue. Above mentioned points make the inclusion of CSR activities in the brand-equity framework as legit and justified.

To conclude, it is argued that the very first step for developing a sustainable brand-equity for destinations (we called it as tourist based brand-equity pyramid) start with defining the destination salience, thus, providing a reason to destination managers / planners why they are into the business and gives them a direction for future decisions followed by defining the destination meaning, destination responses and finally the destination relationships with its tourists. Also, for giving a clear understanding of the reasons for building strong brands, the consequences are explained, thus, legitimizing the reasons for tourism managers to indulge in developing brand-equity of their destinations. Important point to note is that current research is only an attempt towards conceptually explaining the tourist based brand-equity pyramid in the context of tourism destinations. Future researchers are welcomed to empirically assess the validity and reliability of the conceptual framework.

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