Local University Students’ Perceptual Map of a Destination Brand
Shaoxing City in China

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Abstract: This paper views that destination brand as a holistic brand conception, and uses the attributes-based perceptual map technique to describe the static meaning of the positioning conception. With a case study of Shaoxing City in China, two main attributes historical culture and comprehensive function in local university students’ perception are achieved, and Shaoxing’s local university students’ perceptual map is drawn. It indicates that Shaoxing has a big inferiority to Hangzhou in terms of natural landscape, shares almost the same price level as its neighboring cities, takes a great advantage of historical culture over the neighboring cities, but leaves a big gap of comprehensive function below Hangzhou and Shanghai. This discovery offers some guides for Shaoxing City’s future tourism branding.

Keywords: Holistic Brand Conception, Perceptual Map, Static Positioning

1 Introduction

The university students’ tourism consumption is now becoming an interesting academic domain in the fields of tourism marketing (e.g. Kim & Joggaratnam, 2003; Li & Bao, 2000; Jin and Lang, 2004). China’s universities now have almost 30 million students, offering a big potential tourism market. The adult universities students have a lot of spare time and strongly desire to travel to see the outside world. With their higher educational background, university students usually have a unique and more cultural understanding of tourism and destination brand, which has a vital influence on destination brand propagation and communication. Thus, university students are a tourism market segmentation that cannot be neglected.

Shaoxing City as a destination brand is one of China’s most famous scenic spots. It is one of China’s famous historical cultural cities with southern Chinese riverside-town scenery. It has abundant tourism resources. Now in Shaoxing there are more than 200 scenic spots, among which Luxun Museum, Orchid Pavilion, Kuaiji Mountain, Keyan Tourism Holiday Center, Xinchang Great Buddha Temple, and Zhuji Wuxie Scenic Spot are 4A-level scenic spots. Shaoxing has 28 famous scenic spots, one of is national-level scenic spot, seven of which are provincial-level scenic spots, two of which are national-level water conservancy project scenic spots, one of which is national-level geologic park. Shaoxing City now is aimed to build itself a strong brand of tourism destination, which requires a good and appropriate brand positioning strategy. A scientific survey using techniques such as perceptual map will serve this aim.

When a city launches tourism marketing activities aimed at the university students, it should first and foremost focus on its local university students. Since university students in China are from all over the country, their viewpoints or comments about the city can be transmitted to all parts of the country. So this paper aims to draw a perceptual map to analyze the status quo of Shaoxing City’s destination brand positioning among its local university students and to offer some useful information for its further marketing and branding.

2 Theoretical Backgrounds

2.1 Holistic Brand Conception and Destination Brand
Academically there are conflicts about what brand is. These conflicts can be divided into two types of
brand conceptions: the traditional brand conception and the holistic brand conception. The traditional conception views brand name as an addition to the product, and believes that branding aims to help identify the product (e.g. AMA’s brand definition; Gardner and Levy 1955; Aaker 1991; McCarthy and Perreault 1991). Shocker, Srivastava, and Ruekert (1994) noted that more attention is needed to be paid to “the development of more of a ‘systems view’ of brands and products to include how intangibles created by the pricing, promotional, service, and distribution decisions of the brand manager combine with the product itself to create brand equity and affect buyer decision making.” Thus a holistic conception of the brand, which combines brand name and product together as brand, is put forward. Therefore the holistic conception achieves at least three strong supports. The first support is from customers’ brand concept. As a matter of fact, customers who buy and consume a brand are associating the product attributes and the satisfaction from them with the brand, or in other words, customers’ brand concept covers or includes the product per se (Vázquez, et al, 2002). So customers hold the holistic brand conception. The second support is from the brand identity theory. Brand identity theory attempts to use the brand identity as a wide meaning terminology to describe brand and include the product as a part of the brand (e.g. Aaker, 1996; Kapferrer, 1992), which extremely enriches the connotation of the brand conception. The third support comes from the strong correlation between the product and the brand name. Some conceptual researches indicate that it is not easy to divide the product attributes from the brand attributes because there is strong interrelationship between them (Ambler and Styles 1995, 1997; Ambler 1996; Crainer 1997). Vázquez et al (2002) empirically confirmed the truth that the consumers’ utility associated with the product and the one associated with the brand name are highly correlative.

The traditional brand conception confuses the relationship between the brand name and the product with the relationship between the brand and the product. The holistic brand conception considers the brand name and the product/service as inseparable components of the brand. The holistic brand conception is more consistent with the customer’s brand connotation, offering a more integrated and more comprehensive theoretical basis for the brand management field such as brand formulation and brand extension and so on (Achenbaum and Bodga 1996; Ambler and Styles 1997), and setting a more internally consistent logical starting point for the brand theories such as brand equity theory.

In the domain of marketing a brand can be either of product or of service (Aaker, 1991; Clifton, 2003; Murphy, 1998; Ward, Light, & Goldstein, 1999). Therefore, some destination brand definitions (e.g. Blain et al., 2005; Cai, 2002) are directly based on the brand definition of marketing, and some people believe that the brand of product is similar with the brand of service (de Chernatony and Dall’Olmo Riley, 1999). Some researches thus intactly borrow the methodologies of branding in marketing to study the destination branding (e.g. Cai, 2002; Prebensen, 2007; Woodside et al., 2007).

When traveling tourists are placing themselves in the midst of the destination, which shows that destination brand is quite different from the normal consumption brand. Thus, it is more justifiable and more appropriate to examine the destination brand from the holistic brand conception view.

2.1 Static Meaning of Positioning
Positioning theory originated from the criticism of the fact that the information that advertisements offer is disordered and confused for the customers (Trout, 1969). To date, there are two kinds of positioning definitions, the dynamic meaning and the static meaning.

The dynamic view considers positioning as an activity and process. Accordingly, positioning is the process that the marketers try to build certain image or unique identity in the mind of the customers of the target market (Trout, Rivkin, 1996), or the process that the firm or the product takes shape of differences from the rival’s (Domingo, 1988). Dynamic positioning is a process of communication with the customers (Park, 1986).

The static view considers positioning a state or result. Accordingly, positioning is customer’s whole perception about the firm or the product or the service in contrast with the rival’s and the firm can affect the perception (David, 1996). And brand positioning means the brand concept understanding by the
brand owner (Sengupta, 1990; Joachimsthaler & Aaker, 1997), and also means the customer understands of the brand, including the understanding in terms of function and non-function (Park, 1986; Aaker, 1996).

As stated above, the static positioning meaning is the result or content of the dynamic positioning. When re-positioning is required, the static meaning is what the dynamic positioning is based on. The static positioning is the status quo of the position of a brand, while the dynamic positioning is the adjustment of the status quo. Positioning starts with offering feasible difference from the rivals (Kotler, 2004), and ends in leaving impressive different images in the customer’s mind (Lilien & Rangaswamy, 2005). So a brand is not isolated but is compared with other brands when customers talk about their brand perception. So a brand’s static positioning is the target customer’s overall perception compared with other brands, and it is what the perceptual map technique is used to measure.

3 Methods

3.1 Perceptual Map Technique Selection
Perceptual map is a plane figure which simply and clearly describes what customers are aware of a brand. Since the positioning theory has been put forward for 40 years, perceptual map is one of the most important contributions in the field of marketing research. Although the way that perceptual map oversimplifies the complicated marketing structure will obstruct making optimal strategy, it does offer important information from consumers’ perspective about the changes in competition, the status quo of positioning and their contributing factors, which are critical basis for re-positioning. There are three kinds of positioning maps: perceptual map, preference map, and comprehensive map. There are three main techniques in each kind of map drawing: perceptual map drawing based on attribute data, perceptual map drawing based on similarity data, and comprehensive map based on customers’ perception and preference data. When there are differences among the brand’s or product’ attributes that customers are not difficult to understand and assess, the perceptual map drawing technique based on attribute data is especially effective. Compared with other positioning map drawing techniques, the perceptual map based on attribute data is more contributive to identifying the main dimensions of the attributes. Additionally, even when the sample number of brand or product that customers perceive is very small, the perceptual map can still be successfully drawn based on the attribute data. These advantages meet the needs of this study. So this paper adopts the technique based on the attribute data to draw the perceptual map.

The perceptual map analysis based the attribute data includes several main step: (a) to select a group of brands and define their main attributes, (b) to gather attribute data, (c) to select the method of drawing perceptual positioning map, usually to select the factors analysis Method, (d) to explain the result of the factors analysis (Lilien & Rangaswamy, 2005).

3.2 Destination Brand Attributes of Shaoxing
Wang (2006) indicated four kinds of attributes of a destination brand: (a) aesthetic attributes (including four sub-attributes: pleasure, rareness, uniqueness, and intactness), (b) entertainment attributes (including four sub-attributes: participation, appropriateness, scale, and supporting facilities), (c) cultural attributes (including four sub-attributes: history, science, arts, and celebrities), (d) economy attributes (including five sub-attributes: economic situation, economic latent value, accessibility, popularity, and environment). A destination brand study on Jiuzhaigou of China suggests that destination brand attributes can be divided into three aspects: (a) resource value and cultural environment (including seven factors such as traffic, popularity, and so on), (b) hospitality services (including six factors such as price, accommodation, and so on), (c) natural tourism resources and environment (including five factors such as ecology and so on) (Wu, et al, 2009). Based on both these literatures and a focus group discussion with Shaoxing University students, this study obtained seven destination brand attributes of
Shaoxing City: natural landscape, historical culture, the number of scenic spots, the scale of the scenic spots, supporting facilities (such accommodation and traffic), price level, and popularity.

3.3 Data Collection
A questionnaire is designed to investigate Shaoxing City’s local university student’s perception of the seven attributes as stated above, where the Likert 5-point scale is adopted with 1-5 respectively meaning strong disagreement, some disagreement, uncertainty, some agreement, and strong agreement. Five Shaoxing’s neighboring cities are chosen as its rival destination brands: Hangzhou, Ningbo, Shanghai, Wenzhou, and Jiaxing. Seven item are included in the questionnaire as the following: (1) the natural landscape of the city is overall good, (2) this city’s historical scenic spots generally are rich in the educational value, (3) there are many scenic spots in this city for me to visit, (4) in this city, the scale of scenic spots are usually very large, (5) this city’s accommodation, traffic and other supporting facilities are generally very good, (6) the price of the admission tickets or the retailing price in this city is quite acceptable, (7) this city is very famous. In May of 2009, 300 questionnaires were sent out to the local university students in Shaoxing City, and 209 valid questionnaires were acquired.

4 Results
Table 4-1 is the mean value of the seven attributes of the six cities. Data analysis shows that the two variables natural landscape and price level are not correlative enough with other variables, so only five variables are used in the factors analysis: historical culture, number of scenic spots, scale of scenic spots, supporting facilities, and popularity. Four steps of the factors analysis (Song, Xie, He, 2008) were taken as the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shaoxing</th>
<th>Hangzhou</th>
<th>Ningbo</th>
<th>Shanghai</th>
<th>Wenzhou</th>
<th>Jiaxing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural landscape</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>3.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Culture</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>3.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of scenic spots</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>3.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scale of scenic spots</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>3.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Facilities</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price level</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>popularity</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) Check whether the five variables are fit to do the factors analysis. KMO value is 0.495, close to 0.6, which means maybe it is not appropriate to do the factors analysis. But the Bartlett test of sphericity shows Asymp. Sig=0.03, which means the five variables are correlative, and they deserve the factors analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4-2</th>
<th>Rotated Factor Matrix</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comprehensive function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical culture</td>
<td>0.106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of scenic spots</td>
<td>0.847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale of scenic spots</td>
<td>0.974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting facilities</td>
<td>0.936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popularity</td>
<td>0.957</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(2) Formulate the main factor variables. Based on Table 4-2 Rotated Factor Matrix, two new main factors are formulated, namely, Comprehensive function, which is strongly correlated with four original variables (number of scenic spots, scale of scenic spots, supporting facilities, and popularity), and Historical culture, which is the same as the original variable historical culture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4-3 Values of the two main attributes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaoxing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hangzhou</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ningbo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shanghai</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wenzhou</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jiaxing</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(3) Rotate factors to make them more interpretable. The two factors extracted from the original five factors, shown in Table 4-2, can interpret 97.629% of the original information.

(4) Calculate the value of the two main attributes and then draw the scatter diagram. Through the factors analysis the values of the two main attributes are acquired as shown in Table 4-3. Then in Figure 4-1 the scatter diagram of the two main attributes is draw with SPSS, which is also the perceptual map.

Figure 4-1 Local university student's perceptual map of Shaoxing and its neighboring cities

(4) Calculate the value of the two main attributes and then draw the scatter diagram. Through the factors analysis the values of the two main attributes are acquired as shown in Table 4-3. Then in Figure 4-1 the scatter diagram of the two main attributes is draw with SPSS, which is also the perceptual map.

5 Conclusion and Discussions
Analysis based on mean value of the seven attributes of the six cities in Table 4-1 shows what is in the mind of the local university students of Shaoxing: in terms of the attribute of natural landscape, Shaoxing is quite weaker than Hangzhou, but almost at the same level of other neighboring cities. As for the price level, all the six cities are almost the same.

The position of Shaoxing in the perceptual map indicates that in the mind of its local university students, Shaoxing takes an outstanding advantage over its neighboring five cities, lightly stronger than Hangzhou, but far ahead of Wenzhou, Jiaxing, Ningbo, and Shanghai. In terms of Comprehensive function, Shaoxing is far lagging behind Hangzhou and Shanghai, which means that its local university students feel that Shaoxing’s numbers of scenic spots, scale of scenic spots, supporting facilities, and popularity is very inferior to those of Shanghai and Hangzhou.

The results and conclusions of this study by and large give explanatory notes to Shaoxing’s local university students’ touring inclination: although Shaoxing is a historical and cultural famous city in China, but its number of scenic spots, its scale of scenic spots, its supporting facilities, its natural landscapes, and so on can not satisfy their needs; while the price level in Shaoxing is almost the same as its neighboring cities, its local university students often travel to Hangzhou or Shanghai at the weekend or during the summer or winter holidays. And also because of its shortage in number of scenic spots, scale of scenic spots, supporting facilities, and natural landscapes, when non-local tourists come to Shaoxing they often spend very short period of time in Shaoxing.

This study focuses on the local university students of Shaoxing, so the conclusion is only applicable to Shaoxing local young student tourists. But thanks to the internet and other factors, nowadays information dissemination among cities is very fast. Youth students are familiar with the information dissemination tools such as internet, so this study’s conclusion is representative of certain significance, but it can not take the place of examinations over a much larger area.

References


