

# Factors Affecting Brand Equity of Tourism Destination Image in Zhejiang: Consumer Trust as a Moderator

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**Abstract**—This study explores the factors that influence the brand equity of Zhejiang tourism destinations, as well as the role of tourist trust and brand experience. The results show that improving food image, destination image, service quality and transportation convenience can help enhance brand equity, while cultivating tourist trust and providing memorable experiences can further enhance brand equity. These findings have practical guiding significance for the promotion and management of tourism destinations.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is no longer a luxury in today's world, but has become an important part of the global economy. Rapid advances in technology and communications have greatly contributed to the booming tourism industry, which has led to more and more people traveling to various destinations, whether for sightseeing, leisure or other purposes. This development trend has a profound impact on the economic structure. Tourism is not just an economic activity, but has become an important engine of economic and social development, as well as an important source of income for millions of people (UNWTO, 2023).

In the competitive tourism market, the competitiveness of the tourism industry depends on the unique experiences it provides. Different destinations compete to create a variety of unique and memorable experiences in order to attract tourists. These experiences include not only sightseeing or leisure activities, but also the overall impression of tourists on the destination. Therefore, shaping the brand image of the destination has become crucial. Stakeholders such as politicians, marketers and local businesses need to accurately understand these factors to formulate effective policies to attract and delight tourists. Insufficient understanding may lead to inefficient marketing and misallocation of resources, ultimately hindering the potential of the tourism industry. In addition, the decline in tourist satisfaction may also have a negative impact on repeat visits and word-of-mouth communication.

To explore these issues in depth, this study will focus on several key factors. First, we will explore the impact of food image on the brand equity of tourism destinations in Zhejiang Province and the role of destination image. Secondly, we will analyze the impact of accommodation quality and

transportation convenience on destination brand value. In addition, we will examine the role of tourist trust and brand experience in these relationships. By conducting an in-depth analysis of these factors, we aim to provide valuable insights into the dynamics of destination brands and contribute to the broader field of tourism research.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Destination Image Theory

Destination Image Theory is a fundamental concept in tourism research that focuses on the perceptions and mental pictures that potential tourists hold about a particular destination. These perceptions are influenced by a variety of factors including cultural representations, personal experiences, and promotional materials, and they play a crucial role in the decision-making process of travelers (Huang, Chang & Chang, 2021). The theory posits that destination image consists of two main components, which are cognitive image, which refers to beliefs and knowledge about the destination, and affective image, which relates to feelings and emotions associated with the destination (Stylidis, 2022).

### 2.2 Service Quality Model (SERVQUAL)

The Service Quality Model, commonly known as SERVQUAL, was developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry in 1988, aiming to assess customers' perceived service quality by evaluating the disparity between their expectations and evaluations of tangible service delivery (Parasuraman et al., 1988). This widely recognized model encompasses five dimensions relevant to the tourism and hospitality sector. The dimensions proposed by SERVQUAL are Tangibles, which involve the physical evidence of service quality such as facilities and personnel appearance; Reliability, focusing on the consistency and dependability of service delivery; Responsiveness, pertaining to the prompt assistance and addressing of customers' needs; Assurance, emphasizing the competence, courtesy, credibility, and reliability of service providers; and Empathy, reflecting the ability to understand and cater to customers' unique needs (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Shi & Shang, 2020).

### 2.3 Trust Theory

The Trust Theory, as applied in the field of tourism research, encompasses a comprehensive analysis of the influence exerted by trust on several aspects of visitors' experiences and decision-making processes. This includes the selection of a location, the choice of lodging, and the exploration of local culinary offerings. Trust has a pivotal role in mitigating uncertainty, risk perception, and cognitive burden, hence cultivating positive attitudes and behaviors (Williams & Baláz, 2021). At its core, trust refers to the confidence and belief that individuals place in a particular entity or person. In tourism, this entity could be a destination, a hotel, a tour operator, or any other service provider. Trust is a critical factor in tourism because it can mitigate the perceived risk associated with travel decisions.

### 2.4 Brand Experience Theory

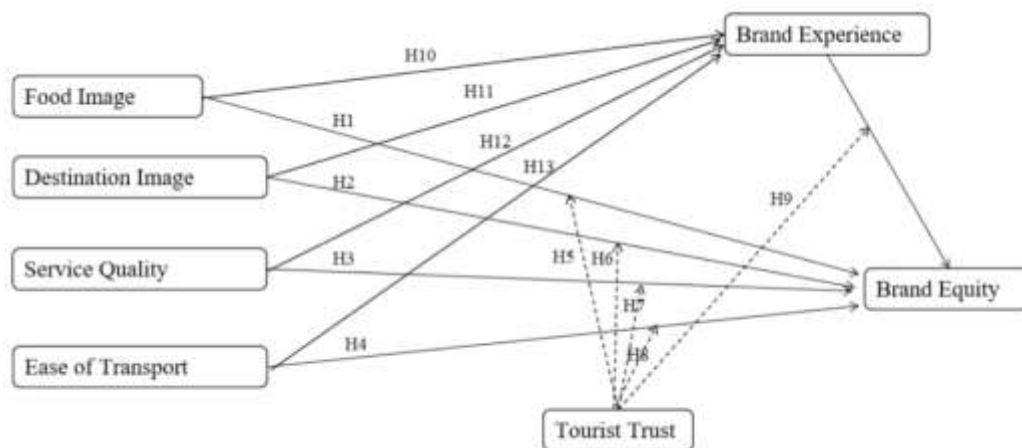
Brand Experience Theory provides a comprehensive framework for comprehending the many ways in which consumers engage with a brand, extending beyond mere product consumption. This theory encompasses several dimensions, including sensory, emotive, intellectual, and behavioral aspects, to give a holistic view of consumer-brand

interactions. The earliest articulation of this notion was presented by Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello in 2009.

The selection of theoretical frameworks in research is a critical decision that shapes the entire study design and interpretation of results. In this case, the choice of integrating Destination Image Theory, SERVQUAL, Trust Theory, and Brand Experience Theory stems from their collective ability to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing tourists' perceptions, behaviors, and experiences in the context of tourism destination brand equity.

### III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A conceptual framework is a visual or written product that explains the proposed relationships between the factors that are to be explored in the study. For this research, the framework would revolve around the independent variables (food image, destination image, service quality, and ease of transport), the moderating variable (tourist trust), the mediating variable (brand experience), and the dependent variable (brand equity).



### IV. GENERALIZATION OF THE MAIN STATEMENTS

The literature provides a comprehensive understanding of how brand experience acts as a critical mediator between various aspects of the tourist offering and brand equity. The review highlights the importance of creating favorable brand experiences through the enhancement of food image, destination image, accommodation service quality, and ease of transport. Each factor independently and collectively influences brand equity, with the relationship being nuanced by the level of tourist trust. Furthermore, the synergistic effect of these variables through the lens of brand experience suggests a need for integrated marketing strategies that promote not only the tangible aspects of the tourism product but also the emotional and cognitive engagement of tourists. In essence, brand equity in the tourism sector is a multifaceted construct that demands a strategic approach in which experience sits at the heart of the tourist offering. Future

research could empirically test the proposed conceptual framework to validate the relationships and the moderating effect of tourist trust on these relationships. As the tourism market evolves, so too must the understanding of how each interaction a tourist has with the destination contributes to the overall perception of the brand and, ultimately, the destination's success in a global market.

### V. RESULT

In summary, the analysis of these four hypotheses reveals that food image, destination image, service quality, ease of transport appear to play a statistically significant affect the brand equity in the context of Zhejiang as a tourist destination.

In summary, the analysis of these five hypotheses reveals that tourist trust does not appear to play a statistically significant moderating role in any of the relationships between the independent variables (food image, destination image, service quality, ease of transport, brand experience) and brand

equity in the context of Zhejiang as a tourist destination. These findings suggest that while tourist trust is an important factor in the tourism industry, it may not significantly influence the way these specific factors impact the overall brand equity of

Zhejiang as a destination. Further research and exploration into the role of tourist trust in other aspects of tourism and destination management may yield valuable insights.

TABLE 1. Path Coefficient, T-statistic (direct relationship)

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ( O/STDEV )	Beta	P values
FI -> DBE	0.118	0.113	0.040	2.957	0.129	0.003
DI -> DBE	0.127	0.124	0.047	2.723	0.143	0.006
SQ -> DBE	0.122	0.120	0.043	2.854	0.126	0.004
EOT -> DBE	0.182	0.178	0.043	4.261	0.186	0.000

TABLE 2. Path coefficient for Moderating Relationship

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	P Values
FI -> TT -> DBE	0.044	0.044	0.016	2.818	0.005
DI -> TT -> DBE	0.042	0.043	0.016	2.702	0.007
SQ -> TT -> DBE	0.029	0.030	0.013	2.184	0.029
EOT -> TT -> DBE	0.046	0.046	0.016	2.921	0.004
TT x BE -> DBE	-0.021	-0.025	0.035	0.612	0.541

TABLE 3. Path coefficient for Mediation Relationship

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	P Values
FI -> BE -> DBE	0.030	0.030	0.012	2.481	0.013
DI -> BE -> DBE	0.032	0.031	0.013	2.496	0.013
SQ -> BE -> DBE	0.027	0.026	0.011	2.418	0.016
EOT -> BE -> DBE	0.030	0.029	0.012	2.495	0.013

In summary, the analysis of these four hypotheses reveals that brand experience (BE) plays a statistically significant mediating role in the relationships between the respective independent variables (destination image, ease of transport, service quality, food image) and brand equity (DBE) in the context of Zhejiang as a tourist destination. These findings

highlight the importance of brand experience as a mediator in enhancing the impact of these factors on brand equity. Understanding these mediating mechanisms can provide valuable insights for destination management and marketing strategies in Zhejiang and similar tourist destinations.

Hypothesis	Statement	Finding
H1	The food image has a significant positive impact on the brand equity of Zhejiang as a tourist destination.	Supported
H2	The destination image has a significant positive influence on the brand equity of Zhejiang as a tourist destination.	Supported
H3	The service quality has a significant positive role in determining the brand equity of Zhejiang as a tourist destination.	Supported
H4	The ease of transport has a significant positive influence on the brand equity of Zhejiang as a tourist destination.	Supported
H5	Tourist trust significantly moderates the relationship between the food image and the brand equity of Zhejiang as a tourist destination.	Supported
H6	Tourist trust significantly moderates the relationship between the destination image and the brand equity of Zhejiang as a tourist destination.	Supported
H7	Tourist trust significantly moderates the relationship between the service quality and the brand equity of Zhejiang as a tourist destination.	Supported
H8	Tourist trust significantly moderates the relationship between the ease of transport and the brand equity of Zhejiang as a tourist destination.	Supported
H9	Tourist trust significantly moderates the relationship between the brand experience and the brand equity of Zhejiang as a tourist destination.	Not Supported
H10	Brand experience significantly mediates the relationship between the food image and the brand equity of Zhejiang as a tourist destination.	Supported
H11	Brand experience significantly mediates the relationship between the destination image and the brand equity of Zhejiang as a tourist destination.	Supported
H12	Brand experience significantly mediates the relationship between the service quality and the brand equity of Zhejiang as a tourist destination.	Supported
H13	Brand experience significantly mediates the relationship between the ease of transport and the brand equity of Zhejiang as a tourist destination.	Supported

In summary, this study provides valuable insights into the factors influencing the brand equity of Zhejiang as a tourist destination. While some hypotheses regarding the moderating role of tourist trust were supported, the mediating role of brand experience in shaping brand equity was confirmed. These findings hold practical significance for destination management and marketing strategies in Zhejiang and similar

tourist destinations, emphasizing the importance of enhancing destination image, service quality, and accessibility to create positive brand experiences for tourists. Further research could delve into the complexity of destination brand trust and explore the impact of brand experience on brand equity.

## VI. SUGGESTIONS

Based on research findings and analysis, the following suggestions are proposed to enhance tourism destination brand strategies and improve brand assets:

Firstly, managers should focus on improving the quality of service and experience. Investing in infrastructure, training, and technology to improve accommodation, transportation, catering, and entertainment services can enhance tourist satisfaction, reputation, and revisit rates, and enhance brand assets.

Secondly, marketers should utilize digital technology to enhance brand communication strategies. Establish a strong online presence, showcase destination characteristics through social media, websites, and applications, interact with tourists in real-time, convey unique value propositions, cultivate emotional connections, and enhance brand loyalty.

In addition, brand efforts should prioritize cultivating tourist trust. Implement security measures, provide transparent information, actively respond to tourist concerns, establish trust relationships, improve satisfaction and brand assets.

Finally, stakeholders should collaborate to develop a unified brand strategy that highlights the unique identity of the destination. By collaborating to create eye-catching brand narratives and experiences, reflecting cultural heritage, natural resources, and uniqueness, attracting target audiences, and enhancing brand assets.

In summary, the above suggestions aim to provide action strategies to enhance destination brands and improve brand assets. However, effective brand building is a continuous process that requires constant adjustment and improvement to meet market demand.