

The Impact of Destination Brand Globalization and Localization on Brand Premium — A Case Study of Global Theme Parks

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Abstract

Based on signaling theory, this study introduces global brand research into the tourism field to explore the underlying mechanisms through which perceived globalness and perceived localness of destination brands influence brand premium. Empirical results show that perceived globalness of a brand can directly and positively affect brand premium, as well as indirectly influence brand premium through perceived quality value and social value. In contrast, perceived localness only affects brand premium indirectly through perceived social value.

Keywords: perceived globalness of destination brand, perceived localness of destination brand, perceived brand value, brand premium

1. Introduction

With the continuous advancement of globalization, global brands have penetrated an increasing number of sectors. In the tourism industry, global theme parks such as Disney and Universal Studios have recently opened in mainland China, attracting significant attention from domestic tourists. The theme park refers to a staged leisure and entertainment space created around a specific theme, and it belongs to the leisure and entertainment industry [1]. The global theme park industry has developed for nearly 70 years since the opening of Disneyland in the United States in July 1955.

Due to the positive role of theme parks in promoting consumption, transforming economic development models, and driving urban development, they have attracted widespread attention from urban scholars, geographers, and sociologists since the 1990s[2,3]. However, in the field of branding, there has been relatively little research on global theme park brands as tourism destination brands. In recent years, the globalization and diversification of theme parks have become increasingly prominent, and issues such as cross-cultural adaptation of theme parks are in urgent need of investigation [1].

Based on this, this paper introduces global brand equity research into the tourism field to explore the mechanisms through which destination brand equity influences tourist consumption behavior. Specifically, it examines how tourists' perceptions of the globalness and localness of destination brands affect their willingness to pay a premium. Guided by signaling theory, this study introduces perceived brand value of the destination as a mediator to explore how destination brand equity influences brand premium. This research not only expands the scope of destination branding studies but also provides insights and references for tourism authorities in developing destination brands.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Formulation

2.1 Perceived Globalness and Perceived Localness of Destination Brands

The concept of global consumer culture positioning strategy was first proposed by Alden et al., who argued that global brands either adopt a shared global culture or associate with local culture as part of their global brand strategy planning[4]. Based on this, scholars introduced the constructs of perceived brand globalness and perceived brand localness (also referred to as local icon value) from the consumer cognitive perspective, and demonstrated that both constructs can effectively contribute to building global brand equity[5]. Perceived brand globalness refers to consumers' perception that a brand operates across various countries and regions, or uses global symbols in its marketing communications. In contrast, perceived brand localness refers to the extent to which consumers perceive a brand to be connected to and representative of local culture[6]. These two constructs coexist and are not mutually exclusive or oppositional.

While research on globalization and localization is relatively mature and well-established in the field of branding, it remains limited in the tourism domain. Kayak and Simoni proposed different types of destination images, such as internationalized and localized images[7]. They conceptualized and measured a destination's globalized image based on the number of countries from which tourists have visited the destination. From the perspective of tourist perception, they defined perceived brand globalness of a destination as the extent to which tourists believe the destination is attractive to visitors from around the world. Furthermore, destination brand globalization was found to strengthen the positive effect of tourists perceived value on brand loyalty[8].

Based on the above, and by integrating studies on corporate brand globalization with the characteristics of destination brands, perceived globalness of a destination brand can be defined as the extent to which tourists perceive the destination as globally well-known and attractive to tourists worldwide. Meanwhile, the local icon value of a destination brand can be viewed as the degree to which tourists perceive the destination as being associated with local culture and characterized by local features in various aspects.

2.2 The Impact of Perceived Globalness and Perceived Localness of Destination Brands on Brand Premium

Brand premium not only reflects the appeal of a brand but also serves as a driving force for enhancing brand equity and marketing efficiency. As the fundamental driving force and ultimate goal of destination branding, destination brand premium refers to a destination's superior ability to set premium prices and its greater resilience to market risks compared to other destination brands[9,10]. It is crucial for improving the profitability of tourism destinations and reinforcing their brand equity[11]. In studies examining the relationship between brand equity and brand premium, some scholars argue that brand premium is one of the outcomes of brand equity, and that different aspects of brand equity influence consumers' brand premium willingness [12]. Building on these insights, this study posits that perceived globalness and perceived localness of destination brands—two important dimensions of global brand equity—also affect tourists' brand premium willingness. Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Perceived brand globalness of a destination has a positive effect on brand premium.

H2: Perceived brand localness of a destination has a positive effect on brand premium.

2.3 The Mediating Role of Perceived Brand Value of Destinations

Value has a significant influence on consumers' purchase intentions[13], as it reflects the difference between the total benefits consumers gain from a product or service and the total costs they incur to obtain it[14]. As a key factor in branding, value has been examined by scholars from both macro and micro perspectives. At the macro level, value is often considered from the viewpoint of investors and shareholders[15], whereas at the micro level, it is primarily explored from the consumer perspective, representing outcomes or behavioral intentions.

Given that consumer-based brand equity is critical to brand value[16], scholars emphasize that brand value should be understood from the consumer perspective—namely, perceived brand value—in order to grasp how consumers interpret and process brand-related information, which in turn influences their purchase decisions, evaluations, and satisfaction[17]. In the tourism field, perceived brand value is often measured using multidimensional approaches [18].

Drawing on signaling theory and the associative network memory model, when market information is incomplete, companies use attribute-based signals to convey information about their characteristics in order to compensate for the lack of market information. Consumers rely on the brand-related information conveyed by companies to support their purchasing decisions. Perceived globalness and localness of a brand serve as such signals, through which firms communicate brand-related information[6], thereby indirectly influencing consumer behavioral intentions. In this context of information asymmetry, signal transmission plays a crucial role in destination promotion. By conveying signals of brand value through perceived globalness and localness, destination brands influence tourists' premium payment behavior.

2.3.1 Perceived Quality Value

Perceived quality value is regarded as the core dimension of overall perceived brand value, representing the performance and quality attributes of a brand[19]. The concept of perceived brand globalness was first introduced by Steenkamp et al., who demonstrated that it positively influences customers' purchase decisions by enhancing perceptions of brand quality and prestige[5]. Furthermore, tourism researchers have regarded cities as destination brands, with quality value defined as visitors' assessment of a city's ability to provide infrastructure and tourist attractions[20]. Scholars also found that the quality value of a destination brand directly impacts tourist loyalty [21], and this effect is mediated by tourist satisfaction[22].

Based on these findings, this study posits that perceived brand globalness, as a type of signal, positively influences the perceived quality value of a destination brand, thereby increasing tourists' brand premium willingness. As a result, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: The perceived globalness of a destination brand enhances tourists' brand premium willingness through its positive impact on perceived quality value.

2.3.2 Perceived Social Value

Social value represents the consumer-perceived utility derived from a product's linkage to particular social reference groups[23]. Specifically, consumers seek social approval from their reference groups by consuming certain products or services. At the same time, consumers recognize and develop attachment to brands based on their sociocultural background, reference groups, and personal identity. For example, the opinions of celebrities, family, and friends can shape an individual's perception of brand value[24].

In the context of tourism, the creation of social value primarily occurs through increased interactions and relationships with other tourists and experienced tour operators, as well as through the added value of travel experiences—such as prestige and special recognition[25]. Tourists seek to enhance their reputation within social groups in various ways, thereby creating their own social value. According to bicultural identity theory, consumers' perception of brand globalization is influenced by their identification with global citizenship. In pursuit of recognition within global cultural groups, they are more likely to exhibit a willingness to pay a brand premium. Similarly, perceptions of brand localization are shaped by identification with national citizenship, which may lead to the same willingness. Based on the above, we propose the following hypotheses:

H4: The perceived globalness of a destination brand increases tourists' brand premium willingness through its positive impact on perceived social value.

H5: The perceived localness of a destination brand increases tourists' brand premium willingness through its positive impact on perceived social value.

3. Method

3.1 Measures and Covariates

This study takes Shanghai Disney Resort in China as the research subject of a destination brand. The questionnaire consists of the following sections: brand globalness, brand localness; destination brand value (including quality value and social value); brand premium; and demographic information. Perceived brand localness and globalness are measured using Steenkamp et al.'s scale [5]. Quality value is measured with reference to the works of Sweeney and Soutar [26], Tsai[27], and Luo et al. [8]. Social value is adapted from Vázquez et al. [28] and Luo et al. [8], while brand premium measurement follows Netemeyer et al.'s established scale [29].

The 5-point Likert scale is used to measure each concept, and the possible answers are "strongly disagree," "disagree," "neutral," "agree," and "strongly agree." Demographic information of respondents includes gender, age, occupation, monthly income, and level of education.

3.2 Data Collection and Sample Description

The survey was primarily conducted online through a questionnaire distributed via the Wenjuanxing platform. We distributed 396 surveys, with 314 valid responses retained for analysis (effective response rate = 79.29%).

Among the respondents, the gender distribution was relatively balanced, with males accounting for 49.0% and females for 51.0%. In terms of age, the majority were young adults aged 18 to 44, representing 65.6% of the total sample. The occupational distribution was diverse, with freelancers, employees of private enterprises, and students accounting for 19.1%, 18.2%, and 14.3%, respectively. Regarding household income, 35.03% and 31.21% of households were in the lower-middle and upper-middle income ranges, respectively. As for education level, respondents were predominantly at the associate or bachelor's degree level, representing 72.61% of the total sample.

3.3 Data Analysis

We used AMOS 26.0 and SPSS 26.0 for statistical analysis. First, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted on the data. Next, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed on the overall measurement model to examine the relationships between measurement items and latent variables, and to evaluate the model's goodness-of-fit, reliability, and validity. Finally, structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to test the hypotheses and examine the structural relationships among brand globalness, brand localness, perceived quality value, perceived social value, and WTP within destination branding.

4. Results

4.1 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

In order to identify the scale's underlying dimensions, an exploratory factor analysis was performed. We employed principal component analysis, retaining factors with eigenvalues exceeding 1 and applying varimax rotation to enhance interpretability. Measurement items with factor loadings below 0.4 were removed to refine the structure of the scale. The results indicated that two items under perceived quality value—"The overall quality of Disneyland is good" and "The number of tourists received by Disneyland is reasonable"—were excluded due to low standardized factor loadings.

4.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between measurement items and the corresponding latent variables. The following were the model fit indices: $\chi^2/df = 2.030$, RMSEA = 0.057, CFI = 0.935, IFI = 0.936, and TLI = 0.925—all exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.9. The GFI was 0.898, which is close to 0.9. These findings imply a satisfactory fit for the measurement model as a whole.

As shown in Table 1, the composite reliability (CR) scores for all the underlying constructs fell between 0.818 and 0.846, while the average variance extracted (AVE) values varied from 0.522 to 0.599. Both sets of figures comfortably surpass the accepted benchmarks of 0.7 for CR and 0.5 for AVE, indicating solid measurement consistency and validity. This indicates that the measurement model has satisfactory reliability. At the 1% level, all corresponding t-values were significant, and the standardized factor loadings for every item ranged from 0.527 to 0.835. Furthermore, the AVE for each latent variable exceeded the squared correlations among any pair of constructs, indicating strong discriminant validity.

Base on the above, the scale demonstrates strong validity and reliability, supporting its use in subsequent structural equation modeling analysis.

Table 1. Reliability and Validity Test of the Overall Measurement Model

Construct	Measurement Items	Standardized factor loading	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Composite Reliability (CR)
Perceived Globalness of Destination Brand	I consider Disneyland to be a global brand	0.739	0.536	0.818
	I believe tourists from other countries and regions also visit Disneyland	0.815		
	I can also visit Disneyland in other countries or places	0.809		
	I think Disneyland has high global recognition	0.527		
Perceived Localness of Destination Brand	I think Shanghai Disneyland's architecture incorporates Chinese style.	0.668	0.522	0.812
	I think Shanghai Disneyland's shows and programs feature Chinese characteristics.	0.625		
	I think the food at Shanghai Disneyland has Chinese flavors.	0.770		
	I think Shanghai Disneyland's souvenirs incorporate Chinese elements.	0.812		
Perceived Quality Value	Disneyland offers a wide variety of rides and activities.	0.688	0.528	0.886
	Disneyland's facilities are safe.	0.587		
	Disneyland's souvenirs are distinctive.	0.699		
	Disneyland has well-maintained public hygiene facilities (e.g., toilets, trash bins).	0.798		
	Disneyland has a comprehensive signage system.	0.812		
	Internal transportation within Disneyland is convenient.	0.708		
	Disneyland staff provide professional service.	0.770		

Perceived Social Value	Visiting Disneyland made me feel socially recognized by others.	0.704	0.595	0.854
	Visiting Disneyland made me feel accepted by others.	0.792		
	Visiting Disneyland improved others' perceptions of me.	0.835		
	Visiting Disneyland left a deep impression on others.	0.749		
Brand Premium	I would choose other similar brands only if Disneyland's fees increased significantly.	0.785	0.599	0.818
	Compared to other theme park brands, I would be willing to pay more for Disneyland.	0.733		
	I would be willing to pay more for tourism products and services associated with Disneyland.	0.803		

4.3 Structural Equation Modeling Analysis

4.3.1 Path Analysis

Based on the above confirmatory factor analysis, the latent variables were entered into the theoretical model to investigate the causal linkages between them and to examine the proposed hypotheses. The results indicated that the structural equation model suited the data well overall ($\chi^2/df = 1.861$, RMSEA = 0.052, AGFI = 0.907, CFI = 0.946, IFI = 0.928). As shown in Figure 1, perceived globalness positively affected brand premium, supporting H1. However, the effect of perceived localness of the destination brand on brand premium was not significant. This might be because, in the process of brand localization, companies only superficially incorporate symbolic Chinese elements without truly delving into the essence of Chinese culture, failing to achieve deep integration and exchange with local culture. As a result, consumers may not genuinely accept such superficial localization. Nevertheless, based on rational decision-making theory, when brand localization strategies or activities provide consumers with opportunities to express their identity within a group or gain social recognition, these efforts can still influence consumer attitudes.

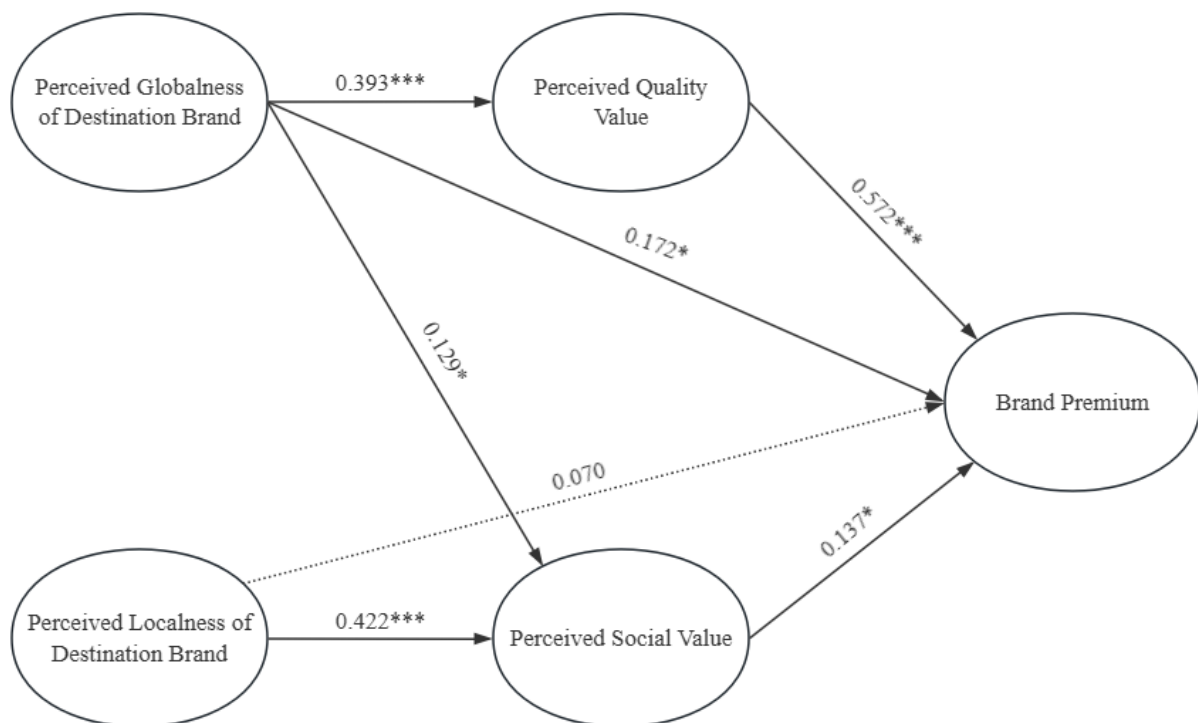


Figure 1. Structural Equation Model

4.3.2 Mediation Analysis

This study used the PROCESS macro in SPSS to test the mediating effects, employing bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. Brand social value and perceived brand quality were examined as mediating factors. First, we investigated the role that perceived quality and social value play as mediators in the link between destination brand globalness and brand premium. As shown in Table 2, the 95% confidence intervals (BootLLCI and BootULCI) for both perceived quality value and perceived social value did not include zero. The mediation effect values were 0.397 and 0.085, respectively, with the mediating effect of quality value being greater than that of social value. Therefore, perceived quality value and perceived social value both serve as mediators in the link between perceived globalness and brand premium, providing support for Hypotheses H3 and H4.

Next, the mediating effect of perceived social value on the relationship between perceived localness of the destination brand and brand premium was tested. As shown in Table 3, the 95% confidence interval for perceived social value did not include zero, and the mediation effect value was 0.123. Thus, perceived social value mediates the relationship between perceived localness and brand premium, supporting Hypothesis H5.

Table 2. Mediation Effect Analysis 1

Effect Type	Category	Effect Size	Boot SE	BootL LCI	BootU LCI	Proportion of Total Effect
Mediation Effect	TOTAL	0.482	0.048	0.389	0.576	70.86%
	Perceived Quality Value	0.397	0.049	0.298	0.493	58.34%
	Perceived Social Value	0.085	0.038	0.013	0.160	12.51%
Comparison of Mediation Effect	Quality - Social	0.312	0.074	0.163	0.454	
Direct Effect	Perceived Globalness of Destination Brand	0.198	0.047	0.106	0.291	29.13%
Total Effect		0.681	0.023	0.635	0.726	

Table 3. Mediation Effect Analysis 2

Effect Type	Category	Effect Size	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI	Proportion of Total Effect
Mediation Effect	Perceived Social Value	0.123	0.029	0.069	0.183	47.97%
Direct Effect	Perceived Localness of Destination Brand	0.133	0.059	0.017	0.250	52.03%
Total Effect		0.256	0.057	0.143	0.369	

5. Conclusions and Implications

5.1 Research Conclusions

Firstly, this study introduces research on brand globalization into the field of tourism. The results of this study demonstrate that the perceived globalness of a destination brand has a positive effect on consumers' premium price willingness. However, the positive effect of perceived localness on brand premium willingness is not significant. Our results differ from existing research on corporate brands[24], and we suggest that it results from the distinctive characteristics of destination brands.

Secondly, this study is the first to examine perceived globalness and perceived localness of destination brands as antecedent variables, introducing perceived value and perceived social value as mediating variables to investigate the structural relationships among these constructs. The results show that perceived destination brand globalness indirectly enhances premium payment willingness through perceived quality value and social value. While both quality value (58.34%, $\beta=0.397$) and social value (12.51%, $\beta=0.085$) demonstrated significant mediating effects, the magnitude of quality value's mediation was substantially greater. Perceived localness affects consumers' willingness to pay a premium through perceived social value.

The study's findings not only further support the research on the links between brand equity, consumer perceived value, and consumer behavior, but also fill the gap in the literature on brand localization within the context of destination branding, revealing the relationship between the localization of global destination brands and local

tourists' perceived value. Furthermore, this study clearly elucidates how perceived globalness and perceived localness of destination brands influence consumers' premium willingness through perceived quality and social value, thereby comprehensively explaining the mechanism through which global brand equity influences tourist behavior in the domain of tourism.

5.2 Implications

This study provides practical implications for expanding the profitability of tourism destinations and enhancing destination brand equity. On the one hand, when promoting the brand's national image, it is essential to emphasize activities and services that meet international standards in order to enhance the brand's perceived quality. The brand's core value proposition, key product features, and quality commitments should be communicated clearly and consistently across global markets. Such consistency conveys the brand's reliability and professionalism, which are the most direct manifestations of international quality. On the other hand, in terms of brand localization, it is crucial to go beyond the superficial integration of cultural symbols and instead delve deeply into the intrinsic cultural connotations. For example, as China's foremost hometown of overseas Chinese, Jiangmen possesses a rich array of cultural elements associated with its overseas Chinese heritage, many of which have been incorporated into product designs by various brands. However, these cultural elements cover a wide range of categories and convey diverse meanings. Therefore, it is essential to thoroughly explore the value orientations embedded within these elements—such as benevolence, achievement, tradition, and self-transcendence—and ensure that they align with the brand's core values. Only when a brand's values resonate with the intrinsic cultural meanings of the local context can it truly enhance its social value and effectively stimulate consumers' willingness to pay a premium.

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