

World Heritage brand awareness and impact: a study of Canadian and US park visitors' knowledge of and behaviour toward the World Heritage brand.

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Introduction

This presentation reports on findings from a study that was designed to investigate visitors' awareness and recall of the World Heritage (WH) brand and the impact of the WH designation on travellers' decision to travel to several protected areas in southern Alberta, Canada. This study contributes to scholarly dialogue relating to global and iconic brands, as well as brands that are managed and communicated by the public sector, namely conservation agencies. Brands managed by the public sector, particularly international brands have received only moderate attention in the communications and marketing literature, and brands relating to conservation have received even less attention. Parks and protected areas are significant tourist attractions. Parks managers' decisions making regarding the development and management of visitation to parks as well as the visitor experience within parks, and the actions that visitors engage in post-visit must be informed by research; this study contributes to evidence-based management of visitors and potential visitors to WH sites.

Background

Rossiter and Percy (1997) argue that *brand awareness* should be a universal communication objective for any management organization since an individual cannot form an emotional attachment to a brand without it. Brand awareness consists of brand recognition and brand recall (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993; Rossiter & Percy, 1997). *Brand recognition*, according to Keller, is the ability to confirm as having previously seen the brand when given the brand symbol as a cue. Brand awareness is developed by increasing the familiarity of the brand with the visitor (Keller, 1993). *Brand recall* is the ability to remember the brand when given the brand category or some other type of memory cue (Keller, 1993). In the case of the WH symbol, the meaning of the logo is not inherently apparent. Visitors must be taught what the brand mark means by experiencing it linked prominently, consistently and repeatedly with the WH brand name (King, 2010b, Stolton et al., 2012; King et al., 2012). The brand a protected property possesses has the potential to significantly influence the level of visitation to the property (e.g. Weiler & Siedl, 2004; Morgan, 2006; Reinius & Fredman, 2007; Fredman, Friberg, & Emmelin, 2007; King & Prideaux, 2010).

Based on its brand values, WH represents a 'top brand' (Buckley, 2002) or 'elite brand' based on its prestigious brand values (Hall & Piggin, 2003) and potential value as a national tourism asset (Drost, 1996; Shackley, 1998; Hall & Piggin, 2003; Fyall & Radic, 2006; Timothy & Boyd, 2006; Ryan & Silvanto, 2009; Tisdell, 2010). Today, WH is recognized as an international brand (Buckley, 2002; Hall & Piggin, 2003; Fyall & Radic, 2006; Petr, 2009; Ryan & Silvanto, 2009; 2010; King, 2010a, 2011; Marcotte & Bourdeau, 2012; Dewar et al, 2012); however, WH brand recognition appears to vary from country to county (King & Halpenny, 2013; Williams, 2004). This presentation reports data from a study was designed to assess WH brand recognition and awareness amongst Canadian and US park visitors and the role WH designation played in influencing tourists' decision to visit WH sites were data were collected.

Methodology

Visitors to four WH sites located in southern Alberta, Canada were intercepted in July and August 2013; these WH sites were: Waterton Lakes- Glacier International Peace Park, Dinosaur Provincial Park, Head Smashed in Buffalo Jump Provincial Historic Site, and the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Area (which includes Banff, Jasper, and Yoho National Parks). A sample of $n \geq 200$ per park was collected. These WH sites have other designations (e.g., national parks, provincial historic sites), and all are included within larger regional destination branding efforts (i.e., the Canadian Rockies, the Canadian Badlands, Crown of the Continent, the Cowboy Trail). Data was collected using a survey questionnaire administered on Android tables with pen and paper. Survey questions documented respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, length of time spent in park and region, frequency of visitation to park and region, place of residence, motivations for trip, and awareness of heritage values protected by each park. Items and methods from previous studies used to measure how WH designation affects travel decisions were modified for use in a North American context. These include measures of WH symbol recognition and recall (King & Halpenny, 2013; King 2010), visitor's awareness that site has WH designation (King, 2010; Poria et al., 2010), influence of markers or park labels (Wall Reinus & Fredman, 2007) and existence of WH site collectors (King & Prideaux, 2010).

Next steps

Data are currently begin analyzed using univariate and multivariate statistical analysis including the use of independent samples T-tests, factor analysis, cluster analysis and regression analysis. Findings will inform provincial, state and regional destination and attraction marketer's efforts to attract interested clients to their tourism offerings. Results will be used to guide these agencies' expenditures of marketing dollars, relating to the development, positioning and promotion of WH areas and related protected area sites.