PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS TOWARDS ABORIGINAL TOURISM

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Summary

Whilst tourism has been cited as having the potential to provide economic opportunities for remote Aboriginal communities, participation rates of international tourists in Aboriginal tourism activities within Australia have been in decline. A simultaneous drop in visitor numbers to remote destinations has also occurred. To address this research problem, the purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions and attitudes of international tourists towards Aboriginal tourism within Australia. The Aboriginal tourism product range has diversified, offering an array of experiences and accommodation, to meet international tourist needs. Using the consumer-based brand equity framework, this study investigates both the depth and breadth of awareness of the diversified range of products available. Furthermore, it explores international tourists' perceptions of image, quality, value and loyalty. As previous research has identified that remote destinations may be impacted by a number of constraints, further consideration is given to Aboriginal tourism within the context of a remote destination.

An exploratory case study design was implemented with a hybrid sequential mixed methods approach to data collection. Initially, a binary regression model was used to analyse recalibrated international tourist visitor data (n=49568), to identify characteristics which increased the probability of international tourists including a remote destination within their holiday itinerary. Additionally, qualitative thematic analysis of exploratory interviews undertaken with ten tourism stakeholders was performed. The findings of these first two studies were analysed alongside a literature review to identify research questions and measures for the final study. Within the final study, a survey instrument was used with a mix of open and closed

questions, to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of international tourists (n=148).

The study initially developed a profile of remote international tourists by identifying a number of characteristics which increased the probability of an international tourist visiting a remote destination. These included age, travel party composition, participation in activities, travel packages, length of stay and stopovers. A conceptual model for consumer-based brand equity in an Australian Aboriginal tourism context was developed. Only two dimensions, Authenticity and Awareness, had direct relationships with the overall brand equity measure. However, relationships exist between the dimensions with Quality having an indirect relationship with Authenticity mediated by the dimensions of Personality and Value. Furthermore, the study identified that tourist characteristics mediated the relationship between the dimensions and brand equity.

Awareness *per se* was insufficient to increase the likelihood of an international tourist to intend to participate in Aboriginal tourism activities, with only awareness gained at the planning stage of the holiday having a positive influence. Gaps in brand knowledge are identified in the work in relation to brand salience, Authenticity, Value and Quality. Finally, the brand equity of Aboriginal tourism activities was found to increase the likelihood of an international tourist's willingness to participate in a remote destination. As with the previous model, tourist characteristics mediated this relationship.

Overall, this research contributes to both theoretical and methodological literature in addition to offering a number of practical implications in regards to target segmentation, positioning and promotional strategies.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor Philosophy at Flinders University. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorization and consent to carry out this research.

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Janine Ashwell

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my father Jack Ashwell, MBE, who dedicated his life to fighting social injustice.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH THIS THESIS

A- Peer review Journal:

Ashwell, J 2015, 'Going bush? Factors which influence international tourists' decisions to travel to remote Australian destinations', *Tourism Management,* vol. 46**,** pp. 80-83.

B Conference papers:

Ashwell, J 2013, Developing a consumer-based brand equity model in an Aboriginal tourism context. *6th International Colloquium on Tourism and Leisure (ICTL)* Bangkok, Thailand