
A Study on the Effect of Storytelling Marketing on Brand Image, Perceived Quality, and Purchase Intention in Ecotourism

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Abstract

Stories have been broadly applied to traditional marketing, attempting to arouse consumers' affection to present empathy on the characters and plots in the stories and change consumer attitudes to achieve the marketing objective. Stories are easily memorized and would appear consonance. Planned storytelling marketing could create affection and infinite business opportunities as well as infinite value of brand to implant in consumers' mind. From the aspect of storytelling marketing, this study intends to discuss ecotourists' reaction to stories and understand the effect of emotional appeal to ecotourists by delivering external information to ecotourists. General people are distributed and collected the questionnaire on-site. Total 300 copies of questionnaire are distributed, and 282 valid copies are retrieved, with the retrieval rate 94%. The research results show significant effects of type of storytelling marketing on brand image, purchase intention, and perceived quality. According to the results to propose suggestions, it provides indicative reference for ecotourism businesses applying storytelling marketing to promote brand image and enhance consumers' perceived quality and purchase intention.

Keywords: storytelling marketing, brand image, perceived quality, purchase intention

Pan L-Y, Chen K-H (2019) A Study on the Effect of Storytelling Marketing on Brand Image, Perceived Quality, and Purchase Intention in Ecotourism. *Ekoloji* 28(107): 705-712.

INTRODUCTION

"Story" is emphasized in marketing in past years that "storytelling" is concerned in industry and academia as the marketing communication strategy. Stories have been broadly applied to traditional marketing, attempting to arouse consumers' affection to generate empathy on characters and plots in stories and change consumer attitudes to achieve the marketing objective (Ho et al. 2013). Past research on storytelling theory in marketing mostly discussed the effect of stories on readers' attitudes towards brands or products (Cheung and Lau 2012) and the measurement of story quality (Kohtamäki et al. 2012) from the viewpoint of drama and stressed on the importance of emotion (affection) in storytelling marketing (Jaafar et al. 2012). Nevertheless, there was not a complete story theory structure in past studies. To understand the effect of storytelling on consumers, it is necessary to discuss the basic traits of stories and consumers' behavior model.

Past research used to discuss entrepreneurs' storytelling strategy from the aspect of enterprises and provide much valuable knowledge, covering what an entrepreneur should do and how to say. The former

referred to the story content and topic, while the latter indicated storytelling methods. Although the viewpoint of storytellers was pointed out, the viewpoint of story listeners was neglected; besides, the comparison of story listeners' opinions about storytelling strategy of an enterprise and the management meaning were short. In fact, some research, discussing entrepreneurs' storytelling from the aspect of enterprises (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001, Martens and Johnson 2008), indicated that an enterprise's storytelling matching audience interests or expectation would guide audience to positively interpret the enterprise and enlarge the effect of stories. For this reason, an enterprise should understand how story audience interpreted and comprehended stories in order to develop more persuasive storytelling strategies. Apparently, past research discussing entrepreneurs' storytelling strategy from the aspect of enterprises was inadequate. The comparison with consumers' points of view about types of stories would assist ecotourism businesses in understanding consumers' opinions and value, developing more persuasive story contents and types of storytelling, and acquiring the legitimacy and resources. With experimental survey and analyses, this study

intends to discuss the effect of storytelling marketing on brand image, perceived quality, and purchase intention in ecotourism as the indicative reference for ecotourism businesses promoting brand image and enhancing ecotourists' perceived quality and purchase intention.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Storytelling Marketing

Kakroo (2015) defined story as facts with emotional packaging to drive people taking actions to change the world. The phenomenon was narrowly regarded as "story", while the process to describe the phenomenon was called "narrative" (Adams 2014). Landa and Onega (2014) also regarded "narrative" as adding points of view into stories that narrative was the story told by narrators. Along with the gradual attention to experience economy, enterprises aimed at the business model to create customer affection. Jeong and Koo (2015) considered that a story being able to create the gap between expectation and authenticity to show more "authenticity" than "expectation" would result in tension. In other words, "brand story" and "brand narrative" did not appear large differences in marketing communication. Kakroo (2015) pointed out three major points for storytelling, namely plot, character, and aesthetics.

(1) Plot: containing beginning, interval, and ending. A story would not be formed without plots, and plots defined the actions in a story.

(2) Character: Actions would not be generated in a plot without characters. A brand good at telling stories would have the brand become a character in consumers' life; besides, brand allowed consumers being more persuasive of the characters in life.

(3) Aesthetics: Costume, decoration, telling styles, and rhetorical skills in narrative would make a story more attractive.

He et al. (2016) explained the application of stories in storytelling marketing as (1) origin story to explain the establishment motivation and objective of an organization founder, (2) function story to describe the product function and use, and (3) effectiveness story to state the examples of organizational effectiveness. Accordingly, storytelling marketing is defined in this study as self-introduction of a ecotourism brand to consumers through stories.

Brand Image

McFerran et al. (2014) pointed out brand image as the key in the sustained-yield management of an

enterprise and presenting uniqueness. They stressed on starting brand image from consumers' points of view and creating pleasant experiences and good memories of consumers. The establishment of brand image started from functional brand and regarded symbolic brand and experiential brand as the pursued objectives. Assaf et al. (2013) defined brand image as the association with brand; besides, the connection between product attributes and customers to brand name was divided into "hard" data and "soft" data. Hard data referred to special feelings about tangible/functional traits, such as speed, price, ease of use, and management period of an enterprise in the industry. Soft data, on the other hand, tended to emotional attributes, e.g. surprise, reliability, joy, bore, masculinity, and innovation. Agrawal et al. (2012) considered that "brand image" was proposed by responders with free selection to pick out brand and cognition with any formats. Nisar and Whitehead (2016) defined "brand image" as "a set of associations" of brand. Huang and Ku (2016) proposed that "brand image" referred to all perceived phenomena affected through communication activity of an enterprise and consumers' understanding of brand through the relevant activity.

In sum, "brand image" in this study is defined as the sum of perception and impression of ecotourism brand, including the awareness of advantages, shortcomings, strengths, and weaknesses.

Perceived Quality

Dwivedi and Merrilees (2013) classified quality into "production quality" and "perceived quality". Production quality was based on products and manufacturing, while perceived quality evaluated quality from the viewpoints of consumers, i.e. consumers' evaluation of certain product. Jin et al. (2013) further defined perceived quality as consumers' judgment of the excellence of products and considered that perceived quality (1) was different from objective or real quality, (2) was a higher-level abstract concept, rather than specific product attributes, (3) sometimes presented the overall evaluation similar to attitudes, and (4) was judged generally in the combination called by consumers. Objective quality was often described as the actual technical excellence of products (Raji and Zainal 2016); such excellence could be measured and proved with certain existing standards. Perceived quality was an important subjective characteristic (Ansari and Riasi 2016), an information clue (Ramos et al. 2015), and a conscious behavior. For instance, consumers' evaluation of product quality would change with new information (Sabir 2016).

“Perceived quality” in this study is defined as the perceived product quality of ecotourism consumers by evaluating the expectation of quality and the evaluation of function, durability, technology, and reliability of products during the purchase, with past experiences and information.

Purchase Intention

Baker and Fulford (2016) defined purchase intention as the possibility of consumers planning to purchase certain products in certain periods that it was an important indicator of purchase behavior. Park and Park (2016) regarded purchase intention as individual plan to purchase a product. Chung et al. (2016) pointed out purchase intention as consumers’ transaction behavior after evaluating the overall product and the emotional reaction to take certain actions to the attitude target, i.e. consumers’ product evaluation or brand attitudes, matched with the inducement of external factors to compose consumers’ purchase intention. Park and John (2012) referred purchase intention as the possibility of consumers being willing to purchase a product. Jarvis et al. (2016) regarded purchase intention as consumers’ subjective intention to select certain product or brand. Deimling et al. (2016) indicated that consumers’ information source would influence consumer preference to further affect the purchase intention. In consideration of current and future possible situations, Rajaguru (2016) regarded purchase intention as consumers, with consideration of current situations and possible occurrence, judging the repurchase of specific service of an enterprise. Jayakrishnan et al. (2016) pointed out purchase intention as consumer intention to purchase certain product or visit certain service store. In terms of storytelling marketing in this study, customer reaction is the consumer behavior stage before making decision to purchase; in other words, the probability of consumers being willing to execute specific purchase behavior. They are covered in purchase intention in this study.

Purchase intention is defined in this study as ecotourism consumers taking possible actions or tendency, under the effect of storytelling marketing to change the points of view and attitudes.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Structure

This study aims to discuss how stories, through humans’ instinct, affect the attitudes towards brand image and the purchase intention. According to the elements required for a story proposed from the

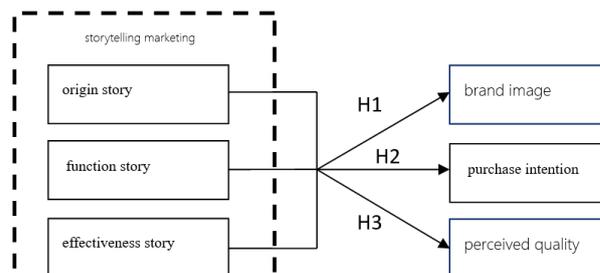


Fig. 1. Research structure

structure of storytelling theory and heuristic theory, the research structure with storytelling marketing model is developed in this study.

Research Hypothesis

Robinson et al. (2012) suggested that storytelling of an enterprise could have the brand story induce consumers’ consonance. He et al. (2016) also pointed out storytelling as the basis of brand marketing that stories could be the tactic of brand marketing. With effectiveness story, a lot of product image was marketed to the mind of organizational members and customers who would agree with the brand product because of comprehending the product effectiveness to further induce the purchase intention and the trend. Walsh et al. (2014) indicated that consumers being familiar with and presenting good product image would show higher brand attitude and purchase intention. Jung (2014) revealed the critical role of brand product image in consumers’ decision-making process that brand products with good image would become a brand choice of consumers intending to purchase specific products. Stylidisa et al. (2015) indicated that a brand with origin story could better impress consumers and become well-known brand legend to promote the enterprise image. Yang et al. (2014) stated the remarkable effects of the authenticity, narrators, and story plot of product function story on customers’ perceived product image. Kent L (2015) mentioned that using origin story of brand as the communication strategy between brand and consumers, interested parties could enhance the positive enterprise image. Gilliam and Flaherty (2015) also proved that origin story could have consumers agree with the brand and enhance the brand image and brand loyalty.

From above literatures, a story would link consumers with an enterprise and provide such a link with specific meanings. Such a link came from consumers’ inner emotion and agreement with the founder in the story and the belief of the enterprise, i.e. agreement with the enterprise. Agreeing with and

understanding product function and effectiveness would agree with the enterprise product and present positive emotion. A story presents emotional belongingness that consumers' feelings should not be ignored. Furthermore, when consumers strongly consider the same situation with the character in origin story, the purchase motivation is for themselves (not for others). The effect of origin story would particularly be strong under individualistic culture. Past research proved that origin story could have consumers better appear memory image and brand identification of the enterprise. Agreeing with the founder in the story and the belief of the enterprise would agree with the enterprise and the products and present positive emotion to affect consumers' brand image. The following hypothesis is therefore proposed in this study.

H1: Type of storytelling marketing presents significant effects on brand image.

Sadeh et al. (2012) considered that consumers with higher familiarity with a product would present better confidence in and attitudes towards the product as well as higher intention to purchase the product. Nabi and Green (2015) indicated that brand image would strongly affect consumers' opinions about the enterprise, and consumers would purchase the product from an enterprise with good product image; consumers' perception of brand product image would affect the decisions of purchase intention (Rawal 2013). Sullivan and Boches (2016) mentioned that product function and effectiveness were the key factors mentioned in various relevant studies. Product function and effectiveness allowed consumers easily identifying products, evaluating product quality, reducing perceived risk in the purchase, and confirming the differentiated perception and satisfaction acquired from the brand. Consequently, consumers would purchase familiar brands according to brand image, while product function and effectiveness allowed consumers easily identifying products, evaluating product quality, and reducing perceived risk in the purchase of unfamiliar brands. For this reason, the following hypothesis is inferred.

H2: Type of storytelling marketing shows remarkable effects on purchase intention.

Smith and Wintrob (2013) stated that consumers would infer or maintain the perceived product quality with brand image, which was often used as an external clue for evaluating product quality. Meanwhile, brand image could represent the overall product information and was an important judgment of consumers selecting

products. In this case, products with better brand image would present better overall evaluation; consumers therefore would appear better perceived quality of such products. For unfamiliar brands, product function and effectiveness allowed consumers easily identifying products, evaluating product quality, and reducing perceived risk in the purchase. Yang et al. (2014) explained the notable effects of the authenticity, narrators, and story plots of product function story on customers' perceived product image. Ogawa and Tsuchiya (2014) mentioned that the use of product effectiveness story could actually promote perceived enterprise image and product image and promoting consumers' perceived quality, because of understanding the effectiveness, to further enhance the purchase intention. It is therefore inferred in this study that consumers would be satisfied with external clues because of origin story connecting consumers with the enterprise. In other words, consumers would promote the perceived abstract quality due to the story, and external clues (product effectiveness) of effectiveness story would affect consumers' perceived quality and perceived risk to further enhance the perceived physical quality. The following hypothesis is therefore proposed in this study.

H3: Type of storytelling marketing shows remarkable effects on perceived quality.

Research Variable and Operational Definition

The operational definitions of variables in the storytelling marketing structure are proposed in this study. According to previous theoretical literature review, independent variables contain origin story, function story, and effectiveness story and dependent variables include brand image and purchase intention.

(1) Origin story: explaining the establishment motivation and objectives of organization founder (Kent L 2015).

(2) Function story: describing product function and use (Ho et al. 2013).

(3) Effectiveness story: showing examples of organizational effectiveness (Smith and Wintrob 2013).

(4) Brand image: referring to consumers, after receiving distinct information about a company, forming the overall image of the company in the memory, including evaluation, feeling, and attitude (Wang et al. 2013).

(5) Purchase intention: referring to possible actions or tendency under the effect of storytelling

Table 1. Variance analysis of storytelling marketing on brand image

variable	F	P	Scheffe posteriori test
brand image	22.461	0.000**	origin>function>effectiveness

Note: * stands for p<0.05 ** for p<0.01

marketing to influence the points of view and attitudes (Yeh 2015).

(6) Perceived quality: to evaluate the quality from the viewpoint of consumers, i.e. consumers' evaluation of certain product (Wang and Tsai 2014).

Measurement of Research Variable

Brand image scale

Total 7 items are included, which are compiled with Likert five-point scale. The questionnaire design is referred to Assaf et al. (2013).

Purchase intention scale

Total 4 items are covered, which are compiled with Likert five-point scale. The questionnaire design is referred to Jeng (2016).

Perceived quality scale

Total 6 items are contained and compiled with Likert five-point scale. The questionnaire design is referred to Lin et al. (2015).

Research Program

Research object

By distributing and collecting the questionnaire on-site, total 300 copies of questionnaire (100 copies each for origin story, function story, and effectiveness story) are distributed to ecotourists, and 276 copies are valid, with the retrieval rate 92%.

Test process

1. Step 1: Participants would randomly read one of origin story, function story, and effectiveness story for the next part of survey.

2. Step 2: Participants are requested to fill in the basic data in order to confirm the completeness of the questionnaire.

ANALYSIS RESULT

Variance Analysis of Type of Storytelling Marketing on Brand Image

Applying Analysis of Variance to discuss the difference of type of storytelling marketing in brand image, **Table 1**, origin story presents better brand image than function story and effectiveness story that H1 is supported.

Table 2. Variance analysis of storytelling marketing on purchase intention

variable	F	P	Scheffe posteriori test
purchase intention	16.583	0.000**	function>effectiveness>origin

Note: * stands for p<0.05 ** for p<0.01

Table 3. Variance analysis of storytelling marketing on perceived quality

variable	F	P	Scheffe posteriori test
abstract quality	16.583	0.000**	origin>effectiveness>function
physical quality	27.162	0.000**	effectiveness>function>origin

Note: * stands for p<0.05 ** for p<0.01

Variance Analysis of Type of Storytelling Marketing on Purchase Intention

Using Analysis of Variance for discussing the difference of type of storytelling marketing in purchase intention, **Table 2**, function story shows better purchase intention than effectiveness story and origin story that H2 is supported.

Variance Analysis of Type of Storytelling Marketing on Perceived Quality

Discussing the difference of type of storytelling marketing in perceived quality with Analysis of Variance, origin story outperforms effectiveness story and function story on abstract quality and effectiveness story appears better physical quality than function story and origin story that H3 is supported.

CONCLUSION

According to the research results, most surveyed ecotourism consumers, after reading the brand story with specific information of the mission and vision of the enterprise or benefits offered by the brand, remember the origin story related to the founder, revealing that ecotourism consumers are more interested in and impressed by the story of characters. However, function story provides more information for ecotourism consumers' purchase intention. The surveyed consumers generally consider that the maintenance of beautiful ecological environment would enhance the purchase intention; in this case, beautiful ecological environment leaves good impression in consumers' mind to further affect the purchase intention. Finally, effectiveness story offers more information for consumers' perceived physical quality. When reading brand stories, ecotourism consumers would be influenced by the consumption experiences and integrate the past experience with brand story to interpret the understanding of the brand.

SUGGESTION

Aiming at the research results, the following suggestions are further proposed in this study.

(1) Ecotourism could well apply the style in the source area to break through the brand positioning and add locality and history in the brand. Well applying the interaction of humanities, history, and climate characteristics in the source area could develop the unique brand positioning. It would be easily comprehended to have ecotourism consumers easily appear natural association at the first moment.

(2) When the association between ecotourism brand story and ecotourism consumers is established, it could easily induce ecotourism consumers' affective

identification. A story about the origin of the ecotourism area could easily arouse ecotourism consumers' desire for change. In this case, brand positioning should have an insight into consumers to greatly assist in the selection of materials for the brand story.

(3) Ecotourism consumers, when reading brand stories, are likely affected by the past ecotourism experiences to integrate the past experiences with brand story and interpret the understanding of the brand. Such ecotourism experiences therefore could be transformed into storytelling materials of brand story, e.g. integrating product packaging and costume design of salespeople into brand story to reinforce readers' existing ideas.

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