A Review of Destination Personality Literature: Focus on Articles Published in the Last Decade (2013–2022)

Athina Nella

Abstract The purpose of this paper is to provide a review of the most recent literature in the field of destination personality. As the importance of symbolic attributes in tourist decision making is increasing destination personality (DP) or destination brand personality (DBP), becomes a key construct in destination branding. DP has been linked with destination image, self-congruence and behavioral intentions, with a positive relationship being supported in most cases. Due to increased research interest in the field, an updated literature review of destination personality literature was considered as valuable. The review was performed with the PRISMA protocol and focused on articles published in high-impact journals during the last decade; these were analyzed in terms of methodologies and measurement scales used, destinations and major findings. Results showed that quantitative methodologies prevailed. Relevant research is not restricted to specific geographical regions but comes from various destinations all over the world. Aaker (Journal of Marketing Research 34:347–356, 1997) 5-dimensional brand personality scale (BPS) consists a reference point in the process of developing DP measurement scales. There is no consensus on the use of a single DP measurement scale, and most researchers acknowledge the need of DP scales to be destination-specific, culture-specific or even tourism-product specific. The most commonly used dimensions were sincerity, excitement, sophistication, conviviality, competence and vibrancy; the number of measurement items ranged from 7 to 26 while the average sample in quantitative studies was 480 respondents. More research in the field with the use of mixed methods is expected to portray better the evolving nature of destination personalities.

Keywords Destination personality · Brand personality · Destination branding

JEL Classification L83

A. Nella (✉)
Hellenic Open University, Patras, Greece
e-mail: nella.athina@ac.eap.gr

1 Introduction: Brand Personality and Destination Brand Personality

Although brand personality (BP) has been acknowledged as an important branding and differentiation tool, until recently there were limited studies referring to destination BP (Bekk et al., 2016; Kumar & Nayak, 2014). Though, during the last decade, significant contributions have been made. This contribution aims to review destination personality literature published in the last decade (2013–2022).

Patterson (1999) has identified more than 15 different definitions of brand personality (BP); he defined brand personality as consumers' emotional response to a brand, through which brand attributes are personified and used to differentiate between alternative offerings. Although brand personality has been widely studied for general consumer goods, it seems not to have been adequately studied for tourism and travel products (Kim & Lehto, 2013).

Jennifer Aaker's (1997) study formed the basis for measuring brand personality in various product categories and settings. Based on the theory of the Big Five Model, Aaker provided a rigorous measurement instrument consisting of five dimensions (sincerity, excitement, sophistication, ruggedness and competence) and 42 personality traits (brand personality scale-BPS). Though, Hankinson (2001) considers branding applications in the context of destinations more challenging, due to the complex nature of the tourism product. Extending Aaker's (1997) definition of brand personality to the tourism context, Ekinci and Hosany (2006) defined destination personality (DP) as the set of human characteristics associated with a destination.

2 Literature Review

One of the earliest studies focusing on destination personality comes from Ekinci and Hosany (2006), who identified three dimensions of DP, namely sincerity, excitement and conviviality. The authors also concluded that DP has a positive impact on perceived destination image and intention to recommend the destination. Murphy et al. (2007) suggested that tourists can articulate different destination brand personalities for each region. According to Usakli and Baloglu (2011), self-congruity is a partial mediator on the relationship between destination personality and tourist's behavioral intentions.

Recently, destination personality has been studied in relation to various tourism marketing concepts, such as destination branding (Apostolopoulou & Papadimitriou, 2015; Hultman et al., 2017), destination image (Chen & Phou, 2013; Souiden et al., 2017; Xie & Lee, 2013), destination brand equity (Salehzadeh et al., 2016), positioning (Hanna & Rowley, 2019), involvement (Liu et al., 2021), destination attachment (Huang et al., 2017) and behavioral intentions (Baloglu et al., 2014; Khazaei

Pool et al., 2018). Another interesting aspect of the relevant literature refers to the relationship of destination personality with self-congruity (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011), self-identity or tourist-destination identification (Huaman-Ramirez et al., 2021; Hultman et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2022).

Leung and Law (2010) suggested that prior DP studies can be grouped into 7 dimensions: disposal, biological, intrapsychic, cognitive, social, adjustment in personality research and plus brand personality. Moreover, Usakli and Baloglu (2011) provided a comparative analysis of DP studies published in the period 2006–2009. Later on, Kumar and Nayak (2014) summarized DP studies of the period 2006–2014. A comparison of 15 DP studies is also portrayed in the study of Dickinger and Lalicic (2016) also provided a presentation of 15 DP studies. The most common classification criteria in the above mentioned literature reviews included methodology, geographical context of the study, sample, year and journal of publication. An updated DP literature review would add more to existing knowledge, given the increasing research interest in the field.

3 Methodology

In order to fulfill the aim of this contribution, the basic principles and steps of the PRISMA protocol (Page et al., 2022) were followed. The PRISMA protocol has been recently applied in other tourism studies (e.g., Papavasileiou et al., 2022; Ram, 2021). The initial step was to define clearly the research objective of this literature review, i.e., to provide an updated mapping of scientific papers focusing strictly on destination (brand) personality.

After defining the primary purpose of this literature review, definition of eligibility (inclusion and exclusion) criteria followed. Inclusion criteria included (a) strict primary focus on the concept of destination personality and not on similar, broader or linked concepts and (b) research articles published in high-impact scientific journals in the fields of tourism or marketing during the period 2013–2022. Exclusion criteria included (a) publications in books, reports, conference proceedings and other sources of scientific knowledge and (b) scientific articles not written in English. Information sources, search strategy, selection process as well as synthesis methods were also determined, according to the PRISMA protocol.

For the purpose of this chapter and in order to identify articles relevant to destination brand personality, Google Scholar was used as the primary data base. The search terms used were "destination" AND "personality", so as to avoid results with studies with broader or alternative focus. Google Scholar was the primary information source for the identification of DP literature. Produced search results exceeded 130 for the period 2006–2022. The lists of Q1 or Q2 journals in subject areas "tourism, leisure and hospitality management" and "marketing" of Scimago Journal & Country Rank were chosen as a filter for high-impact journals.

Thus, 43 contributions published in Q1 or Q2 tourism and marketing journals were included to form the basis of this analysis; all of the selected articles were

available in English and published in the period 2013–2022, thus confirming that destination personality is a field mainly formed in the last 10 years.

4 Results

Based on predefined synthesis methods, these 43 scientific papers were classified and analyzed in terms of key findings, destination(s) under focus, journal and year of publication, methodology and sample (where applicable). Our analysis started with a classification per journal and year of publication. In order to provide an overview of research interest in the field, the total number of published articles in Q1 and Q2 Scimago-listed journals was examined initially per year (Fig. 1). The average number of published studies per year (4.3) during the last decade is substantially increased in comparison with the previous period of 2006–2012, where the average number of published articles per year was 1.4. These 43 published articles were published in 24 tourism and marketing journals of the Q1 and Q2 Scimago list (Table 1).

The next step of our analysis included a classification of articles per geographical focus and research method (Table 2). Starting with the geographical distribution of DP papers, research seems not to be entirely focused in a limited number of regions but comes from various destinations all over the world. The most popular destinations under examination in DP studies were China, UK, Australia, South Korea and Italy. Comparative studies were also identified in the DP literature (e.g., De Moya & Jain, 2013; Hanna & Rowley, 2019; Vinyals-Mirabent et al., 2019).
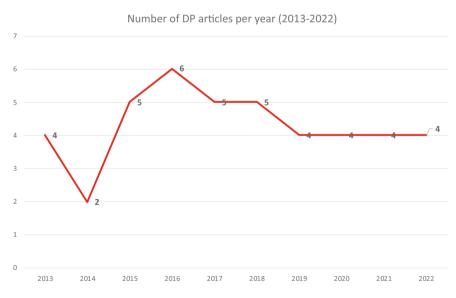

Fig. 1 Number of DP articles per year of publication (2013–2022)

Table 1 Number of DP articles per journal

Q1/Q2 Scimago-listed journal	Number of articles	Year(s) of publication
Tourism Management	**6**	**2013, 2016, 2017, 2019, 2019, 2021**
Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	4	2013, 2014, 2017, 2018
Journal of Destination Marketing and Management	5	2015, 2017, 2018, 2021, 2022
Journal of Travel Research	3	2013, 2015, 2016
International Journal of Tourism Cities	2	2020, 2022
Information Technology and Tourism	2	2016, 2019
Tourism Management Perspectives	2	2014, 2016
Journal of Strategic Marketing	2	2020, 2021
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	2	2017, 2020
Tourism Analysis	1	2018
International Journal of Tourism Research	1	2016
Tourism Review	1	2016
Annals of Tourism Research	**1**	**2022**
Journal of Vacation Marketing	1	2021
Cities	1	2022
Journal of Marketing Management	1	2019
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research	1	2018
Psychology and Marketing	1	2017
Current Issues in Tourism	1	2015
Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research	1	2015
Public Relations Review	1	2013
Journal of Business Research	1	2015
Tourism and Hospitality Research	1	2018
Journal of International Consumer Marketing	1	2020

The majority of studies (over 70%) used quantitative methods, while approximately 10% used qualitative techniques, 7% used mixed methods and an even lower percentage was based on literature reviews. In studies employing quantitative techniques, some of the most popular methods included exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, regression models and structural equation modeling. In studies

Table 2 DP studies of the period 2013–2022, destinations examined, methods and sample used

	Authors	Destinations	Methods used	Sample
1	Chen and Phou (2013)	Cambodia-Multinational sample	EFA, CFA, structural model	428
2	Xie and Lee (2013)	Beijing, China	EFA, CFA, structural model	500
3	Kim and Lehto (2013)	South Korea, US sample	CATPAC for website analysis, EFA, CFA	480
4	De Moya and Jain (2013)	Mexico, Brazil—Facebook content analysis	Computer-aided content analysis	–
5	Kumar and Nayak (2014)	Literature review	Literature review	–
6	Baloglu et al. (2014)	Jamaica	Subgroup analysis, regression analysis	312
7	Guiry and Vequist (2015)	South Korea, US sample for medical tourism	Factor analysis, t-tests, logistic regression analysis	1588
8	Pereira et al. (2015)	Portugal, golf destination	Qualitative techniques	46
9	Hultman et al. (2015)	Most recently visited destination-Taiwan sample	EFA, CFA, structural model	490
10	Papadimitriou et al. (2015)	Greece-Greek sample	EFA, CFA, structural model	361
11	Apostolopoulou and Papadimitriou (2015)	Greece-Greek sample	Principal component factor analyses, ANOVA, regression analyses	568
12	Gomez Aguilar et al. (2016)	UK visitors to 2 specific Spanish destinations	CFA, reliability analysis, model fit	329
13	Dickinger and Lalicic (2016)	Vienna—international visitors	Survey findings comparing to social media reviews, text-mining approach	599
14	Bekk et al. (2016)	Spain, Fuerteventura	Principal component factor analysis, CFA, multiple regression analysis, model fit	308
15	Kumar (2016)	India	EFA, CFA, SEM	356
16	Salehzadeh et al. (2016)	Pool, Iran	Reliability analysis, CFAs, SEM	367
17	Matzler et al. (2016)	Slovakia	PLS-SEM	2.116
18	Huang et al. (2017)	China—Yangshuo	EFA, CFA, SEM	337

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

	Authors	Destinations	Methods used	Sample
19	Souiden et al. (2017)	Canadians concerning Dubai	EFA, CFA, SEM	173
20	Kim and Stepchenkova (2017)	Jeju Island, South Korea	Content analysis—blogs	–
21	Pan et al. (2017)	Mainland Chinese travelers	Content analysis—reviews, EFA, CFA, multiple regression	394
22	Hultman et al. (2017)	Switzerland, UK airport visitors	CFA, ERLS	261
23	Kumar and Nayak (2018)	India, foreigners	Principal component analysis	329
24	Chi et al. (2018)	Sardinia, non-resident tourists (both international and domestic)	CFA, SEM	1266
25	Khazaei Pool et al. (2018)	Iran, foreign tourists who chose a historical-Islamic destination	CFA, SEM	397
26	Jeon et al. (2018)	US, Italy and Peru websites, US citizens	CFA, SEM	433
27	Xu and Tavitiyaman (2018)	Japan (Hong Kong tourists)	Quantitative methods	–
28	Vinyals-Mirabent et al. (2019)	Content analysis of websites, 12 European urban destinations	Content analysis—websites	12 destinations
29	Sertkan et al. (2019)	350 destinations	Regression analysis, seven-factor model—recommender systems	350 destinations
30	Zhang et al. (2019)	Urban destinations	Data analysis tool, machine learning, algorithm	672
31	Hanna and Rowley (2019)	10 European capital cities—website content	Content analysis—websites	–
32	Hsu and Scott (2020)	Macao	PLS-SEM	450
33	Šagovnović and Kovačić (2020)	Novi-Sad, Serbia	Factor analysis, ANOVA	203
34	Sharifsamet et al. (2020)	London, UK	CFA, bootstrapping analysis	515
35	Yang et al. (2020)	Glasgow, UK (Chinese sample)	PLS-SEM	226

Table 2 (continued)

	Authors	Destinations	Methods used	Sample
36	González-Rodríguez et al. (2021)	China, Spain	PLS-SEM	1.132
37	Huaman-Ramirez et al. (2021)	Aix-en-Provence, France	PLS-SEM	212
38	Pan et al. (2021)	Chinese and U.S. sample	CFA, SEM	1.092
39	Liu et al. (2021)	Tibetan pilgrimage destination	EFA, CFA, SEM	348
40	Yang et al. (2022)	Auckland and Glasgow	PLS-SEM, PLS–Henseler's multigroup analysis	544
41	Wang et al. (2022)	China	Neuroscience experiment	32
42	Pasquinelli et al. (2022)	4 Italian cultural destinations	Content analysis	–
43	Auemsuvarn et al. (2022)	Thailand	EFA, CFA	411

employing quantitative techniques or mixed methods, the average sample was 480 subjects.

The issue of measuring destination personality and identifying the most suitable dimensions and traits was the next focus of the analysis. One of the most critical issue in DP studies was how to measure this complex construct; various scales and BPS dimensions were used for this purpose. In most of the initial studies of the field Aaker's (1997), 5 dimensions and 42 traits of BPS formed the basis of measurement scales for DP. Though, a significant number of other researchers tried to test and use the BPS in respect with tourism destinations. Some of the authors tried to use the BPS in its original form as a starting-point, while others upon judgment eliminated items/traits of the BPS not relating to the specific destination. This explains the great variation in terms of DP measurement items used in various DP studies (9–42 items of the BPS). Other researchers used mixed methods and a multi-stage identification of traits most relevant to the specific destination or tourism product (e.g., open questions, interviews with experts, content analysis, use of previous DP scales already validated for the specific culture or destination).

The majority of studies identified DP dimensions ranged from 3 to 5, but there were also measures ranging from 2 to 7 dimensions. Some of the most commonly identified measurement dimensions identified across geographical contexts were the following: sincerity, competence, excitement, sophistication and ruggedness. Though a great variety of other dimensions were identified for various destinations (e.g., masculinity, sacredness, conformity, liveliness, family orientation, activeness, dependability, philoxenia, tranquility, viciousness, etc.), as shown in Table 3.

Relevant literature shows that dimensions of destination personality may vary according to the destination under examination. Some authors stress the importance

Table 3 Identified DP measurement dimensions and traits/items

Authors	Destinations	DP dimensions finally proposed and items included in models
Chen and Phou (2013)	Cambodia-Multinational sample	Sincerity, excitement, sophistication, ruggedness, contemporary (5 dimensions, 18 items)
Xie and Lee (2013)	Beijing, China	Sincerity, competence, excitement, sophistication, ruggedness (5 dimensions, 13 items)
Kim and Lehto (2013)	South Korea, US sample	Excitement, competence, sincerity, sophistication, ruggedness, uniqueness and family orientation (7 dimensions, 39 items)
Guiry and Vequist (2015)	South Korea, US sample for medical tourism	Sincerity, competence, ruggedness (3 dimensions, 11 items)
Hultman et al. (2015)	Most recently visited destination-Taiwan sample	Excitement, sophistication, activeness, dependability, philoxenia, ruggedness (6 dimensions, 26 items)
Papadimitriou et al. (2015)	Greece-Greek sample	Sincerity, excitement (2 dimensions, 8 items)
Apostolopoulou and Papadimitriou (2015)	Greece-Greek sample	Sincerity, excitement (2 dimensions, 8 items)
Gomez Aguilar et al. (2016)	UK visitors to two specific Spanish destinations	Sincerity, competence, ruggedness, sophistication, excitement (5 dimensions, 26 items)
Dickinger and Lalicic (2016)	Vienna—international visitors	Sincerity, competence, ruggedness, sophistication, excitement (5 dimensions)
Bekk et al. (2016)	Spain, Fuerteventura	Sincerity, excitement and sophistication (3 dimensions, 15 items
Kumar (2016)	India	Well mannered, vibrancy, creativity, conformity, viciousness (5 dimensions, 23 items)
Matzler et al. (2016)	Slovakia	Responsibility, activity, aggressiveness, simplicity, emotionality (5 dimensions, 12 items)

Table 3 (continued)

Authors	Destinations	DP dimensions finally proposed and items included in models
Huang et al. (2017)	China—Yangshuo	Excitement, competence, charming, outdoorsy (4 dimensions, 22 items)
Souiden et al. (2017)	Canadians concerning Dubai	Sentimental, competence (2 dimensions, 7 items)
Pan et al. (2017)	mainland Chinese travelers	Competence, sacredness, vibrancy, femininity, excitement (5 dimensions, 18 items)
Hultman et al. (2017)	Switzerland, UK airport visitors	Excitement, sophistication, activeness, dependability, philoxenia, ruggedness (6 dimensions, 24 items)
Kumar and Nayak (2018)	India, foreigners	Courteousness, vibrancy, conformity, liveliness, viciousness, tranquility (6 dimensions, 23 items)
Chi et al. (2018)	Sardinia, non-resident tourists (both international and domestic)	Conviviality, sophistication, vibrancy (3 dimensions, 9 items)
Zhang et al. (2019)	Urban destinations	Temperament, competence, mood, attitude (4 components, 32 items)
Šagovnović and Kovačić (2020)	National and international tourists in Novi-Sad, Serbia	Sincerity, competence, excitement, sophistication, ruggedness (5 dimensions, 24 items)
Sharifsamet et al. (2020)	London, UK	Competence and contemporary-feminine (2 dimensions, 8 items)
Pan et al. (2021)	Chinese and U.S. sample	25-item destination gender scale (DGS) is assembled with 4 sub-dimensions of masculinity (i.e., dominance, vigor, courage and competence) and 4 sub-dimensions of femininity (i.e., grace, softness, gorgeousness and kindheartedness)
Huaman-Ramirez et al. (2021)	Aix-en-Provence (southern France), French sample	Aaker (1997)'s 5 dimensions confirmed, 15-item-scale

of developing culture-specific, validated destination personality scales (Auemsu-varn & Ngamcharoenmongkol, 2022; Kumar, 2016; Pan et al., 2017), while others emphasize the importance of developing customized scales for each destination (e.g., Huang et al., 2017). As research in the field evolves, scholars seem to be less hesitant to develop, use and propose more customized scales and this can be seen as a sign of progress in the field.

5 Conclusions

Destination personality is a complex construct drawing increasing research interest during the last decade. The use of PRISMA protocol led us to the analysis of 43 scientific papers. The identified articles were comparatively presented in terms of main findings, measurement scales and dimensions of DP, methods and samples used, destinations, journal and year of publication. Aaker's (1997) study provided the initial basis for developing DP measurement scales, but recently scholars are less reluctant to develop culture-specific, destination-specific or even tourism-product-specific measurement scales. Despite variations in dimensions and measurement items/traits used, the DP literature is becoming richer and enhancing its contribution in destination branding. The links of DP with other marketing constructs such as destination image, self-congruity and behavioral intentions were also clearly shown. In most cases, quantitative research methods and tools were employed. This review confirms that DMO's and NTO's should invest on creating distinctive destination personalities, based on their overall tourism product and strategies. Market research provides appropriate qualitative and quantitative tools for the identification of perceived destination personality.

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