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Abstract

In a study seeking to understand destination choice, focus group participants consisting of travellers, mentioned the importance of 'bragging rights'. Additionally, tourism marketers when interviewed about destination choice also referred to bragging rights. An online search of 'travel', 'tourism' and 'bragging rights' revealed thousands of links. Despite this, bragging rights has received limited attention in tourism research. This paper defines bragging rights, discusses its relevance to tourism and proposes a conceptual model suggesting how bragging rights can be managed by destination marketers to enhance destination image and consequently increase visitation.

Keywords

model, destination, bragging, tourism, marketing, rights

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Bragging Rights and Destination Marketing: A Tourism Bragging Rights Model

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In a study seeking to understand destination choice, focus group participants consisting of travellers, mentioned the importance of 'bragging rights'. Additionally, tourism marketers when interviewed about destination choice also referred to bragging rights. An online search of 'travel', 'tourism' and 'bragging rights' revealed thousands of links. Despite this, bragging rights has received limited attention in tourism research. This paper defines bragging rights, discusses its relevance to tourism and proposes a conceptual model suggesting how bragging rights can be managed by destination marketers to enhance destination image and consequently increase visitation.

Keywords: bragging rights, destination choice, leisure tourism, conspicuous consumption, status consumption, cool consumption

Introduction

'Bragging rights' is a term often used in everyday language. It is the objective of this work to discuss the relevance of bragging rights to tourism management and marketing. If understood, bragging rights can be managed by destination marketers to enhance destination image by providing tourists an opportunity to communicate about their experience at the destination, and consequently, increase visitation. Prior to undertaking this task, an explanation of the meaning of the term is provided.

Bragging Rights

A search of current editions of dictionaries provided a number of meanings of bragging rights. These are provided in Table 1.

Reflecting upon these meanings (in Table 1), bragging rights is summarised in this work as being '*a perceived entitlement to communicate about one's accomplishments*'. On this basis, it is argued that a bragging right consists of a *belief* that a *behaviour* will provide an opportunity – or a right, to *communicate* (brag) about that behaviour. We suggest that the acquisition of a bragging right is usually planned, that is, based on an existing belief. There may however, be some cases where a person's unplanned or impulse behaviour, such as responding to a crisis, might give rise to a belief that bragging rights are to be expected.

In the context of consumer behaviour, and indeed destination choice, we have an interest in the planned acqui-

sition of bragging rights, that is, the sequence of *belief*, *behaviour*, and *communication*. A tangible product – for example a luxury car, can communicate a message about its owner (for example, see Martineau, 1957). The owner of a vehicle, possibly with the aid of associated supporting evidence (merchandise such as key-rings and clothing), may choose to brag about their ownership (or at least possession) of the product. The purchase of services, despite their intangible nature, may also be motivated by bragging rights. Holidays, for example, whether planned or realised are frequent topics of conversation and it would seem that bragging rights have relevance to the consumption of tourism products.

This paper aims to explain how bragging rights might be applied and managed in tourism. To that end, literature is now reviewed commencing with a discussion of other terms in social science which are relevant to this study. Following this, literature that alludes to bragging rights and tourism is discussed. Further, qualitative data from exploratory studies providing evidence as to the importance of bragging in tourism is then presented. Finally, guided by the dictionary definitions of bragging rights, the relevant literature, and qualitative evidence, a model that proposes how bragging rights can be managed within a tourism context is presented.

Relevant Terms in the Literature

While the term bragging rights is not common in academic literature, related terms such as '*conspicuous consumption*', '*status consumption*', '*cool consumption*' and '*social desirability*' are more prevalent. It is argued that the basic objective of participating in conspicuous consumption, status consumption, cool consumption or socially desirable

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Table 1
The meaning of 'bragging rights'

Source	Meaning
Dictionary.com	The presumed right to brag or boast, often associated with winning a contest of skill, as cooking or fishing The supposed right to brag about an accomplishment
Collins English Dictionary	Notional privileges that are gained by defeating a close rival
Learner's Dictionary	A good reason to talk with pride about something you have done
Merriam-Webster	Entitlement to boast about something
Wikitionary	The prerogative to praise oneself for an accomplishment or for possession of a superior characteristic
Oxford Dictionaries	A temporary position of ascendancy in a closely contested rivalry
Urban Dictionary	The rights granted to a person that allow said person to boast on themselves to a certain extent without being looked down on for it

consumption is to gain the right to communicate about it. Such communication is often aimed at a pre-identified target group. Conspicuous consumption, status consumption, cool consumption and socially desirability are now discussed.

Veblen's ([1899] 1931) theory of conspicuous consumption describes the consumption or purchase of products for status and prestige. He (p. 36) suggests that "in order to gain and hold the esteem of men, it is not sufficient merely to possess wealth or power. The wealth or power must be put in evidence, for esteem is awarded only on evidence". Reflecting on Veblen's ([1899] 1931) argument, bragging, particularly when supported by evidence may earn social status.

It was during the course of undertaking this work that the research of Phillips and Back (2011), on conspicuous consumption applied to tourism destinations, was published. This work was timely in that it established the relevance of conspicuous consumption to tourism, given the limited research in the field, a gap also noted by Phillips and Back (2011). In particular, the article allowed us to better focus on the application and possible management, of bragging rights in tourism. Phillips and Back's (2011) study is discussed as relevant throughout the paper.

O'Cass and McEwen (2004, p. 34) define status consumption as "the behavioural tendency to value status and acquire and consume products that provide status to the individual". They argue that status consumption is a reflection of the consumers' desires to gain prestige from the acquisition of status-laden products and brands, and propose that consumers at every class level have the desire to consume for social status. Langer (1997) defines two categories of status brands: pinnacle brands and premium brands. Pinnacle brands act as icons of excellence and symbolise success and wealth while premium brands are respected as elite products that are not ridiculously overpriced. Such brands may be used as means to an end, such as making a desired impression on others via the brands symbolism (O'Cass & Frost, 2002). By their nature, status brands are able to command premium prices (Eastman, Goldsmith, & Flynn, 1999).

Although status and conspicuous consumption have considerable theoretical overlaps (see: Eastman, et al., 1999; O'Cass & Frost, 2002), status consumption is different from conspicuous consumption. Status consumption emphasises the personal nature of owning status brands

while conspicuous consumption focuses on putting wealth into evidence and therefore displaying possessions (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004).

Gloor and Cooper (2007, p. 7) define cool as being something that is "not only "excellent" but also suggests an element of being "fun" and even possessing a particular attitude". Hebdige and Potter (2008) defined cool consumption as a certain style of rebellious consumption, introduced by a subculture and commercialised. Similarly, Schor and Ford (2007) compare cool to rebellious tendencies including anti-adult and drug themes. Cool products are consumed due to the perceptions of individualism associated with such products (Hebdige & Potter, 2008). Similarly, Ferguson (2011) proposed that cool is often defined in opposition to the norms and values of mainstream culture and is often found in counter cultural communities that reject conformist views. Belk et al. (2010) in contrast argued that coolness derived from consuming brands perceived as being cool is more about fitting in with a certain group. These include ghetto dwellers, minorities, gangsters, homosexuals and other disempowered groups on the margins of society (Belk et al., 2010). Products considered cool are therefore, segment specific (Ferguson, 2011). Cool brands therefore, act as markers for establishing boundaries for inclusion and exclusion. An individual might appear cool based on their possessions, tastes, preferences, and knowledge (Belk et al., 2010). Ferguson (2011) argued that by consuming cool products, individuals attempt to transfer the cool status to their identities by communicating about their ownership. Such consumption is often driven by the external environment. Consumers consume cool to be validated by a specific audience or reference group (Belk et al., 2010).

Another term relative to bragging rights is social desirability. This relates to the perceived approval from one's peers in regard to a certain action (Calder & Burnkrant, 1977). Awareness that an individual's behaviour may be observed and interpreted by others, influences the individual to manage their social image and impressions, and in turn their behaviour (Fisher & Dubé, 2005). Certain planned behaviour therefore, can provide an individual with symbolic capital (Katsulis, 2010, p. 212) which can, if desired, be used to brag.

It should be noted that conspicuous consumption, status consumption, and cool consumption may all be a form of socially desirable consumption aimed at communicating

a certain message. The possession of objects considered as conspicuous, cool or status laden may also entitle the individual to communicate or brag about it. The basic tenet of such consumptions is that many consumer decisions are motivated by the desire to communicate an existing or perhaps an aspirational social status. It is therefore argued that consumption is often planned based on the symbolic utility provided by the object. Similarly, Holt (1998) argues that *materialists* consume products with the aim of winning prestige. In regard to tourism, Urry (1990) suggests that destinations are often not consumed because they are intrinsically superior but, because of the taste or status they communicate. Additionally, Klenosky (2002) proposed that destinations may be a means to achieving ends which may include status and the right to brag.

Relevance of Bragging Rights to Tourism

The relevance of bragging rights to tourism is, to some extent, supported by studies including Delener (2010), Beeton (2005), Launius and Jenkins (2006), and Brooker and Burgess (2008). Although these studies do not investigate the role of bragging rights in tourism, they allude to its relevance. These studies are now briefly reviewed along with other studies in tourism that are relevant to this work.

Delener (2010, p. 1133) proposes that Baby Boomers, who are now in their 60s travel to seek "luxury, fulfilment, bragging rights and comfort". In reference to film-induced tourism, Beeton (2005, p. 112) proposes that visiting film sites allows the individual to return home knowing how movies were filmed and so "brag about possessing an insider's knowledge". Launius and Jenkins (2006) argued that bragging rights may also be earned by participating in exclusive activities such as hunting in sub-Saharan Africa. Brooker and Burgess (2008, p. 279) propose that one of the reasons people may visit new and un-commercialised destinations that the individual's peers have not heard about or considered visiting, is because of the "bragging rights" that might be earned. We suggest that while an individual's peers may not always be familiar with the destination, they may share a common interest. For instance, King and Prideaux (2010) refer to tourists as *collectors* of experiences within specific categories such as World Heritage Parks. The tourist can potentially brag to colleagues who have similar interests that they have 'been there-done that'. Similarly, Timothy (1998) argues that individuals may collect destinations for competitive reasons; that is, to be able to boast about destinations visited. This competition is between friends and relatives and helps the individual satisfy self-esteem needs. He also proposes that collecting destinations lends credibility to the individual and provides the prestige and recognition of belonging to a "unique group of privileged travellers" (Timothy, 1998, p. 126).

Todd (2001) posits that due to the public nature of tourism, tourists often attempt to retain and exhibit part of their tourism experience. She suggests that items or markers, or artefacts as referred to by Hummon (1988), may be evidence of the experience and help communicate a message about the consumer. Parrinello (1996) further suggests that tourism is immersed in a universe of signs and symbols that are often carried over into other aspects of

the individual's life. The importance of artefacts in communicating the bragging right is discussed in more detail later in this paper.

Phillips and Back (2011) argue that conspicuous consumption can influence destination choice. They conclude with the comment that conspicuous consumption in tourism has received limited attention by researchers and needs to be refined through a closer examination of the relevant concepts and more empirical research. We suggest that while conspicuous consumption and bragging rights are inherently different concepts, they share common elements. Phillips and Back (2011) find that one destination can be more conspicuous than another and ask the question: "What would make tourists view one destination as conspicuous?" (p. 584). Their study found that factors such as "interpersonal mediation, status demonstration and materialistic hedonism" (p. 590) influences destination choice. Interestingly, "status demonstration" was found in their study as not being influential and we agree with their claim that this finding was likely due to the wording of their questions (p. 590).

We suggest that the existence of bragging rights, particularly if they can be managed, would be a likely determinant of destination choice. Some evidence to support this claim came about as a result of comments made in two separate and broader tourism studies undertaken by us. The first study involved focus groups with leisure travellers, while the second involved interviews with tourism marketers. Further, an online search using the phrases 'travel and bragging rights' and 'tourism and bragging rights' revealed thousands of links originating from many countries although only a small proportion were from scholarly articles. Both of our studies which included references to bragging rights by participants are now discussed. This is followed by a discussion relative to the online search.

Focus groups with leisure travellers

Lewis et al. (2010) identified reasons why young Australian travellers (YATs), aged between 18 and 25 years, preferred overseas travel rather than domestic travel. Data collection included hosting three focus groups in 2009 involving a total of 13 participants. A number of comments were made which prompted the researchers to consider issues of prestige, social acceptance, and bragging about the holiday. Comments from the Focus Group Participants (FG_n, P_n) included:

Australia has stuff to do, but things overseas are much more glamified. It's like wow - like I went shopping in London or France. It's different. (FG1, P2).

When I was planning my trip to Europe, we chose to visit the Greek Islands because it's considered more prestigious. (FG1, P3).

Iconic landmarks which were representative of overseas destinations, particularly those featured in television programs or movies, were important to some.

[I'd like to see] all the iconic things, like the Leaning Tower of Pisa and London Bridge and the Eiffel Tower, just to say that you have done it. Yeah, it's true; it's a massive thing; like 'I've been to the Eiffel tower' (FG2, P3).

Yeah ... you see it on the TV all the time (FG2, P1).

Participants indicated that bragging was an activity they indulged in post holiday. However, they acknowledged that

bragging excessively about a topic may reduce their symbolic capital (a similar finding was noted by Muller & Butera, 2004). Participants commented:

It's an achievement; like you put it up on Facebook; then everyone can see it (FG2, P2).

... you can say, "I've been there"... a lot of people are doing it, so you can say "I've been there as well". [On reflection], a lot of my family and friends are sick of me bragging about my trip (FG2, P1).

The 'competitive nature' of the consumption of travel was also discussed. For instance:

[By talking about iconic landmarks visited] people get jealous over it as well (FG2, P1.)

[My friends are] going to envy me going to Paris (FG3, P1.)

Based on an examination of the focus group data, it seems that some destinations 'help' individuals achieve a desired (or perhaps perceived) social status. Destinations therefore, may be selected based on the 'wow factor' associated with them. Given the demographic of the respondents (18-25-year-old Australian travellers), social media played an important role in communicating (even bragging) about the destinations visited. In addition to the focus groups, destination marketers interviewed as part of a separate study also made reference to the importance of bragging rights to tourism.

Interviews with Tourism Experts

In an exploratory study to ascertain, 'What makes a successful tourist destination?' interviews with six destination marketers were undertaken in June 2011. Reflecting on tourist's thinking, a number of participants made reference to bragging rights. Comments included:

I want to be the first person [to visit a destination in my group] – bragging rights. Most people travel for bragging rights. It's bragging rights to do something that hasn't been done before by someone else. Bragging rights becomes an important part 'cause everyone wants to be one up on the Joneses - your next door neighbour (EP1).

Because others have [been there]; there's this mystique of going to those places and seeing if what their friends are saying is correct and also to have it in their 'kit bag' or repertoire of saying "Hey, I've been there"... it gives you bragging rights (EP2).

[Travelling overseas is] like an Olympic gold medal in a way. Bragging is definitely there. It is most likely that the group has this expectation that you should have done that... you want to be seen there (EP6).

Another participant reflected:

It is just human nature [to talk about where you have been]... it's what people do (EP5).

The academic literature discussed earlier, together with the comments from travellers and tourism experts support our argument that bragging rights can play a role in destination choice. Our claim is also supported by an online search which is now discussed.

Online Search of Travel/Tourism and Bragging Rights

An online search (Google.com) was conducted using the phrases 'travel and bragging rights' and 'tourism and bragging rights'. The purpose of this online search was to determine the relevance and application of bragging rights

to tourism. We found that the term was used extensively. For example, many results related to travel blogs including activities individuals 'had to' participate in, such as, the world's best ski slopes (Oakes-Ash, 2011). The term bragging rights has also been used by destinations to publicise their awards and accolades, examples including, Nova Scotia (Novascotia.com, 2011), Vancouver (Fong, 2011) and Philadelphia (Garely, 2010). Bragging rights has been related to landmarks and tourist attractions, including Indianapolis (Indiana Tourism, 2011) and Jiangyou City, China (Wan, 2010). The term was also used by news media, particularly when reporting about unique events such as Russia's sand art (TraveltoWork.net, 2011) and Indianapolis' Turtle Back Zoo (Eisenberg, 2011).

The online search combined with the comments made by participants in our earlier studies, attests that bragging rights is an often used term in tourism language, both by consumers and marketers. The term is also used in academic literature, although similar to Phillips and Back's (2011) claim about conspicuous consumption, no evidence has been found to suggest that bragging rights, relative to tourism, has been the subject of academic research. Given this, and heeding Phillips and Back's (2011) call for a closer examination of concepts relative to conspicuous consumption, a conceptual model was inductively developed to explain how bragging rights might be applied and indeed managed in tourism. This process was guided by the use of the term, *bragging rights*, in the general and the tourism specific literature, and the findings from broader exploratory studies. The conceptual model explains and suggests possible management implications for embedding bragging rights in a destination marketing strategy.

The Tourism Bragging Rights Model

Given the lack of research into the explanation and implication of bragging rights to tourism, we argue the need to develop a conceptual model which might have theoretical and practitioner value. Motivation to develop a conceptual model arose after reading Rossiter (2011) who recounts that many long standing theories were developed by pure introspection on the part of the researcher. Available qualitative data allows researchers to use "aided introspection" to formulate theories (p. 118). Rossiter (2011, p. 118) explains that aided introspection allows:

- (a) identification of the relevant constructs, and
- (b) theorising of causal relationships between them, including estimation of the causal importance of each construct that precedes the other.

Interestingly, when discussing abstract formed objects, Rossiter (2011) suggests the use of a thesaurus as an aid for researchers when choosing the components of an abstract formed object. In this research, dictionaries were used to identify the meanings and components of bragging rights. In a somewhat similar manner, Phillips and Back (2011) used a dictionary and advice from an expert (a professor) to identify synonyms of conspicuous consumption. Despite Rossiter's (2011) criticism of grounded theory, we draw attention to Miles and Huberman (1994) who suggest the inductive approach may not necessarily start from a 'clean slate' but may first identify likely concepts and frameworks.

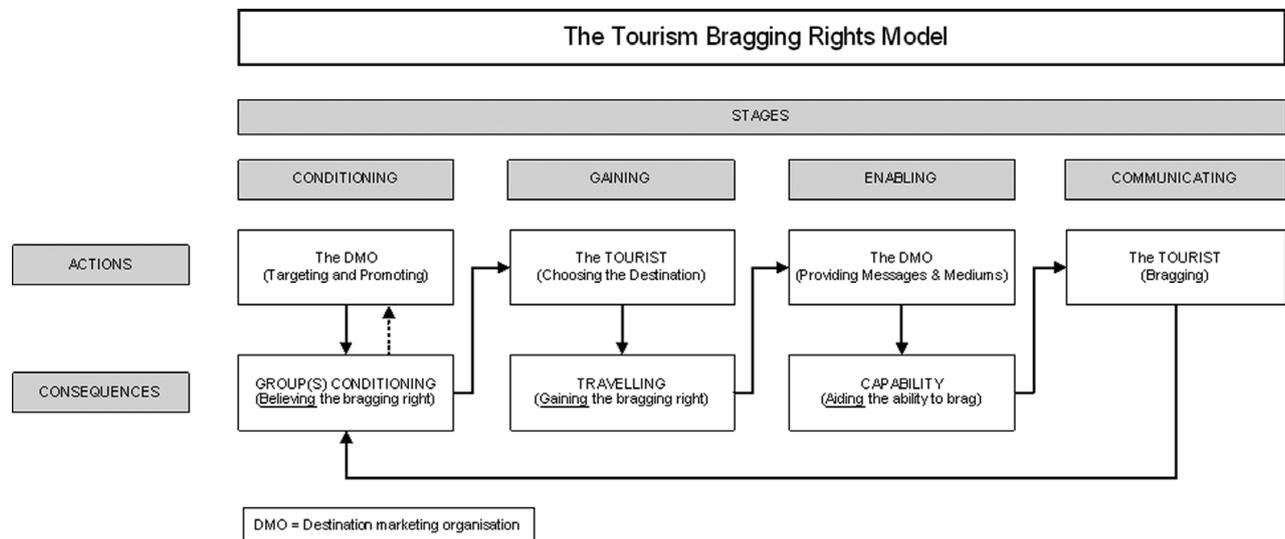


Figure 1

The tourism bragging rights model

Based on the dictionary definitions, the comments from tourist consumers and tourism marketers, and a review of the use of the term online, we identified the 'ingredients' of bragging rights. By way of writing down the key ingredients on system cards, we were able to discuss and propose an explanation of what constitutes a bragging right. Included in these was the identification of *actors* including the individual and a social or referral group. This process revealed some sequential ordering to achieving a bragging right as well as actions and consequences. We discussed and moved the cards on a table with the aim of grouping meanings and processes, in line with the concept card approach used by researchers including Turner (1981).

We suggest the acquisition of a bragging right is a process made up of related constructs. At the very least, these seem to include a *belief* (that a behaviour (an action) will provide an opportunity to brag), *the behaviour* (based on the belief that a behaviour – possibly an action – will give rise to the ability to brag) and a *communication* (being the act of bragging). This is expressed as:

Belief → Behaviour → Communication

Further, considering the findings of Phillips and Back (2011), we propose that in a tourism bragging rights model, roles for social groups, travellers, and tourism marketers are evident. To explain how bragging rights can be applied and even managed within tourism, the tourism bragging rights model (Figure 1) was developed.

Our model suggests that there are *actions* and *consequences*, which are sequential, and (importantly for a destination) to some extent can be managed by a destination marketing organisation (DMO). Each of the components of our model is discussed in detail below.

Conditioning

We prescribe that the bragging rights process begins with a belief that a particular behaviour will result in the right to brag. We also suggest that when the individual is contemplating the acquisition of bragging rights, the belief

contains an idea as to whom the bragging might be directed towards. We would suggest that the recipients of communication (bragging) would often be members of a person's existing or aspirational social group. [Notwithstanding, we may sometimes be recipients of travel related bragging from unknown persons. Likewise, unknown persons might talk to us if they notice we are wearing a shirt which displays the name of a destination.] Given the importance we assign to social groups in the bragging rights process both in influencing travellers and as the recipients of communication (bragging), we argue there is a role for destination marketing organisations (DMOs) in *conditioning* social groups. The act of conditioning on the part of a DMO requires identifying, targeting, and promoting to social groups. Such promotion should contain features about a destination that suggest there are bragging rights associated with visiting the destination. This might include messages about the social desirability about visiting a destination. [This is the subject of further research by the authors.]

Bragging rights may differ from the view of conspicuous consumption expressed by Phillips and Back (2011) who in their study, suggested that most major cities in the United States were categorised as conspicuous and less well-known destinations were perceived as inconspicuous. By contrast, we suggest that bragging rights could potentially be attributed to destinations relative to group beliefs (social desirability) more so than the size of the city. It should also be noted that while conspicuous consumption is associated with the desire to display wealth, bragging is the process of communicating experience. People may therefore brag about being to luxurious destinations as well as participating in activities perceived as being socially acceptable and superior. To explain, a destination believed to hold bragging rights might not hold characteristics of "prestigious, noticeable, ostentatious and pretentious" as suggested by Phillips and Back (2011, p. 586) for conspicuous consumption. For some social groups, the inconspicuous descriptives of "unremarkable, ordinary, low key and

obscure” (p. 586) might hold a belief that bragging rights exist. For instance, people who like to travel to remote areas of Australia by four-wheel drive vehicle might brag to members of their social group about the small and remote towns visited. For example, a person may brag that they have visited Goodooga – a small town in western NSW, Australia which was awarded the title of ‘the most boring town in Australia’ (see: Brewarrina Shire Council, 2011).

The industry experts interviewed (and discussed previously in this paper) referred to the importance of bragging rights. Conditioning therefore, is about ‘building the belief’ that bragging rights will be gained by visiting a destination. This involves projecting the right images about a destination to selected social groups. This task is not that dissimilar from Kerr and Balakrishnan’s (2012) reference to place brand management as being:

The act of communicating the place brand in a manner to deservedly influence the meaning of the location in the minds of the people who matter to the future of the location.

We suggest that a DMO might be more effective if it can target groups and promote the destination in a manner which emphasises its social desirability – that is its ‘braggability’. Phillips and Back (2011, p. 585) argue that “a conspicuous destination is a destination where tourists believe they can be observed and/or judged by significant others”. We argue that social groups (the significant others) and group-norms influence the destination choice of individuals who behave (that is, travel) in a particular way to gain the right to brag. A similar argument was presented in Lewis et al., (2010).

Gaining

DeLaet (2006, p. 14) suggests a right is a moral or legal entitlement that is “something individuals deserve and have a reasonable expectation of receiving”. *Gaining* therefore is the behaviour by which an individual earns the right to brag. In tourism, the act of travel (the behaviour based on a belief), provides a ‘just claim’ to brag. Based on the belief and the consequent action (behaviour), the tourist therefore acquires the right to communicate (that is, brag).

As discussed, bragging can arise from the *belief-behaviour-communication* sequence. However, in addition to the potential role of a DMO in *conditioning*, we realised that there is another potential role for the DMO in aiding communication (bragging). This role is assisting, even enabling, the communication process (bragging), and has been included in our model. We refer to this as *enabling*.

Enabling

Phillips and Back (2011, p. 594) in discussing conspicuous consumption suggest that DMOs offer products which “provide ways for visitors to flaunt their visit to a destination to create a “wow” effect on others.” Readers are reminded of the intangible nature of tourism which is different from tangible goods such as motor vehicles or clothing which can be observable evidence of conspicuousness. These tangible goods communicate meaning – the driver of a prestige car does not have to brag about his ownership; the vehicle, as an object, communicates meaning about its owner. With services such as tourism, there are no, or limited objects which communicate meaning. This is where DMOs can assist.

We suggest that DMOs have an opportunity to provide messages and mediums to aid the ability to brag. Destination marketing organisations can enable bragging by providing artefacts to support the tourist’s bragging efforts. Perhaps this is the real value of souvenirs and artefacts. These objects which might be worn or given away act as evidence, conversation pieces, and communicators. Facilitating photographic opportunities next to an iconic feature is another example of enabling or aiding bragging. These photographs may be uploaded to social networking sites or included in ‘brag books’ – albums used to display photographs of personal experiences. Assisting with messages and mediums provides the tourist with evidence and is akin to Veblen’s ([1899]1931) argument and that of Hummon (1988) and Parrinello (1996) which were discussed previously in this paper. Notwithstanding a traveller’s desire to brag, the DMO can aid this process through the *enabling* stage. On return (and even during, when postcards and online channels are considered) a tourist is able to exercise the right to brag.

Communicating

Communicating, that is bragging, may be verbal or non-verbal through symbols such as artefacts and souvenirs. Bragging is a form of communication which we argue is usually directed towards a person’s social group, although other people may also be ‘beneficiaries’ [for example, a conversation between people at a bus-stop]. For some social groups online communications are important. In recognition of this need, Facebook launched an application in 2007 that allows users to tag destinations they have visited, creating a colour-coded map that can be placed on the user’s Facebook profile page (Conlin, 2007).

Bragging has value to the traveller in that it can communicate conformity (and potentially superiority) with existing or aspirational group norms. As well as being a benefit to the traveller, bragging rights can also be of benefit to the destination. This communication also conditions the social groups. For instance, one tourism expert interviewed commented:

We went to Saint Petersburg and when we came back and said it to people, they [said]; “I want to do that. Was it a problem? What’s it like? ... I’m a bit scared but if you tell me it’s alright. If you can do it, I can do it (EP3).

This comment suggests that when tourists communicate (even brag) about their travels, they are providing potential tourists with valuable information, perhaps the motivation to travel, and even destination choice. By word-of-mouth and other forms of communication (such as wearing merchandise) tourists are marketing the destination as well as themselves. A similar argument was presented in Gartner (1994) who discusses the role of word-of-mouth communication in influencing the destinations image and consequently visit intentions.

What is implied in our model is that there are at least two important channels for conditioning of social groups. The first is that suggested as the potential role of the DMO in the *conditioning* stage. The second is the impact of bragging upon the social group. Thus, agreeing with Phillips and Back’s (2011, p. 594) comment that “destination

marketing organisations need to know how their destinations are perceived by potential visitors". It is therefore important that DMO's ensure that the 'DMO conditioning' of social groups and the 'tourist's conditioning' of social groups are aligned. The dotted arrow in our model reflects the information obtained from members of social groups through research undertaken by the DMO.

Conclusion

We do not suggest that bragging rights determines destination choice, but that a probabilistic relationship (see Dul & Hak, 2008) exists between bragging rights and destination choice. Therefore, the level of bragging rights believed to be gained from the destination may influence the decision to visit that destination. As with conspicuous consumption, we do not suggest that bragging rights are relevant to all consumers. While Phillips and Back (2011) claim that conspicuous consumption relates to larger capital cities, we suggest that our bragging rights model has broader application, particularly if destination marketers can instil a belief in selected groups that bragging rights are linked to a visit to their destination. We propose that a number of research questions relative to each stage are necessary to validate our model. For instance, an experimental design could be used to prove the relationship between conditioning and gaining. As well, studies of social media and even the role of souvenirs as channels of communicating bragging rights would be worthwhile. It is our intention to continue research into bragging rights with one possibility being an action research approach with researchers and practitioners working together to implement and measure the impact of bragging rights tactics in a destination. We hope that our model will be of interest and use to practitioners and will also generate academic debate and research as to how this model can be empirically tested.

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