



Giant Panda Brand Image and Travel Motivation to China

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The thesis is commissioned by Snow Panda Education and Research Consortium (SERC) which is a co-operating network consisting of education and research organizations, and companies of which Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences is one. The projects of the SERC network include the elements of species conservation, to which the background of the thesis is related. The thesis is quantitative research that aims to understand the giant panda brand image among college students in Finland. Also, the thesis explores the travel motivation to China and considers whether the giant panda brand image has an impact on that. The thesis process started in March 2021 and finished in May 2022.

The theoretical part includes the literature review on the most relevant topics related to branding. Theory also takes a look at the China's panda diplomacy and giant panda species conservation. The author has compiled a conceptual model based on the reviewed literature.

The empirical part presents the data collection process, the research findings, the conclusion after analysed data, and finally author's own reflection on the thesis process. The method of this quantitative research is an online survey that is a questionnaire consisting of 12 questions. The invitation link to the survey was shared to the target group, that is college students in Finland, in several different distribution channels available to the author. The data collection began in May 2021 and was completed in October 2021.

The results provide insights to better understand how college students in Finland perceive giant panda brand. The results also indicate the level of travel motivation to China among the target group. The conclusion of the study includes recommendations for further research, as well as a developmental aspect for the commissioner to enhance the giant panda brand as China's destination ambassador.

The Harvard referencing style has been used in the thesis.

Keywords

brands, branding, giant panda, foreign travel, conservation

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1 Introduction

Travelling has become a popular activity in the postmodern and globalized world. Destinations compete for revenue generated by travellers in the complex field of tourism. In order to succeed, the destination brand image needs to be understood. The destination brand image is composed of many factors and subjectively depending on the consuming person. The tourism industry cannot escape contrasts, as its operations pose a threat to the biodiversity of nature.

This thesis is quantitative research that studies the image perceptions on giant panda brand. The target group of the study is college students in Finland. The study also investigates the level of knowledge that the target group has on snow pandas Lumi and Pyry in Ähtäri Zoo. Additionally, the study examines if the target group has travel motivation or travel intention to China. Finally, it is considered whether the brand image of giant pandas have an impact on the travel motivation to China.

1.1 Background

The commissioner of the thesis is Snow Panda Education and Research Consortium (SERC). SERC is a multinational partnership network consisting of different education and research organisations and companies. The projects of the SERC network always include the elements of species conservation and environmental education.

The thesis is part of Haaga Helia's international co-operation with SERC. The topic came into the author's knowledge through Haaga-Helia's thesis related course. Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences is one partner of SERC network and so is Ähtäri Zoo. (SERC, n.d.) In Finland, there are two giant pandas in Ähtäri Zoo. The giant pandas are named Hua Bao and Jin BaoBao or alternatively Pyry and Lumi in Finnish. They arrived in Ähtäri in January 2018 and their lease was made for 15 years. The giant pandas are an international attraction, and the zoo expects these pandas to be drivers for profitable growth in their business. (Saavalainen, 2018.)

The background of the topic lies in the giant panda lease between China and Finland which is part of China's Panda Diplomacy. There are a total of 70 giant panda individuals under a lease in 20 different countries as a result of China's good will gesture to enhance their country brand image and to build international relations. This kind of lease costs 1 million US dollars to the recipient country a year. The money is put to conservation efforts of giant panda species and their living environment. (Anderlini, 2017; Li & Wong, 2018.)

Giant pandas are an exclusive species to the region of southwest China. Due to the exclusivity, giant panda has become a symbol that represents China. This study takes a look at giant pandas from branding perspective. The emphasis is on the giant pandas' significance as a national brand of China. (Li & Wong, 2018.) The giant pandas are considered as destination brand ambassadors for China.

1.2 Objectives

This study is among initial attempts to better understand the image perceptions, opinions, and attitudes that college students in Finland have towards giant panda brand. Interpretations of the study will provide beneficial information for the commissioner on this matter as well as on the level of travel motivation that college students in Finland have to China. The research question is: What is giant panda brand image like? The sub-questions are as following:

1. How do college students in Finland perceive Giant Panda Brand?
2. Do Hua Bao (Pyy) and Jin BaoBao (Lumi) have an impact on the image perception of college students in Finland on Giant Panda Brand?
3. Do college students in Finland have travel intention to China?
4. Does the image perception on Giant Panda Brand have an impact on travel motivation to China?

This study employs a questionnaire as an instrument to find answers to the research questions. The questionnaire is structured in Sichuan Agricultural University (SAU), where the same study is conducted targeting college students of China. Later on, the findings of this study will be compared with the ones of SAU. Like Haaga-Helia UAS, SAU works as a partner of SERC.

1.3 Thesis structure

After the introduction begins the theoretical part. Theory consists of literature review on the subjects of brand, brand image, brand equity, brand identity, brand relationship, country branding, and destination branding. In addition, the theory presents the China's panda diplomacy in brief. In the theoretical part, multiple academic sources are considered and reviewed in order to present a solid cohesive whole of the broad subject. Lastly, the author presents a conceptual model produced from the literature review to summarise the theory.

Next, empirical part outlines the approach to quantitative research and the nature of it. Also, empirical part elaborates the methods and timing of data collection. Then, the research is justified through reliability, validity, and limitations of the study. Later, the research findings and conclusions are presented. Subsequently, the research questions will

be answered reflecting the data on the theory. Finally, the discussion suggests future recommendations for the commissioner.

2 Brand

Brand is a name, term, design, symbol, or anything that identifies a seller's goods or service and that differentiates the offering from competitors (Jarowski, et al., 2017). Brands are present in postmodern societies. Brands and branding became central topics of marketing already in the modern times, during the second half of 20th century (Grönroos, 2015, p. 337). Brands have three poles they rely on: product or service, name, and concept. Good brand name has the power to influence the market. Good brand concept is able to create a community around its values. (Kapferer, 2012, p. 8–11.)

Business-wise, brands are intangible assets that produce benefits for the enterprise. Brands are created in the minds of consumers through brand assets. The brand assets are brand awareness, beliefs of brand's unique benefits, and emotional bonding. (Kapferer, 2012, p. 7–8.) According to Aaker (2010), this set of assets form brand equity (Aaker, 2010). Aaker (2010) divides brand assets into four principal categories: brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand associations. With these assets, brand itself is a powerful asset to a business. (Aaker, 2010.)

There is an internationally agreed definition for brands from legal point of view: "*Brand is a sign or set of signs certifying the origin of a product or service and differentiating it from the competition.*" (Kapferer, 2012, p. 8). The legal definition allows brands to have birthdays on the day they were registered. It is in a contradiction with the definition that brands are made in the minds of people, not born. (Kapferer, 2012, p. 8.) Brand has two meanings. The classic narrow approach looks at the brand as a physical and functional product trademark. It supports the identifying and differentiating of a brand. The other behavioural and broad approach considers brand as an intangible and meaningful symbol that produces value for customer. The multitude of supply and demand today has led to the integration of both approaches. To meet the demands the markets require, brand must be strong and well named. (Świtłała, et al., 2018.) In order to have a strong brand that generates growth and profitability, Kapferer (2012) states that it is essential to understand how brands create value for the customers (Kapferer, 2012, p. 20).

2.1 Brand Image

Brand image is the perceptions of a brand. It reflects the reality how consumers see the brand. (Aaker, 2010.) In their minds, consumers form associations of brand's tangible and intangible attributes. Brand image is based on these associations. The meaning and intensity of the associations are affected by the person's attitude towards the brand, their personality, and brand's actions. (Išoraitė, 2018.)

When evaluating the brand image, it is essential to look into brand associations on different dimensions: product attributes, use context, user imagery, organizational associations, brand personality, brand-customer relationships, and emotional and self-expressive benefits. Brand identity, which is the way the brand strategists want the brand to be perceived, can differ from the brand image. (Aaker, 2010, p. 180–196.)

2.2 Brand (image) perception formation

As mentioned earlier, brand image is reflection of how customers perceive the brand. As stated by Grönroos (2015), brand is not something that is first built and then offered for customers to be perceived. Thus, a brand cannot exist without a customer. For the customer, brand is the brand image. Therefore, the concept of brand image does not differ from the concept of brand.

When a person receives inputs about a brand to the extent that they start to observe and react to these brand messages, the brand image is being formed. Brand image formation happens in the minds of consumers on conscious and subconscious levels. One brand input after another will add up to the brand image forming the customer perception of that brand. These brand inputs are also called brand contacts that are a flow of interactions between customer and brand. In this case, brand can be represented by supplier, service provider, marketing communication elements, Internet websites, and social media. Finally, the interactions between two parties form an ongoing relationship. Creating brand relationship is a process of exposing and engaging customer with the brand, followed with a brand image formation in the mind of the customer. (Grönroos, 2015. p. 339–342.)

Brand identity is the goal that describes the brand image as the brand strategists want it to be perceived in the minds of customers. Branding is the process when brand strategists strive to create a brand image that corresponds to the brand identity. The main role in this process is still customer's. Brand strategists' role is to offer consumers frames for the development of favourable brand image by providing appropriate product or service with supportive marketing communication. Still, the formation of brand image in consumers' minds is not manageable. However, brand contacts are manageable and should be supported by suitable circumstances for branding to be successful. (Grönroos, 2015. p. 339–345.)

2.3 Brand Equity

When brand is seen superior compared to other alternatives in the market, the brand is perceived valuable in the mind of customer. Brand value offers the base for achieving sales. (Grönroos, 2015, p. 342.) The brand value results from customers' willingness to buy one brand rather than a cheaper one from a competitor. The willingness to buy from a more expensive producer is due to customer's perceptions, beliefs, and ties to the brand, that arise over time. These factors are drivers for brand value. (Kapferer, 2012, p. 7–8.) A brand that produces value is valuable for the business. Brand value describes the financial worth of the brand in the market. It is notable that a positive brand value does not directly mean that brand equity is positive. (Aaker, 2016.)

Brand equity, on the other hand, is a combination of assets or liabilities that are formed of brand visibility, brand associations and customer loyalty. Brand equity can add to or subtract from the value of product or service provided by the brand. (Aaker, 2016.) Brand equity has many different definitions. In his book, Kapferer (2012) clarifies the concept of brand equity by showing how the consumer approach and financial approach are connected. In his model, brand assets lead to brand strength which leads to brand value which means financial equity. (Kapferer, 2012, p. 14–15.) Brand equity assets create value not only to the business but also to the customer. Customers are concerned to be both the end users and retailers. (Aaker, 2010, p. 8.)

Keller (2012) underlines the importance of brand equity to marketing. Brand equity results from brand's marketing actions. Thus, brand ought to be involved in marketing strategies. In his book, Keller (2012) states that branded product or service will result in positive marketing outcomes. (Keller, 2012.)

2.3.1 Brand Awareness

When it comes to concept of brand equity, brand awareness is an important factor. In the process of creating brand equity, the first step is to build brand awareness. (Ali, 2019.) Brand awareness describes how strong is the presence of a brand in the mind of a consumer. Citing Aaker (2010), "*If consumers' minds were full of mental billboards – each one depicting a single brand – then a brand's awareness would be reflected in the size of its billboard*" (Aaker, 2010, p. 10). Brand awareness can be measured by how well a consumer recognizes or recalls the brand. Recognition results from past exposure to the brand. It is about a consumer feeling familiarity with the brand. They have seen it or heard about it before. That is to say, they have knowledge of the brand. It is not a necessity for

them to remember where or when they have encountered the brand nor why or how it differs from other brands, nor even what is the product class of the brand. Recognition alone arouses instinctively positive feelings in consumers towards the brand.

The positive feeling towards the brand is not only an instinctive response resulting from recognition. When a consumer encounters a brand and remembers seeing it before, perhaps more than once, they feel that the company is spending money to support the brand. Consumers have a general belief that companies will not put money and effort on bad products. Repetitive exposure to the brand is a signal to consumers that the brand is good. (Aaker, 2010, p. 10–11.)

Brand recall, on the other hand, requires more than knowledge of brand's existence. Brand possesses brand recall when it comes to consumer's mind when the product class of the brand is mentioned. When measuring the brand strength, brand recall can address that brand recognition is not enough. Consumers may recognize the brand, but it is not a primary brand in their minds when considering a purchase. (Aaker, 2010, p. 11–13.)

The brand reaches the highest possible awareness when its name becomes a common label for the product class it represents. (Aaker, 2010, p. 15–16.) For example, Band-Aid, Post-It, and Thermos are trademarks that have become common terminology of their product class (Shontell, 2010). This phenomenon is called brand name dominance which is not necessarily positive possession. By becoming a common label among mainstream of consumers, the brand loses control of the trademark. (Aaker, 2010, p. 15–16.)

2.3.2 Perceived Quality

Perceived quality reflects the customer's overall view of the quality of product or service. It is defined through customer's opinions about characteristics of product or service, such as reliability, durability and serviceability, and style and design. (Keller, 2012, p. 187) Perceived quality is essential for consumers when considering a purchase. Also, perceived quality affects to all other aspects of customers' perception of a brand. In customers' minds, perceived quality reflects a measure of goodness of a brand. (Aaker, 2010, p. 19.)

As perceived quality plays a significant role of brand formation in the minds of customers, it is a driver for financial performance. Therefore, perceived quality is often listed as one of the strategic values of a business. Perceived quality defines the competitive environment of a brand and the brand's position in that environment. It reflects the consumer's opinion of a brand compared to another competing brand. Perceived quality position often enables differentiation for the brand. (Aaker, 2010, p. 18–19.)

2.3.3 Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty requires a brand to have an existing customer base. These customers are willing to repurchase the products or services the brand represents. They trust the brand and would recommend it to others. To some extent, loyal customers can even feel proud of being the brand's users. (Aaker, 2010, p. 40.) The highest level of brand loyalty takes place when customer is engaged to the brand. They show commitment by investing resources like time, energy, and money in the brand. For instance, engaged customers may join a club created around the brand and interact with other brand enthusiasts. (Keller, 2012.) There is a division to other loyalty segments in the brand's market in addition to committed customers. Fence sitters are product class users but they are not committed to one certain brand. The passively loyal customers are used to buy certain brand out of habit but do not have a particular reason for that. Price switchers are sensitive for price and therefore, are after the cheapest brand available. Noncustomers are the consumers buying competing brands, or they are the ones not using the product class at all. (Aaker, 2010, p. 22–23.)

Brand loyalty adds to the brand value. Loyal customer base is expected to generate streamy profitable sales. Therefore, for brand, it is desirable to obtain long-term committed customers. Also, it is less expensive to retain existing customers than attracting new ones. To retain the existing customers, there are loyalty-building programs. (Aaker, 2010, p. 21.)

2.3.4 Brand Associations

Aaker (2010) emphasizes that brand equity is supported by the associations that consumers make with a brand (Aaker, 2010, p. 25). Positive brand associations will foster the brand recall and purchase decisions consumers make. The more customer is exposed to the brand, the stronger the brand associations are. (Wijaksono & Ali, 2019.)

Brand associations are related to, for instance, product attributes, a celebrity representative, or a certain symbol. Brand associations are consumer's cognitive links with the brand reflecting their beliefs or knowledge of the brand attributes. (Aaker, 2010, p. 25.) Brand associations contribute to brand image. Brand image is a set of mental associations of a brand formed in the mind of a customer. Brand associations are formed of brand's product class, quality level (low, middle, premium, or luxury), features, typical user, and personality. (Kapferer, 2012, p. 9).

When influencing on the associations that consumers make, consciously or unconsciously, the key is to develop and implement a brand identity. Aaker (2010) states that

brand associations are driven by brand identity. Brand identity reflects the desired outcome of what the brand managers want the brand to stand for in the minds of consumers. (Aaker, 2010, p. 25.)

2.3.5 Measuring brand equity

Standing out among its competitors gives a brand point of differentiation. Differentiation is the base when building a strong brand. Next, brand must be found relevant by significant segment to attract a large number of consumers. A brand that has relevance is personally meaningful to a user. There is a link between relevance and household penetration. In other words, high percentage of consumers buy brands that are practical and are sold in reasonable price. For a brand to be strong, it must bear both characteristics, differentiation and relevance. (Aaker, 2010, p. 306–307.)

In addition to brand strength, brand stature indicates the value of brand assets. Brand stature is formed of esteem and knowledge. As for esteem, it is a combination of perceived quality and perceived popularity. Esteem indicates whether a brand is highly respected and seen as the leader in its category. Knowledge is about the consumers understanding what the brand stands for. Knowledge goes beyond the brand awareness and therefore, it is created by deep customer acquaintance with the brand. When a brand's esteem is higher than its knowledge, only few consumers understand what brand stands for but the ones who do, keep it in high regard. Contrariwise, brands with low esteem and high knowledge are potentially losing their market penetration. (Aaker, 2010, p. 304–308.)

2.4 Brand Identity

As stated by Aaker (2010), a brand image is how a brand is perceived and the brand identity is aspirational. Brand identity is how the brand would like to be perceived. Brand identity gives direction, purpose, and meaning for the brand. Therefore, brand identity forms a base for brand's strategic vision. Brand identity is a driver for brand associations. To clarify, brand identity can be compared to a person's identity: "Who am I and how do I act among others in order to give them the desired image of myself?" (Aaker, 2010, p. 68.)

Brand identity is consisted of different layers. At the heart of the identity, is the core identity. The core identity is timeless permanent part of the brand that remains the same regardless of the market or possible brand expansion (Aaker, 2010, p. 85–86). In the core, there is strategy including mission, vision, and values of brand. These are supported by brand attributes, story, and differentiating elements. The second layer is called brand ele-

ments. It includes all visual elements like logo, colour, or font. The last layer is brand applications which is about the brand contacts where customer is interacting with the brand, such as web, social media, or advertisement. (Jurišová, 2020.)

When developing brand identity, it is essential to understand the brand image. Brand image describes how the brand is actually perceived among consumers. Still, there is more to brand identity than accepting the existing perceptions of consumers. Brand identity should not be based on what consumers say they want. Brand identity is how brand managers want the brand to be perceived. Brand identity must reflect the strategic vision, desired outcome, and persistent characteristics of the brand. When looking at the matter from strategic perspective, brand identity has elements of innovative, profitable, and forward-looking qualities. (Aaker, 2010, p. 69–70.)

Brand identity generates brand value proposition and credibility. Brand position – like brand image – is part of brand identity. Brand position is the part of the brand that is actively communicated to the target customers. Like value proposition, brand position separates the brand from competitors. (Aaker, 2010, p. 68–71.) With value proposition, brand offers functional, emotional, and self-expressive benefits for the customer which generates value for them (Aaker, 2010, p. 95).

When building the brand identity that has a solid structure and depth, the key is to take into account different perspectives from where to look at the brand: Brand as a product, an organisation, a person, and a symbol. The brand identity perspectives are there to support clarifying, enrichment, and differentiating of brand identity. (Aaker, 2010, p. 78.) A good plan and an implementation of brand identity and brand position can be an asset to the enterprise. Brand identity and brand position can create value for the business different ways: they guide and enhance brand strategy, provide extension options, improve brand memorability, and provide meaning and focus to the organization. Additionally, they give a competitive advantage by providing a value proposition, credibility to other brands, and basis for customer relationship. (Aaker, 2010, p. 201–205.)

2.4.1 Brand-as-Product

A core element of brand identity is the product class it represents. In peoples' minds, a brand is associated to a product or products. Brand has a strong link to its product class if the brand is recalled when the product class is mentioned. When a brand possesses dominance, it will be the only brand recalled.

Product-related associations usually lead to brand choice decisions and the use experience among customers. Therefore, product perspective is important component of brand identity. Different products have different attributes which is a point of differentiation for brands. Product attributes can be functional or emotional benefits that the customer feels to receive when purchasing. A product-related attribute creates a value proposition by offering something better than rivals or by offering something exceeding expectations of a customer. In addition to product attributes, there are other associations related to brand as product. A brand can be associated with use occasion, type of users, or linked to a country or region. (Aaker, 2010, p. 79–80.)

2.4.2 Brand-as-Organisation

The people, culture, values, and programs of the company create the attributes related to organizational perspective of a brand identity. The organizational attributes are, for instance innovation, a drive for quality, and ethical and environmental actions. Compared to product attributes, the organizational attributes provide brand a better competitive edge. For rivals, it is easier to copy a successful product than a successful organisation.

Organisational attributes can foster value proposition when they meet with consumers' admirations, values, and preferences. Organisational attributes like customer focus, environmental actions, technological development, or local orientation can provide emotional and self-expressive benefits. (Aaker, 2010, p. 82–83.)

2.4.3 Brand-as-Person

Brand-as-person is a rich and more interesting perspective on brand identity than product-related attributes. Brand-as-person perspective can give a brand a personality with a set of human characteristics like being fun, casual, formal, youthful, active, humorous, trustworthy, or intellectual. (Aaker, 2010, p. 84–85.) Also, characteristics like gender, age, and socioeconomic class can be associated with a brand (Aaker, 2010, p. 141). Brand personality can provide customer self-expressive benefits when they use the brand to express their own personality. In addition, brand personality can communicate product attributes to the audience and in that way contribute to a functional benefit. (Aaker, 2010, p. 83–84.) For example, Duracell Bunny is presented as fast, energetic, and enduring mascot which implies that Duracell batteries have the same attributes.

Another link between brand-as-product and brand-as-person perspectives is how the product attributes affect brand personality. Product-related characteristics like product class, package, price, and attributes can be drivers for brand personality. On the other hand, non-product-related characteristics like user imagery, sponsorships, symbol, age,

advertising style, country of origin, company image, CEO, and celebrity endorser can also affect brand personality. (Aaker, 2010, p. 145–147.)

Aaker, (2010), states that brand personality can create brand equity. To iterate, brand equity refers to the set of brand assets that create value to business and customers. Consumers buy products that bring meaning to their lives, products that not only fulfil the functional benefit purpose. For some consumers, the meaning of using brands is to express themselves. (Aaker, 2010, p. 153–159.) To provide consumers with meaning for buying, brands add value to the product and tell a story about its users. (Kapferer, 2012, p. 1). Brand personality contributes to the cultural meaning of the brand. Consumers are after the brands whose cultural meanings correlate with the person they are or want to become. Also, brand personality can arouse feelings in a customer. When a certain brand is associated with a particular feeling the customer seeks out, the brand serves as a channel for self-expression. When a brand goes beyond representing one's personality by becoming part of the self, the ultimate personality expression occurs. For example, the constant usage of an Apple iPhone makes the device to become part of the person. Thus, the brand becomes a central element of the user's identity. (Aaker, 2010, p. 153–159.)

2.4.4 Brand-as-Symbol

Brand symbol can be anything that represents the brand. Aaker (2010) points out three different types of brand symbols: visual imagery, metaphors, and the brand heritage. With brand symbol, it is easier to achieve recognition and recall for the brand because a powerful brand symbol adds consistency and structure to the brand identity. (Aaker, 2010, p. 84–85.) Having a brand symbol is also an effective way to increase the brand awareness. Aaker states, that brand awareness level will increase when a brand name is attached to a symbol or visual image. (Aaker, 2010, p. 331.)

Symbols can create very strong associations in peoples' minds and in that way contribute significantly on brand personality (Aaker, 2010, p. 148). The symbol is more powerful the more it provides meaning for a customer on a personal level. Also, a visual image makes the symbol more powerful. (Aaker, 2010, p. 203.) To conclude, a symbol can be a visual image, slogan, jingle, metaphor, brand ambassador, or anything to enhance, represent, and support the brand identity. A symbol makes it easier for consumers to understand and remember the brand identity.

2.5 Brand relationship

Like two persons can have a relationship between them, so can a brand with a customer. One's behaviour affects the way their personality is perceived by others. Similarly, brand's

perceived personality is affected by the brand's actions. The way that brand personality is perceived has an impact on customer's willingness to create a relationship with the brand as well as on the nature of the relationship between a customer and the brand. When the quality of the relationship between a customer and a brand is high, it results in brand loyalty. Then the customer has created a bond between them and the brand. For instance, behavioural interdependence, personal commitment, or love and passion between a customer and a brand are all forms of brand loyalty. (Aaker, 2010, p. 159–167.)

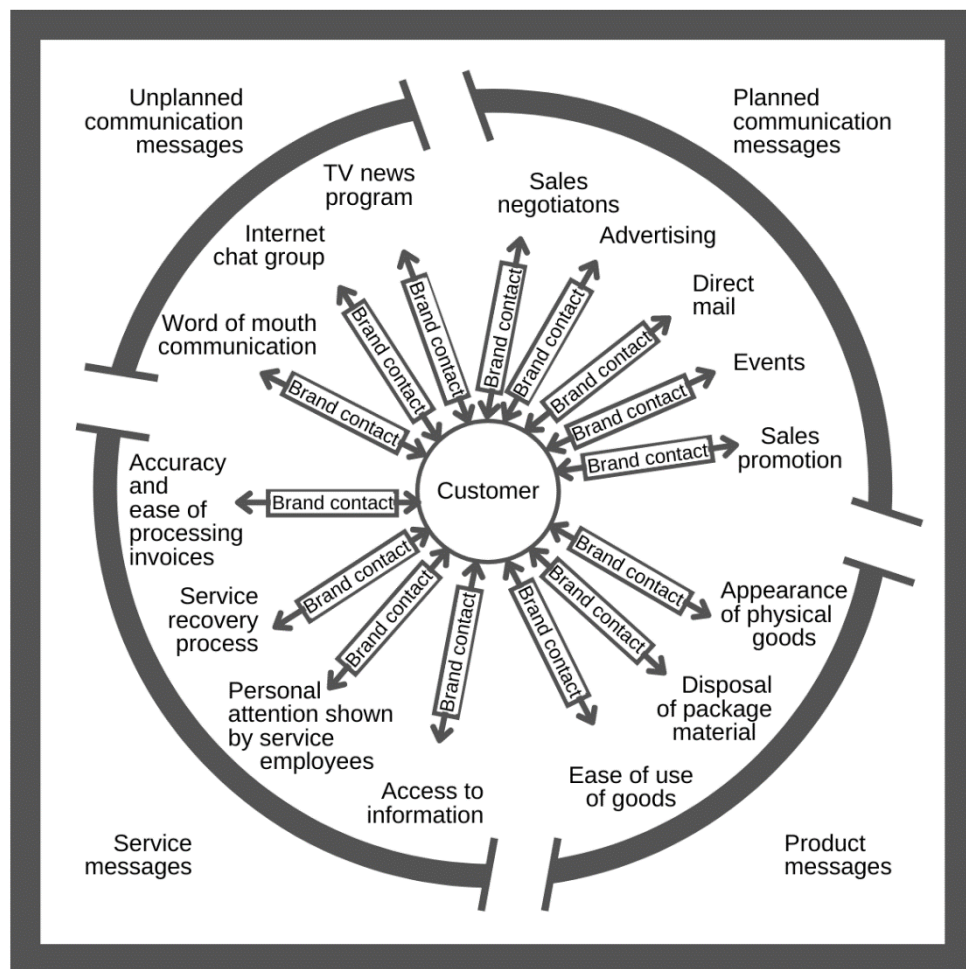


Figure 1. Brand contacts forming a brand relationship. (Grönroos, 2015, p. 340.)

The brand relationship forms through brand contacts (Figure 1.). Brand contacts are all the brand messages that customers are exposed to, for instance, planned marketing communication, social media, and word of mouth. Brand relationship contributes to brand image. (Grönroos, 2015, p. 340.)

2.6 Branding a service

Service is a process that involves service provider and customer. Therefore, buying a service is process consumption. While product brand associations can be created through product attributes and marketing communications, service brand associations are primarily created in the actual service process. (Grönroos, 2015, p. 337–338.)

Products are ready-made, pre-produced physical goods that can be delivered to customers as a starting point of brand relationships. The development and designing of the products are considered as first step of branding process. The first phase includes market research on customer preferences and needs which results in the knowledge of the desired features for the product. Products always possess the same features and quality levels which provides a standardized base for product branding. When products are existent, the branding process continues by planning and implementing the marketing communications. In product branding, marketing communications are considered as central function, whereas the product is a supporting element designed in respect of brand identity. (Grönroos, 2015, p. 338–343.)

While on the other hand, service process is unique, intangible occasion which is an experience created at the moment of consumption. In service branding, marketing communications are only an assisting element to create brand awareness and give customers a promise of that service brand. (Grönroos, 2015, p. 338–343.) Kapferer (2012) calls the brand promise as *vocatio*, which is service brand's slogan to define and illustrate brand's behavioural guidelines (Kapferer, 2012, p. 72). The brand promise ought to be fulfilled in the service process, otherwise it may have fatal consequences on brand image and branding process. Therefore, the key point of service branding is planning and managing the service process. (Grönroos, 2015, p. 343.) Often, service brands have mapped customer journeys and personnel code of conduct how to perform within each contact point of the journey (Kapferer, 2012, p. 72).

In many cases, employees are an essential part of the service process. They deliver the brand promise to customers. Therefore, the success of service branding can be enhanced with creating a supportive service culture in the organization. In a favourable situation, the employees adopt the brand identity, and the intended service brand image emerges. (Grönroos, 2015, p. 338–344.) Internal branding is the term that aims to create such organizational culture in which the employees cohesively understand and consistently cherish the service brand identity (de Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley, 1999).

As stated by Grönroos (2015), branding is about doing better in competitive situation. As for the subject of branding, the focus is still put on increasing a customer base and keeping the existing customers satisfied and loyal rather than on branding itself. (Grönroos, 2015, p. 338.)

2.7 Country Branding

Countries can be seen as brands. Countries are symbols and they gain reputation for their accomplishments, key competences, personality traits of their inhabitants, and events of history, recent or distant. Country brand image forms through the reputation factors. Also, the private sector, like companies and commercial brands, has an influence on the country brand. Country brand is a combination of information from different societal levels. Political, social, cultural, economic, and tourist aspects all contribute to formation of country brand. Additionally, it is noteworthy that country brand image can be formed through real or imaginary information, and it can be emotionally charged. (Kapferer, 2012, p. 87–88.)

Today, having a brand is a desire for every organization. Cities and countries share this desire. Countries compete in several markets, like in the tourism market. From political perspective, country is put at the centre of the world. When attracting international markets, the perspective broadening is advisable. Brand-as-country perspective looks at the country from foreigner's perspective. Brand-as-country perspective poses a question: Does the country name have an impact on the product or service choices of a foreign audience? (Kapferer, 2012, p. 88–89.)

When a brand is associated with a certain country or a region it adds credibility to brand identity. For instance, champagne is associated with France, and Stolichnaya vodka with Russia. These country associations imply that these brands are higher quality because the countries have a reputation of making the best within that product class. (Aaker, 2010, p. 78–82.) In addition to quality, a country or a region origin can generate strong brand personality which is a significant point of differentiation (Aaker, 2010, p. 169).

2.7.1 Destination branding

Destination is a place where somebody is going (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, n.d.). From tourism perspective, destination can be a country, state, province, region, city, or a town (Blain, et al., 2005). Tourism has become a popular activity in globalized world, and it contributes to destination country's economy by being an important source of export (Pereira, et al., 2019).

Destination is seen as intangible product that provides multidimensional experiences. Like services, destinations are unique and experienced differently depending on the person of consumption. In other words, traveling to a destination is subjective experience. (Chi, et al., 2020.) From marketing perspective, destination is a set of products and services within the destination environment. Therefore, destination marketing faces the challenge of whether one brand alone can represent the destination as a united whole. (Moilanen, 2008.)

Destination brand image formation is impacted by the consumer's route of travel, purpose of the visit, educational level, culture, and past experience of the destination. In addition, destination brands can be affected by human-induced influences, natural phenomena, and purposeful interventions. (Chi, et al., 2020.)

In their research, Chi, et al. studied if the destination brand equity has an impact on travel intentions. They found out, that there is a positive link between destination brand equity – which consists of destination brand awareness, destination brand image, perceived destination brand quality, and destination brand loyalty – and travel intentions. Additionally, they found out that destination familiarity has a positive impact on destination awareness and perceived quality of destination. Destination brand equity is a key factor that determines the travel intentions of international tourists. (Chi, et al., 2020.)

Travel intention describes a person's commitment to travel. It is a culmination of mental process that turns travel motivation into action of making a visit. (Bai, et al., 2009.) Travel motivation, on the other hand, reflects a tourist's desires of traveling and experiencing things they value. A positive destination image enhances the travel motivation of tourists. (Pereira, et al., 2019.) Also, a good destination brand image has a positive impact directly on travel intention (Wu, 2015). For destination branding to be successful, a thorough understanding of the destination image is required. (Chan & Marafa, 2019)

2.7.2 China's panda diplomacy

Giant pandas are bears that live in temperate forests in the mountains of eastern edge of West China. Their natural habitat locates in Sichuan, Shaanxi, and Gansu provinces. Human activity like logging, agriculture, and infrastructure development in the living area of giant pandas has had a fragmenting and isolating impact on panda populations. Climate change poses another threat to the species. Giant pandas are dependent on bamboo as their diet consists of 90 percent of it. Bamboo is vulnerable to changing climate. (Advani, 2017.)

Chinese Government has been committed to actions protecting giant panda species. One of the most recent ones being the announcement of the development of national parks, of which Giant Panda National Park is one. Establishment of national parks puts the focus on protecting the ecosystem which includes the living environment of endangered species such as the giant panda. (Xu, et al., 2019.) Over the past decade, the giant panda population has grown 17 percent, downgrading the species' status from endangered to vulnerable on the global list of threatened species held by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Today, the overall giant panda population size is 1,864 individuals in total. (WWF, 2017.)

The giant panda species is exclusive to the region of southwest China and therefore, the Chinese put high value on the species. Giant panda has become a symbol that represents China. Due to its national significance, giant panda is a national brand of China. (Li & Wong, 2018.)

The year 1941 started the modern practice of China's panda diplomacy, when Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek sent two pandas to the United States as an acknowledgement for their war-time aid. Since then, Chinese leaders have offered pandas to zoos in different countries as a goodwill gesture to improve China's image. Giant panda is part of China's peaceful brand identity, and a diplomatic tool to strengthen friendly relations with other countries. (Li & Wong, 2018)

Panda diplomacy is not only China's attempts to build the country brand image, but an implementation of the conservation work of the species. Nowadays, pandas are transferred to foreign countries in a form of a lease, where the recipient country pays one million US dollars to China contributing to the conservation of the species. Outside of China, there are 70 captured pandas in 20 different countries, of which Finland is one. (Anderlini, 2017.)

In January 2018, two giant pandas arrived to Ähtäri Zoo in Finland as a result of research and conservation cooperation agreement between the Ähtäri Zoo and the China Wildlife Conservation Association (CWCA). Together with State Forestry Administration (SFA), CWCA is the coordinator of giant panda conservation outside of China. The giant pandas in Ähtäri Zoo are named Hua Bao (Pyy), and Jin BaoBao (Lumi). (Sivonen & Lahtinen, 2021.) Pyy and Lumi are also called snow pandas due to their names that are strongly related to snow in Finnish language. Ähtäri Zoo is part of Snow Panda Education and Research Consortium (SERC) which is a co-operating network consisting of education and research organizations, and companies. The cooperation agreement was concluded for 15 years, during which Ähtäri Zoo is financially involved in the conservation efforts

related to giant pandas and their habitat. The pivotal conservation operations of the agreement are targeted to preserving the natural vitality of panda population, expanding the protected areas, the restoration and afforestation of the areas undergone pandas' loss, and training conservation area personnel. (SERC, n.d.). In this study, the giant panda is considered a brand ambassador for China as a destination brand.

2.8 Brand management

To gain positive perceived quality of a brand among the customers, there must be an understanding of what quality means to the target customer segments. Offering a superior quality product or service is not enough, perceptions must be created as well. Still, it is vital for a brand to be high quality from the very beginning when entering the markets. If consumers are influenced with an image of inferior quality, these perceptions are not easily changed. When influencing consumers' perceptions of quality, brand management must send right cues of quality to the customers. Consumers usually lack information to make rational judgments on quality. They may rely on just a few cues or wrong cues that they associate with quality. (Aaker, 2010, p. 19–20.)

To reach brand loyalty within the market, brand management should identify their loyalty segments. The key to enhancing brand loyalty is to create and develop the brand relationship. Brand awareness, perceived quality, and well-planned and well-executed brand identity all contribute to brand relationship formation. (Aaker, 2010, p. 23.)

In order to build a brand that is strong and adaptable in different and international markets, many perspectives must be taken into account. Competitive price, differentiation from competitors, consistent strategy, innovative organizational culture, open to invest elsewhere, and long-term goals are factors needed to build and maintain a strong brand. (Aaker, 2010, p. 26–35.)

2.9 Conceptual model

Based on the literature review consisting of variety of sources, a conceptual model (Figure 2.) was made. In a visual way, the model presents the process of travel intention formation through destination brand image. The author has connected the brand theories presented in previous chapters into a unified summary.

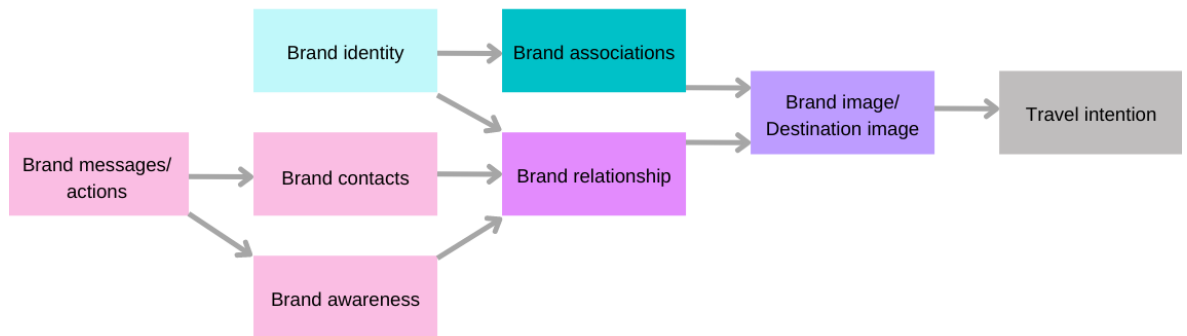


Figure 2. Process of travel intention formation through destination brand image.

On the very left of the model, there are brand messages or brand actions which refer to all the brand messages that customers are exposed to, including planned or unplanned marketing communication, like social media posts, and word of mouth. These brand messages form brand contacts with the customer and create brand awareness. Both of these contribute to the forming of brand relationship between customer and the brand.

In the light blue box, there is brand identity which represents the brand management's vision of how the brand would like to be perceived among the customers. The way that customers perceive the brand identity also affects the formation of brand relationship. Additionally, brand associations in the dark blue box are driven by brand identity. Brand associations refer to all the things that customers associate with the brand in their minds. Subsequently, brand relationship and brand associations both contribute to the brand image, or in this study destination brand image, and the recent research shows that positive destination brand image has an increasing impact on travel intention. (Aaker, 2010; Kapferer, 2012; Grönroos, 2015; Wu, 2015; Išoraitė, 2018; Pereira, et al., 2019; Wijaksono & Ali, 2019; Chi, et al., 2020.)

3 Methodology

The research question of the thesis explores what is giant panda brand image like. To discover the answers to this and the sub-questions, a research method is required. The thesis is quantitative research that aims to understand the giant panda brand image. The target group of the research is college students in Finland. The thesis is research oriented. The method of this quantitative research is an online survey (Appendix 1), that is a questionnaire that respondents complete themselves. The data are gathered through non-probability sample.

The survey is designed by the commissioner and assigned to the author to use as a research method for empirical data gathering in the study. The questions of the survey are constructed in Sichuan Agricultural University and the same structure is used in this study as well. Webropol 3.0 is used as a tool for conducting the survey. The online questionnaire was tested in Vaasa University during in the spring of 2021. The research data resulting from the survey are analysed using Webropol Analytics.

3.1 Quantitative research

Quantitative research is an orientation of research strategy that entails the collection and analysis of numerical data. In quantitative research, the approach is focused on the testing of existing theories. In other words, the relationship between theory and research is deductive. (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 37–38.) Therefore, the first part of this study consists of theory on the relevant concepts.

Ontologically, quantitative research examines social reality objectively as an external reality. Epistemologically, quantitative research applies the practices and norms of the natural science and especially of positivism. Positivism's main emphasis is on observation rather than theory as an acceptable knowledge. Theory provides a basis for generating hypotheses that are tested in a study. (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 26–27.) Instead of formulating hypotheses, this study employs the theoretical concerns in relation to which the author collects data.

3.2 Data collection

The target population of the study is college students in Finland. Since the population of the study is considered large, sampling was required. The sampling method selected was non-probability sampling due to its cost- and time-efficiency. Precisely, the type of sampling was convenience sampling. To gather a satisfactory amount of data, the aim was to collect 300 responses to the survey. To ensure that goal to be achieved, the invitation link

to the survey was shared to college students in Finland in diversity of distribution channels available to the author.

The online link to the survey was sent centrally to Haaga-Helia students via e-mail through Haaga-Helia Student Services. Additional invitation letter was written for preface of the e-mail (Appendix 2.). The invitation link to the survey was sent 11 May 2021 to all Haaga and Porvoo campuses' students enrolled to current study term. Additionally, the invitation link was sent to enrolled BITE, SEBBA, and GLOBBA students from Pasila and Malmi campuses. The reminder of the invitation link was sent to students mentioned above on 3 June through Haaga-Helia Student Services.

In addition, the link to the survey was shared in MyNet under news on 26 May 2021. On 10 June, after one month of the link being published, the number of respondents was 55. Additional channels were considered for sharing the link. Social media was utilized to improve the visibility of the survey to students in Finland. On 11 June, the link to the survey was shared in Lab8 Facebook page. On 1 July, the link was shared in Matkailun parhaaksi Facebook group as well.

On 17 August, the link to the survey was additionally converted into QR-code and printed. The print (Appendix 3.) was spread in Haaga campus during orientation week which is targeted to new freshmen students. On 10 September, the permission to conduct research was accepted in Laurea University of Applied Sciences. On 16 September, the link to the survey was sent to nearly 7 000 Laurea Bachelor's students via e-mail. On 29 September, the number of respondents was 237. The reminder of taking part in the survey was sent to Laurea students on 6 October. On 13 October, the data collection was completed with the closure of the online link. Eventually, the survey gathered 293 responses in total which the commissioner saw as a representative sample.

3.3 Reliability, validity, and limitations

The method of the study is truthfully presented with details in the appendices and the data analysis is attached in its entirety under research findings. Thus, the research is reliable. However, it must be noted that the sampling frame was rather narrow to the entire target group which was the college students in Finland. In Finland, there are about 300 000 people studying for tertiary level degree (Statistics Finland, 2020). Meaning that the sample was about 0.1 percent of the whole target group. Also, the sampling method was non-probability sample meaning that the selection of sample was affected by the author's judgement. Therefore, some members of the target group were more likely to be selected

to the sample than others. This type of sampling can lead to sampling error. (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 186–190.)

A limitation of this study was low response rate. Nearly 10,000 college students were contacted by emailing them an invitation to the survey. Meaning that the response rate was about 3 percent. A low response rate can possibly cause a bias in the findings of the research (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Another limitation is related to the individuals of the sample. A small percentage of respondents reported that they were from China. This could slightly distort the results of a study.

As for the validity, the questions in the survey are designed by SERC's partner operator Sichuan Agricultural University representatives. Also, prior to the data collection, the questionnaire was tested by a professor with their students in Vaasa University, that is also a partner of SERC. By respecting their expertise in the field, it can be stated that the questionnaire measures the concepts of the research, and therefore, the research is valid.

4 Research Findings

The questions in the survey are not mandatory to respond. Therefore, the number of the responses may vary depending on the question. All respondents are studying on higher level in Finland. The total amount of respondents was 293, of which 27.3 percent (n=283) were male and 72.7 percent were female. 51.2 percent (n=287) of the respondents were aged 28 years or over. The remaining 48.8 percent were aged between 18 and 27 years. Most respondents, 66.4 percent (n=253) reported their place of residence being in Helsinki metropolitan area, including Helsinki, Espoo, and Vantaa.

Table 1. The results of the first set of statements of the survey.

| 1. Please score the following statements based on your own cognition: | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | General | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| I know snow pandas | 25.9 % | 20.8 % | 13.0 % | 23.9 % | 16.4 % |
| Speaking of Finland, I can immediately think of snow pandas | 48.5 % | 33.8 % | 9.2 % | 5.4 % | 3.1 % |
| Speaking of snow pandas, I can immediately think of giant pandas | 17.1 % | 17.8 % | 20.5 % | 29.5 % | 15.1 % |
| I can think of some characteristics of snow pandas (birthplace, food, related events, etc.) | 27.3 % | 22.8 % | 20.8 % | 21.8 % | 7.3 % |
| I know that the snow panda is a cooperative research between China and Finland in the form of lease | 40.9 % | 24.4 % | 11.7 % | 14.8 % | 8.2 % |
| Snow pandas have a good reputation in Finland | 9.4 % | 13.5 % | 51.4 % | 19.8 % | 5.9 % |
| Snow pandas have a good word of mouth in Finland | 13.3 % | 16.4 % | 47.0 % | 17.4 % | 5.9 % |
| Snow Panda is a representative brand in Finland | 25.3 % | 33.0 % | 34.4 % | 5.9 % | 1.4 % |

The first question of the survey presents snow panda related statements to which respondents specify their level of agreement on 5-point Likert scale. The very first row in the first set of statements (Table 1.) measured whether respondents know snow pandas. 46.7 percent (n=293) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. Thereafter, 48.5 percent (n=293) strongly disagreed with the statement that when speaking of Finland, they can immediately think of snow pandas. Still, 44.6 percent (n=292) agreed or strongly agreed that when speaking of snow pandas, they can immediately think of giant pandas. 50.1 percent (n=289) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement of knowing some characteristics, like birthplace or food of snow pandas. 40.9 percent (n=291) strongly disagreed of knowing about China leasing snow pandas to Finland in the spirit of research co-operation. 51.4 percent (n=288) of respondents had a general opinion that in Finland, snow pandas have a good reputation. Also, 47

percent (n=287) responded general about snow pandas having a good word of mouth in Finland. Lastly, 58.3 percent (n=288) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that snow panda is a representative brand in Finland.

Table 2. The results of the second question of the survey.

| 2. Do these words come to mind when you think of Giant Panda? | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | General | Agree | Strongly agree |
| Cute | 1.0 % | 2.8 % | 5.5 % | 33.8 % | 56.9 % |
| Beautiful | 1.7 % | 5.5 % | 18.3 % | 40.0 % | 34.5 % |
| Interesting | 3.5 % | 2.8 % | 11.5 % | 43.5 % | 38.7 % |
| Ferocious | 20.8 % | 28.9 % | 37.3 % | 10.2 % | 2.8 % |
| Special | 3.5 % | 4.2 % | 11.1 % | 44.4 % | 36.8 % |
| Precious | 2.7 % | 4.5 % | 13.1 % | 32.1 % | 47.6 % |
| Pet | 61.8 % | 24.3 % | 7.6 % | 3.5 % | 2.8 % |
| Bamboo | 1.1 % | 1.4 % | 7.6 % | 31.6 % | 58.3 % |
| Keeper | 13.9 % | 18.5 % | 41.8 % | 18.8 % | 7.0 % |
| Feed | 9.8 % | 16.1 % | 35.7 % | 27.6 % | 10.8 % |
| Close | 26.0 % | 31.1 % | 31.1 % | 8.3 % | 3.5 % |
| Dream | 19.7 % | 27.0 % | 25.9 % | 20.1 % | 7.3 % |
| Culture | 8.7 % | 10.8 % | 18.4 % | 41.3 % | 20.8 % |
| Respect | 5.2 % | 11.0 % | 19.0 % | 34.5 % | 30.3 % |
| Wealth | 16.5 % | 23.4 % | 29.0 % | 22.0 % | 9.1 % |
| China | 2.1 % | 4.1 % | 9.7 % | 30.7 % | 53.4 % |
| Sichuan | 26.0 % | 24.6 % | 30.4 % | 12.1 % | 6.9 % |
| Dujiangyan | 36.0 % | 28.0 % | 29.8 % | 2.4 % | 3.8 % |
| Friendship | 11.5 % | 23.1 % | 25.2 % | 29.0 % | 11.2 % |
| Peace | 7.6 % | 15.6 % | 24.9 % | 34.9 % | 17.0 % |
| International relations | 12.9 % | 16.4 % | 20.2 % | 32.7 % | 17.8 % |
| Ecosystem | 7.6 % | 12.5 % | 22.5 % | 33.9 % | 23.5 % |
| Local community | 19.0 % | 26.3 % | 30.8 % | 15.2 % | 8.7 % |

The second question (Table 2.) measures the giant panda associations for respondents on 5-point Likert scale. 56.9 percent (n=290) strongly agreed that cute is a word that comes to their minds when thinking of giant panda. 40 percent (n=290) of respondents agreed with the word beautiful. 43.5 percent (n=287) agreed that interesting is a word for giant panda. 49.7 percent (n=284) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that ferocious is a word that comes to mind when thinking of giant panda. 44.4 percent (n=288) agreed that giant panda is related to the word special, and 47.6 percent (n=290) strongly agreed that giant panda associates with the word precious. The word pet emerged the most, with 61.8 percent (n=288) of respondents strongly disagreeing that giant panda is related to the word. But then again, 58.3 percent (n=288) strongly agreed that the word bamboo is associated with giant panda. 41.8 percent (n=287) responded general to the statement that the word keeper is related to giant panda.

57.1 percent (n=289) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the word close comes to their minds when thinking of giant panda. 46.7 percent (n=289) disagreed or strongly disagreed that giant panda is associated with the word dream. 41.3 percent (n=288) of respondents agreed that there is a link-up between the word culture and giant panda. 64.8 percent (n=290) agreed or strongly agreed that giant panda is associated with the word respect. The word China emerged with 53.4 percent (n=290) of respondents strongly agreeing that giant panda is associated with the word. 50.6 percent (n=289) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that Sichuan is related to giant panda. At the same time, 64 percent (n=289) disagreed or strongly disagreed that Dujiangyan associates with giant panda. 40.2 percent (n=286) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that friendship is a word that comes to their minds when thinking of giant panda. Also, 51.9 percent (n=289) agreed or strongly agreed that peace is associated with giant panda. Additionally, international relations are related to giant panda, with 50.5 percent (n=287) of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing to the statement. 57.4 percent (n=289) agreed or strongly agreed to associate the word ecosystem with giant panda. But then, 45.3 percent (n=289) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the word local community would have a link-up with giant panda in their minds. The words that had no significant distribution in the table were feed and wealth.



Figure 3. Word cloud of the results of the third question.

The third question of the survey is open-ended question that measures additional giant panda associations for respondents apart from the set of words of the second question. There were 119 responses in total. Some words from the second question were reiterated more than once in the responses, such as China, cute, precious, and bamboo. However, new words or themes could be discovered from the responses. The word cloud (Figure 3.) reflects words that reoccurred more than once in the responses. The bigger the font, the more a word or theme emerged. The word that recurred the most, was endangered, with

21 mentions. The word rare was featured in six responses and extinction was mentioned three times. Ähtäri occurred in four responses, and Lumi and Pyry were mentioned three times. Many of the words referred to the appearance of giant panda, such as fluffy, furry, soft, big, and black and white. Also, many words were related to the characteristics of the species, like lazy, funny, slow, silly, clumsy, and playful.

Zoo and related words were featured in seven responses, while freedom and related words were presented in six responses. WWF occurred in six responses. Additionally, protection of the species was mentioned four times. In four different responses, giant pandas were associated with either politics or propaganda. Co-operation related words occurred in six different responses. Eight different responses cited threats to the species, such as habitat loss, climate change, and low reproductive rate. Four times giant pandas were linked to money, like the word expensive. Then, the pop-culture got their part with six answers featuring the words Kung Fu Panda or Taotao.

Table 3. The results of the fourth set of statements of the survey.

| 4. Please rate the following statements based on your feelings about China leasing giant pandas to Finland: | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | General | Agree | Strongly agree |
| I know China | 3.1 % | 9.3 % | 16.6 % | 34.5 % | 36.5 % |
| Speaking of giant pandas, I can think of China immediately | 3.8 % | 8.6 % | 12.4 % | 33.1 % | 42.1 % |
| This event makes me want to know more about China | 13.5 % | 26.0 % | 36.0 % | 18.3 % | 6.2 % |
| This event makes me feel good about China | 16.3 % | 19.0 % | 38.4 % | 20.1 % | 6.2 % |
| This event makes me feel that China has a good reputation in Finland | 11.8 % | 22.8 % | 40.1 % | 18.7 % | 6.6 % |
| This event makes me feel that China and Finland have good international relations | 4.5 % | 11.1 % | 33.7 % | 40.6 % | 10.1 % |
| This event makes me feel that China welcomes the Finn | 6.9 % | 11.8 % | 37.4 % | 35.3 % | 8.6 % |
| I want to travel to China | 20.9 % | 20.9 % | 23.7 % | 22.7 % | 11.8 % |
| I will often recommend/talk about traveling to China with my relatives and friends | 44.6 % | 29.1 % | 18.0 % | 5.2 % | 3.1 % |
| If there is a travel plan, China will be my priority choice | 51.9 % | 25.3 % | 14.5 % | 5.5 % | 2.8 % |

The fourth question of the survey (Table 3.) presents China related statements to which respondents specify their level of agreement on 5-point Likert scale. 71 percent (n=290) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they know China. 42.1 percent (n=290) strongly agreed that they can think of China immediately when speaking of giant pandas. 40.1 percent (n=289) responded general to the statement that China leasing giant pandas

to Finland makes them feel that China has a good reputation in Finland. 40.6 percent (n=288) of respondents agreed that China leasing giant pandas to Finland makes them feel that China and Finland have good international relations. Also, 43.9 percent (n=289) agreed or strongly agreed that China leasing giant pandas to Finland makes them feel that China welcomes the Finn. Still, 41.8 percent (n=287) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that they want to travel to China. 44.6 percent (n=289) strongly disagreed with the statement that they will often recommend or talk about traveling to China with their relatives or friends. The most outstanding result emerged with the statement that if there is a travel plan, China will be the first priority choice, with 51.9 percent (n=289) of respondents strongly disagreeing with that. The results within two statements did not have significant distribution in the table: China leasing giant pandas to Finland makes me want to know more about China, and China leasing giant pandas to Finland makes me feel good about China.



Figure 4. Word cloud of the results of the fifth question.

The fifth question of the survey was open-ended question that examines the respondents' additional knowledge of China when speaking of China leasing giant pandas to Finland. The number of responses were 103. The word cloud (Figure 4.) illustrates the words or themes that could be found in more than one response. The theme that emerged the most was culture which recurred in 15 responses. Also, food related words occurred in 14 responses. Other subthemes of culture were discovered within the responses, such as language in seven responses, history in six responses, New Year and Great Wall both in three different responses, and eSports in two responses.

Various human rights issues were mentioned in 12 different responses. Separately, Uyghurs were mentioned in 10 additional responses. Additionally, labour violations emerged in four responses. Also, limited freedom of speech and unsafe could be separated from two different responses.

Politics was the theme that emerged from 11 responses. Additionally, communist party was mentioned in seven responses. Totalitarianism, propaganda, and Taiwan were themes, each mentioned in five responses. Also, Hong Kong could be separated by being mentioned in three different responses. The word Mao was featured in two separate responses.

Pollution was mentioned in nine different responses. Animal abuse recurred in six responses. Large population emerged from eight different responses. Friendly people and wealth were both mentioned three times. On top of that, hard-working people and poverty were both featured in two different responses.

COVID-19 emerged from five responses. Closed country was cited in two responses. Surveillance was mentioned four times. Additionally, control and censorship were both mentioned in three different responses. Great Firewall was featured in two responses.

Beijing found mentioned in four different responses. Metropolises and nature were both featured in two different responses. Additionally, business, innovation, and technology were each mentioned twice.

Table 4. The results of the sixth set of questions of the survey.

| 6. Please, answer YES or NO to the following questions: | | |
|--|------------|-----------|
| | Yes | No |
| Do you know about China leasing giant pandas to Finland? | 65.9 % | 34.1 % |
| Do you know the snow pandas "Pyrä" and "Lumi"? | 73.4 % | 26.6 % |
| Have you ever seen the giant pandas? | 19.0 % | 81.0 % |
| Have you travelled abroad before? | 94.8 % | 5.2 % |
| Have you been to China before? | 16.6 % | 83.4 % |

The sixth and final set of questions of the survey consists of five dichotomous questions (Table 4). First question examines whether respondent has knowledge of China leasing giant pandas to Finland to which 65.9 percent (n=290) replied yes. Additionally, 73.4 percent (n=290) of respondents knew the snow pandas Pyry and Lumi. However, 81 percent (n=290) of respondents have never seen the giant pandas. 94.8 percent (n=290) reported they have travelled abroad before. Finally, 83.4 percent (n=290) of respondents answered no to the question of whether they have been to China before.

4.1 Cross-tabulation

After conducting cross-tabulation between female and male respondents, some results did diverge depending on the gender of the respondent. Below is gathered the results that had distinction between these two variables.

Table 5. Cross-tabulation of the first statement set of the survey.

| 1. Please score the following statements based on your own cognition: | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| I know snow pandas | Strongly disagree | Disagree | General | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| Males | 28.6 % | 33.7 % | 13.0 % | 14.3 % | 10.4 % |
| Females | 24.4 % | 16.6 % | 12.7 % | 27.3 % | 19.0 % |

Cross-tabulation of the very first statement of the first question (Table 5.) indicated that 62.3 percent (n=77) of male respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed to know snow pandas. At the same time 46.3 percent (n=205) of female respondents agreed or strongly agreed to know snow pandas.

Table 6. Cross-tabulation of the second question of the survey.

| 2. Do these words come to mind when you think of Giant Panda? | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| Feed | Strongly disagree | Disagree | General | Agree | Strongly agree |
| Males | 12.0 % | 22.6 % | 24.0 % | 30.7 % | 10.7 % |
| Females | 8.9 % | 13.9 % | 40.1 % | 27.2 % | 9.9 % |
| Wealth | Strongly disagree | Disagree | General | Agree | Strongly agree |
| Males | 18.7 % | 24.0 % | 28.0 % | 21.3 % | 8.0 % |
| Females | 14.8 % | 23.3 % | 29.2 % | 22.8 % | 9.9 % |
| Friendship | Strongly disagree | Disagree | General | Agree | Strongly agree |
| Males | 12.2 % | 25.7 % | 31.1 % | 24.3 % | 6.7 % |
| Females | 10.8 % | 22.1 % | 23.0 % | 31.4 % | 12.7 % |

Cross-tabulation of the second question of the survey (Table 6.) showed that for some words, female respondents had more general opinion while male respondents clearly agreed or disagreed with that word. For example, when the respondents were asked if the word feed comes to their minds when thinking of giant pandas, 40.1 percent (n=202) of female respondents had a general opinion on that. Whereas 41.4 percent (n=75) of male respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Also, for the word wealth, 42.7 percent (n=75) of male respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that it is the word that comes to their minds when thinking of giant pandas. At the same time, there was no clear

distribution for that word among female respondents, with 29.2 percent (n=202) of female respondents responding general for the word wealth. The word friendship had an opposite result. As for the male respondents, there was no clear distribution in the table, 31.1 percent (n=74) answering general. While 44.1 percent of female respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that the word friendship comes to their minds when thinking of giant pandas.

Table 7. Cross-tabulation of fourth statement set of the survey.

| 4. Please rate the following statements based on your feelings about China leasing giant pandas to Finland: | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| This event makes me want to know more about China | Strongly disagree | Disagree | General | Agree | Strongly agree |
| Males | 15.6 % | 27.3 % | 33.7 % | 18.2 % | 5.2 % |
| Females | 12.3 % | 24.6 % | 38.4 % | 17.8 % | 6.9 % |
| This event makes me feel good about China | Strongly disagree | Disagree | General | Agree | Strongly agree |
| Males | 23.4 % | 26.0 % | 29.8 % | 16.9 % | 3.9 % |
| Females | 12.8 % | 15.3 % | 42.8 % | 22.2 % | 6.9 % |
| This event makes me feel that China has a good reputation in Finland | Strongly disagree | Disagree | General | Agree | Strongly agree |
| Males | 16.9 % | 29.8 % | 24.7 % | 23.4 % | 5.2 % |
| Females | 9.4 % | 19.2 % | 46.8 % | 17.2 % | 7.4 % |
| This event makes me feel that China welcomes the Finn | Strongly disagree | Disagree | General | Agree | Strongly agree |
| Males | 13.0 % | 16.9 % | 32.4 % | 26.0 % | 11.7 % |
| Females | 4.9 % | 8.9 % | 38.4 % | 39.9 % | 7.9 % |
| I want to travel to China | Strongly disagree | Disagree | General | Agree | Strongly agree |
| Males | 30.3 % | 19.7 % | 18.4 % | 21.1 % | 10.5 % |
| Females | 16.8 % | 21.3 % | 26.7 % | 22.3 % | 12.9 % |

Also, the cross-tabulation of the fourth question of the survey (Table 7.) indicated that in four statements, female respondents continued having a general feeling, while male respondents' feelings were split more on disagreeing end. 42.9 percent (n=77) of male respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that China leasing giant pandas to Finland makes them want to know more about China. Also, 49.4 percent (n=77) of male respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that this event mentioned above makes them feel good about China. Additionally, 46.7 percent (n=77) of male respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that this event makes them feel that China has a good reputation in Finland. Lastly, 50.0 percent (n=76) of male respondents disagreed or

strongly disagreed that they want to travel to China. In all these statements, female respondents tended to have general feelings or there was no clear distribution in the table. Only when the respondents were asked if this event makes them feel that China welcomes the Finn, 47.8 percent (n=203) of female respondents agreed or strongly agreed with that, while male respondents had more general feeling towards the statement.

4.2 Conclusion

After analysed data is gathered, the emphasis is on finding answers for the research questions. Based on this study, the results imply that in several cases, giant pandas are associated with their appearance or characteristics, such as being cute, beautiful, fluffy, black and white, lazy, and funny. In addition, giant panda was somewhat associated with WWF that has the giant panda as their logo. These findings support Aaker's (2010) claim that visual imagery adds to brand awareness. When it comes to giant panda brand image, the results indicate that respondents perceive giant pandas as interesting and precious animals which are connected to China and culture. On top of that, giant pandas are not seen as pets, rather as endangered species facing threats, especially habitat loss and therefore, highly protected. Also, results indicated that giant panda represents friendship, peace, international relations, and ecosystem. To summarise, it could be concluded that the giant panda brand image exist in the minds of college student in Finland and this brand image is quite positive. Still, there are concerns about the survival of the species.

When it comes to Ähtäri Zoo's snow pandas Lumi and Pyry, which are giant pandas living in snowy zone, the results imply that there is some knowledge of these animals existing. Still, most of the respondents have not ever seen giant pandas. Respondents seemed to know about China leasing these pandas to Finland, but there was hardly any knowledge that there is cooperative research involved in the lease. Also, the results indicate that snow pandas are not related to Finland in the respondents' minds and are not a representative brand in Finland. After conducting cross-tabulation, it was discovered that there was demographical difference on the knowledge of snow pandas.

The results show that college students in Finland do know China. Most of the respondents have not ever been to China, even though most have travelled abroad before. It was discovered that in many cases, China is not the main destination topic when respondents have conversations on travelling. Also, the results imply that there is little travel motivation or travel intention to China among respondents.

According to the results of this study, respondents associate giant pandas with China. China leasing giant pandas to Finland gives respondents perception that there is good international relation between China and Finland. Also, the leasing makes them feel that China welcomes the Finns. However, most of the respondents do not associate giant pandas with Sichuan, which is the precise area where the species live. Based on this data, giant pandas have brand awareness but there is only little travel motivation to China. It must be recognised that the outcome of the study is indicative, and one cannot say with certainty whether this is the case, however, some of the results justify concluding that the giant panda brand image exists in the minds of college students in Finland, but that image is not strong enough to create motivation for travelling to China.

5 Discussion

Nonetheless, cross-tabulation of data indicates that in many cases, female respondents tended to know about the existence of snow pandas more often than male respondents did. Followed with the finding that female respondents had more neutral opinions on giant pandas, and they associated the species with the word friendship more often than did male respondents. Also, based on this data, the leasing of giant pandas between China and Finland gave female respondents general feelings of China while male respondents' feelings towards China tended to be rather negative. In addition, female respondents' travel motivation to China is at higher level than that of male respondents. These findings may support the Aaker's (2010, p. 304–308) statement that brand knowledge has more importance than brand awareness when brand relationship is in question. Brand knowledge indicates that one understands what the brand represents. Additionally, these findings among female respondents may imply that giant panda brand has the potential to positively raise travel motivation to China.

Moreover, general finding indicated that most of the respondents get a feeling that China and Finland have good international relations when it comes to China leasing giant pandas to Finland. This could imply that giant pandas give college students in Finland positive feeling of China as a partner country. In general, most of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they find giant pandas interesting. According to this finding of the data, it could be assumed that there is potential market for giant panda brand to emerge. All in all, the findings indicate that giant pandas raise positive feelings towards China which could address that giant panda has potential to be a China's destination brand ambassador.

As the results of the fifth question (Figure 4.) indicate, there is diversity of knowledge of China among the college students in Finland. Some of the respondents' perceptions of China are truly emotionally charged which is in line with Kapferer's (2012, p. 87–88) statement of country brand image. College students in Finland do have a destination brand image of China but there is just little travel intention. As recent research (Wu, 2015; Pereira, et al., 2019; Chi, et al., 2020) shows that positive destination brand image enhances the travel motivation of tourists, it could be concluded, based on this data, that the destination image of China is not positive among college students in Finland. This finding could support the claim of Li & Wong (2018) that China's panda diplomacy has been unsuccessful in its attempt to improve China's country brand image among the international community (Li & Wong, 2018).

5.1 Recommendations for future

The author suggests for commissioning party, that the future work could be surrounded by enhancing the giant panda brand. As stated by Aaker (2010, p. 306–307), the strong brand requires differentiation, and it must be meaningful for the user. The giant panda brand already possesses a point of differentiation with the species' exclusivity and strong associations to China. The future project could focus on building the brand relationship between giant panda brand controlled by SERC and people in Finland. As the results of this data indicated, there is almost no information on the conservation work that is involved in the giant panda lease between China and Finland. Since this topic is central for the SERC operations, the project could aim to build brand image on giant panda conservation. Second, as stated by Aaker (2010), environmental actions that the organisation takes can provide consumers emotional and self-expressive benefits. When consumers can relate to the values the brand represents, it provides a platform for brand relationship to emerge. (Aaker, 2010.)

Based on the literature review, the author suggests the following steps. First, establishing clear brand identity. Second, to implement the brand identity through favourable brand messages aiming to build a brand relationship between college students in Finland and the giant panda brand. Third, the same study could be replicated with larger sample to get more reliable result.

According to Keller (2012), consumers find non-profit organisations warmer but less competent than for-profit companies (Keller, 2012, p. 115). As the branding is means to an end for gaining profits of marketing, it raises questions: Can a vulnerable living creature be considered as a brand ambassador? Advani (2017) points out that tourism can be seen as a threat to the species living in nature (Advani, 2017). Would there be inconsistency involved when using giant panda brand to promote China's tourism? Perhaps, the future research could tackle these questions, and investigate if the giant panda is an efficient brand ambassador for China as a tourism destination after the strong brand identity and brand relationship is built.

5.2 Learning outcomes

For the author, the thesis process has been par excellence a learning process in many aspects. First, the subject of branding was only superficially familiar from marketing courses in university of Applied Sciences. Through the literature review, the author enlarged her knowledge on branding to its great extent. The reading provided improvement on author's ability to produce academic writing in English. Second, taking quantitative research from theory into practice was the first experience of its kind for the author. Perhaps, being the

first-timer became the stumbling block when speaking of project management and scheduling of the thesis process. However, by making mistakes in these subject areas, the author gained a better understanding of what is required to conduct quantitative research. Additionally, objective thinking was improved as being crucial requirement when examining the research results.

The tool for conducting and analysing the study was Webropol 3.0 which was previously unfamiliar to the author. The usage of this tool was greatly improved which will be an asset in regards of possible future projects. In addition to theoretical and practical learning, the thesis process enabled the author to learn more about herself. Different challenges were faced along the process, which certainly taught persistence through solution centricity. For the author, personal growth was one of the most important achievements of the whole thesis process.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. The questionnaire

Chinese Giant Panda Brand and Its Influence on Willingness to Travel to China

This questionnaire is a part of the research cooperation between Sichuan Agricultural University SAU in China with Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences and University of Vaasa in Finland. Thank you for filling out this questionnaire, the information you provide will be exclusively used for this research cooperation only, the information and identity of respondent will be kept confidential.

1. Please score the following statements based on your own cognition:

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | General | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| I know snow pandas | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Speaking of Finland, I can immediately think of snow pandas | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Speaking of snow pandas, I can immediately think of giant pandas | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I can think of some characteristics of snow pandas (birthplace, food, related events, etc.) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I know that the snow panda is a cooperative research between China and Finland in the form of lease | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Snow pandas have a good reputation in Finland | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Snow pandas have a good word of mouth in Finland | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Snow Panda is a representative brand in Finland | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Next

Chinese Giant Panda Brand and Its Influence on Willingness to Travel to China

Please read the following materials about snow pandas and answer:

Finnish President Niinisto held talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Helsinki on April 5, 2017. In order to strengthen cooperative research on giant pandas and other areas, Xi Jinping agreed to lease a pair of Finnish giant pandas for 15 years. The pair of giant pandas took a special plane to take off from Chengdu Shuangliu Airport at 6 a.m. local time on April 18 and arrived in Helsinki, at 10 a.m. 18th, living in the panda pavilion built by Ähtäri Zoo at a cost of 8 million euros, this marked that Finland has become one of the few countries in the world that has cooperated with China on giant panda conservation research. The Finns gave these two giant pandas Finnish names with the characteristics of the Nordic snow region, namely "Pyry" and "Lumi". Their meanings are all related to snow, so they are also called "snow pandas", that is, "Giant pandas in the snow". In addition, this flight to transport giant pandas will fund low-income families in rural Sichuan Province, China, to replace coal with household biogas digesters, and partially offset the flight's carbon dioxide emissions through climate protection projects.

2. Do these words come to mind when you think of Giant Panda?

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | General | Agree | Strongly agree |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Cute | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Beautiful | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Interesting | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ferocious | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Special | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Precious | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Pet | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Bamboo | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Keeper | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Feed | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Close | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Dream | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Culture | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Respect | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Wealth | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| China | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Sichuan | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Dujiangyan | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Friendship | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Peace | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| International relations | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ecosystem | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Local community | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

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Chinese Giant Panda Brand and Its Influence on Willingness to Travel to China

3. When it comes to giant pandas, can you remember any other words? Please write and rate it with 1-5 points (5 is strongly agree).

4. Please rate the following statements based on your feelings about China leasing giant pandas to Finland:

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | General | Agree | Strongly agree |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| I know China | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Speaking of giant pandas, I can think of China immediately | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| This event makes me want to know more about China | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| This event makes me feel good about China | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| This event makes me feel that China has a good reputation in Finland | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| This event makes me feel that China and Finland have good international relations | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| This event makes me feel that China welcomes the Finn | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I want to travel to China | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I will often recommend/talk about traveling to China with my relatives and friends | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| If there is a travel plan, China will be my priority choice | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

5. Speaking of China leasing giant pandas to Finland, do you have any other knowledge of China? Please write and rate it with 1-5 points (5 is strongly agree).

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Chinese Giant Panda Brand and Its Influence on Willingness to Travel to China

6. Please, answer YES or NO to the following questions:

| | Yes | No |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Do you know about China leasing giant pandas to Finland? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Do you know the snow pandas "Pyry" and "Lumi"? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Have you ever seen the giant pandas? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Have you travelled abroad before? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Have you been to China before? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

7. What is your gender?

8. What is your age?

9. What is your grade?

10. What is your average monthly spend (budget in Euros)?

11. What is your hometown/municipality (i.e. Where you mainly live)?

12. In which university you are studying?

- Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences
- University of Vaasa
- Other, which?

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Submit

Appendix 2. E-mail Invitation Letter to Students

Dear fellow students,

Welcome to the survey on the Image Perception on Giant Panda Brand. This survey is part of The Comparative Study that aims to understand the image perception of college students in China and Finland on Giant Panda brand, and both countries as well. Additionally, the Study aims to evaluate if the image perception on Giant Panda Cooperation Project has an influence on the travel motivation either to China or to Finland. This research Study is part of Haaga-Helia's international co-operation with SnowPanda Education and Research Consortium (SERC).

The same survey is also conducted in Sichuan Agricultural University, and in University of Vaasa. The results of the survey gathered in Haaga-Helia UAS and UV will be analyzed, and then compared with the data collected in SAU.

The survey works as a method of quantitative research of my thesis. The data gathered through this survey will be used in my thesis. The opinion of the individual respondent will not be displayed.

Please fill in the questionnaire behind the link below. It takes about 5 minutes to answer this questionnaire. Each entry will be highly appreciated!

<https://link.webpolsurveys.com/S/4AB4970827980EC8>

If there are any questions regarding the questionnaire, do not hesitate to contact me. 😊


Best regards,

Aino Raudaskoski

aino.raudaskoski@myy.haaga-helia.fi


Appendix 3. The print

Commissioned by **SERC**



Hey Student!

Take part in the survey!



on image perceptions
of Giant Panda Brand
and travel motivation to China.