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Back-to-trueself as an Identity Element of Indiana Rural Tourism

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Abstract

Tourism branding has an impact on a rural community's economic development and overall wellbeing, so it should be designed carefully. This study proposes the concept of back-to-trueself as an identity element of rural tourism and presents a branding model which is illustrated by the case of 'Honest-to-Goodness' brand of the State of Indiana in the United States. The study is contextualized in the growing trends of urbanization and the resultant concerns of its effect on quality of life. The proposed model suggests that rural communities branded with the back-to-trueself element meets the need for urban residents to relieve self-presentational concern and at the same time pursue an authentic way of life. The model takes into consideration the primary motivation of rural tourists, rural community's attractiveness to urban residents, and their loyalty to the destination brand.

Keywords: existential authenticity, trueself, rural tourism, rural community, quality of life, tourism branding

1.0 Introduction

Tourism has long been pursued by governments as a means of development in rural areas (Lane, 2009). Rural tourism has been conventionally treated as an alternative economic development tool, a medicine for the economic and sociocultural problems caused by declination of traditional sectors, and an important tool of rural

reconstruction and restructuring (Gartner, 2005; McComb, Boyd, & Boluk, 2016). It creates a much more heterogeneous rural community in terms of land use, social composition, economic activity, modes of regulation and place representation. At the same time, it has been criticized for the underachievement of economic benefit (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004; Sharpley, 2002) and its negative impact on the fragile natural environment of rural community (Hall & Boyd, 2005). Moreover, tourism in rural areas is associated with quality of life in rural communities (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2010; Crofts & Holland, 1993). Considering the significant influence of tourism on rural community development and current controversy about rural tourism's contribution, it is valuable to examine the approaches of rural tourism development.

Tourism branding is an indispensable component of rural tourism development and plays a critical role in the overall market success (Cai, Gartner, & Munar, 2009). To maximize the positive impact and minimize the negative impact of tourism on rural communities, an appropriate branding strategy should be designed to attract sufficient tourists who really appreciate the heritage and spirit of the local community, are committed to the protection of the local social environment, and contribute to the income of the local community (Middleton, 1998). Therefore, a good branding model should create a match between what the target markets want and what the community can provide in a sustainable way. Current study will propose a branding model that targets the urban residents who seek to improve quality of life through the experience of back-to-trueself.

Pursuing better quality of life is one of the oldest and fundamental motives for tourism (Hobson & Dietrich, 1995). Contemporary urbanization and modernization processes raise new issues of quality of life in urban areas. Increased material wealth and advanced life-facilitating technology in this process are not equal to better quality of life, particularly in the aspects of life satisfaction, health, and living environment (Diener & Suh, 1997). Urbanization can negatively influence people's quality of life due to intensified air and noise pollution, rising social inequality, and stressful interpersonal relationships (Urban-Nexus, 2012).

Rural tourism may provide a fresh perspective to address urban residents' quality of life concerns. Rural experience, a contrast to urban daily routine, may possess synergistic qualities in improving urbanites' quality of life (Dong, Wang, Morais, & Brooks, 2013; Urry, 2002), particularly with regard to physical and mental wellbeing, life satisfaction, work-life balance, education, and social connection. Pesonen and Komppula (2010) noted that many rural tourists have similar motivations to wellbeing tourists, including seeking relaxation, escaping from busy jobs, peace and quiet, sports, and healthy gastronomy. They argued that wellbeing is one segment of rural tourism. Tourism is also believed to foster existential authenticity (Wang, 1999), a psychological concept that is described as a true self-concept or the subjective feeling of knowing one's true self and behaving in accordance with it (Schlegel, Hicks, King, & Arndt, 2011). Existential anxiety, as its counterpart, is often linked to symptoms of neurotic anxiety, depression, and mental distress related to identity problems (Berman, Weems, & Stickle, 2006). Tourism can alleviate existential anxiety (Brown, 2013) and thus enhance psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction (McCabe, Joldersma, & Li, 2010; Neal, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2007). Rural tourism can be a ready remedy for fulfilling the need on the part of the urbanites' seeking existential authenticity and releasing existential anxiety at rural communities.

The current study is aimed at developing a conceptual model that links rural tourism and tourists' trueself in relation to rural tourism branding. The concept of back-to-trueself is proposed as an identity element of rural tourism branding and examined in terms of urban residents' motivation and loyalty. Brand identity refers to "a unique set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to create or maintain" (Aaker, 1996, p. 68). Destination brand identity is the source of the desired destination image (Wheeler, Frost, & Weiler, 2011), which is critical to destination loyalty (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). This study posits that individuals are motivated to improve their quality of life and will be attracted to destinations that satisfy this motivation. If urban residents perceive that a rural community destination can allow them to embrace a sense of trueself and lead to improved quality of life, they will be attracted and even committed to that destination brand. The conceptual branding model is illustrated by the case study of the State of Indiana in its 'Honest-to-Goodness' brand with an element that mirrors the back-to-trueself concept.

2.0 Back-To-Trueself Rural Tourism Branding

This study proposes a rural tourism branding model that incorporates the concept of back-to-trueself. The case of 'Honest-to-Goodness' Indiana is presented along with the theories regarding trueself. The textual data for the case study consists of interviews with the staff in the Indiana Office of Tourism Development (IOTD), the destination marketing organization of the State of Indiana, contents of visitor guides, the official state tourism website (VisitIndiana.com), promotional videos, advertisements, official social media, as well as archival documents provided by IOTD including brand announcements, advertising effectiveness studies, and tourism economic impact reports.

Each year Indiana receives over 70 million tourists. The tourism and hospitality industry is the sixth largest industry in the state and directly responsible for 144,200 jobs, generates over \$2.25 billion in tax receipts, and contributes \$10.7 billion in revenue to Indiana businesses (Rocket Analytics, 2014). IOTD markets the state's tourism destinations and fosters economic development by providing opportunities for statewide tourism partners. Indiana has a strong rural tradition and most of its jurisdiction areas are rural. Most of the tourism destinations in Indiana are also associated with rural communities. Rural tourism, according to IOTD, is a significant part of the Indiana tourism profile. The rural lifestyle is also considered as a core heritage of Indiana people. People are proud of this heritage and want to rejuvenate it to attract visitors. The Fair Oaks Farm in Indiana, for example, has enjoyed the reputation of being the only agriculture theme park in the U.S.

The slogan 'Honest-to-Goodness' was launched in 2014 by IOTD to replace the previous 'Restart Your Engine' which mainly focused on the capital city Indianapolis. The new slogan is more inclusive and is an attempt to "represent all areas of the state", according to Mark Newman, executive director of IOTD (personal communication, May 20, 2016). The first set of advertisements in this campaign features small towns and picturesque countryside landscapes and highlights places like French Lick, Roanoke, and Brown County. 'Honest-to-Goodness' Indiana represents the rural tourism branding that incorporates the identity element back-to-trueself.

2.1 *The Trueself*

Wang's (1999) theory of existential authenticity in tourism lays the foundation for explaining tourists' trueself. It is a special state of being in which one is true to oneself and acts this way as opposed to becoming lost in public roles and public sphere (Berger, 1973). The concept of trueself and the motivation of seeking for one's trueself have roots in the works of existential philosophers such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Camus and Sartre. Wang (1999) proposed that tourism destination as liminal zones, where social orders and norms are temporarily suspended, can form an environment favorable to liberation and acting out one's authentic self or trueself. Tourism could act as both a catalyst and a context for existential authenticity, influencing tourists' destination activities and personal lives (Brown, 2013).

According to existential philosophers, individuals are born into a set of pre-defined values and beliefs which they internalize in the process of socialization and grow to accept as their own (Heidegger, 1962). As individuals begin to internalize and endorse the external values, their essence becomes compromised and determined by these values (Heidegger, 1962; Sartre, 1966). Such individuals are said to be in the state of 'bad faith' (Sartre, 1966) or 'inauthenticity' (Heidegger, 1962). Kierkegaard (1983) asserted that cultural institutions tend to produce pseudo-identities or stereotyped members. It must be a goal for each individual to choose and assert values that are personally meaningful and individually valid. To reach authenticity, individuals need to shed culturally accepted and preserve intrinsically meaningful values.

Preserving the trueself and having an authentic lifestyle is critical to subjective well-being. In psychology literature, existential authenticity is often associated with self-esteem (Goldman & Kernis, 2002), life satisfaction (Carmody, 2013), and optimal psychological well-being (Bettencourt & Sheldon, 2001; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Hence, people's fundamental inner force of pursuing psychological well-being motivates them to seek the experience of authentic self. However, acting in an authentic way needs courage to overcome the potential conflict between one's true dispositions and those of peers or authorities that could threaten one's success (Tillich, 1952). Thus, authentic behavior may jeopardize one's success if the individuals in power have strong evaluative tendencies and authoritative power. Therefore, an environment that relieves the pressure of peers, norms, and authorities may nurture the authentic behavior that reflects one's trueself (Brown, 2013; Wang, 1999). Rural tourism can provide the opportunity of authentic behavior for urban residents in that it can afford an experience of returning back to one's trueself.

Goffman (1959) theorized that social interaction might be likened to a theater. People in everyday life are actors on a stage, each playing a variety of roles. The audience consists of other individuals who observe the role-playing and react to the performances. In social interaction, like in theatrical performances, there is a front region where the actors are on stage in front of an audience. There is also a back region or back stage, where individuals can be themselves and get rid of their role or identity that they play when they are in front of others. Activities at the back stage are partitioned from the audience. Actors practice and gain capabilities at the back stage in order to perform their roles appropriately in the front stage. At the back stage, people can behave freely without the constraint of their social roles.

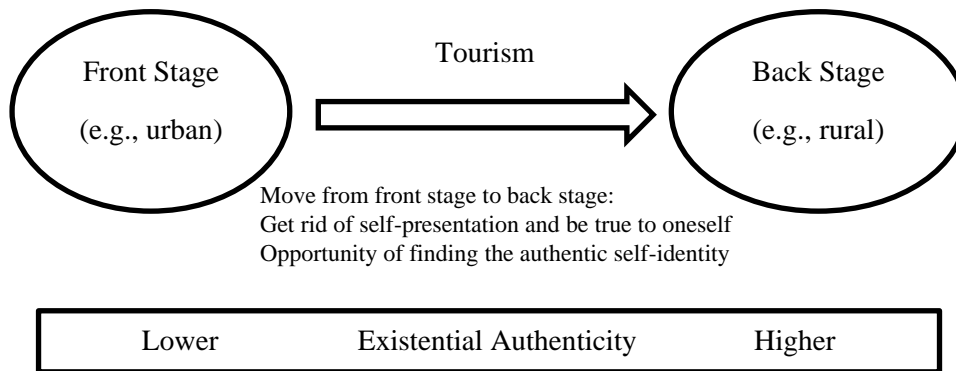
Goffman's theory also indicates that the front stage and back stage represent different social contexts, but it is the perceptions of individuals that determine the stage. Normally, the back stage could be any place perceived as a private setting

where individuals feel free to express their authentic selves, such as their home, kitchens and bedrooms. Even in the tourism context, front stage and back stage co-exist in any social setting and tourists switch between the stages as they did in daily routines. However, the current study attempts to extend Goffman's framework to the tourism system by dividing the front-back stage at a higher level. It discusses the possibility of associating the rural destination environment to the back stage and the urban home environment to the front stage. This division is consistent with Goffman's basic argument that the front and back stages are relative to each other and co-exist in self-presentations. For instance, urban residents may perceive the rural destinations as their back stage compared with the urban daily routines which is more like their front stage. Specifically, the contrasting natural and social fabrics of rural communities become the back stage setting for urban residents who are performing the social characters at the urban front stage. Admittedly, within each environment there are front and back stages of social interactions.

This case study proposes the concept of back-to-trueself by drawing on the tenets of both existential authenticity and self-presentation sociology as examined above. The concept consists of two components. The first is relieving the pressure of projecting desirable self-image to other people and of following the social norms of urban life (i.e., self-presentational concern). At rural communities, they feel free to act as they wish and be more authentic to themselves. For example, modern urban society requires a lawyer to present the characteristics of affirmative, confident, intelligent and progressive in social interaction. At rural destinations, the lawyer does not have to be concerned about presenting these characteristics and he can just follow his nature. Although, as a back-stage experience also exists in the lawyer's daily life (e.g., home, local park), the rural destination experience makes him or her more disconnected from the normal social characters. This phenomenon has been referred to as 'escapism' in tourism. This first component serves as the condition for the second, which is experiencing the authentic self-identity. Upon removal of the self-presentational concern needed in urban life, urban residents will be able to play different roles that may not be accepted at their urban, home environment.

In essence, the first component of back-to-trueself is getting rid of current roles defined by society while the second is seeking a different role defined by authentic self. For people whose authentic self is suppressed and never known to the individual, trying different roles may be a way to find out the exact authentic self-identity and authentic lifestyle. For example, the lawyer mentioned in the previous paragraph might always work hard to stand out in school and obey the rules of school and family as a good student. However, the lawyer never has the chance to experience the life of 'bad boys' who are naughty and disobedient at school. He may feel this identity is exciting to him and want to know if this is his authentic identity. During vacation he may try on the character of a 'bad boy' since he does not have to act according to the social expectation for a lawyer. However, not all the tourists who fulfilled the first component can reach the second component. The phenomenon of getting rid of the former identity and taking on a new identity has been discussed in Jafari's (1987) socio-cultural tourist model. Figure 1 illustrates the concept of back-to-trueself.

Figure 1. Concept of back-to-trueself.



2.2 Rural Tourism and Back-to-Trueself

Although the relationship between tourism and existential authenticity has been extensively discussed, the quest for existential authenticity has been challenged in recent literature (e.g., Gillen, 2016; Knudsen, Rickly, & Vidon, 2016; Shepherd, 2015). Noticeably, Kirillova, Lehto, and Cai (2017a) have pointed out the conditions for the experience of existential authenticity at tourism destinations while Brown (2013) makes it clear that not all the tourists have the same degree of such experience. A cycle of existential experience might be identified during the vacation (Kirillova & Lehto, 2015). Furthermore, Kirillova, Lehto, and Cai (2017b) extend the knowledge of tourist existential authenticity to post-travel experience. They conclude that the experience of existential authenticity may not necessarily occur during the tour but could be observed after tourists come back home. Therefore, although the destination environment can provide an existential experience for tourists, it is not guaranteed. Tourists' characteristics, travel motives and destination experiences affect tourists' existential authenticity during and after the trip. A rural tourism branding model that incorporates this concept should be built upon specific conditions.

Tourism experiences that help tourists approach authentic self need to satisfy the following conditions: (a) visiting places associated with the past (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006), (b) exposure to cultures that challenge the common values of home culture (Kirillova & Lehto, 2015), and (c) separation from the social norms of usual environment (Wang, 1999). The characteristics of rural community create an environment that satisfies these conditions for urban residents to approach trueself. Firstly, lifestyle of the rural community is more related to the past as oppose to urban life which is more associated with modernity. In sense of urbanization process, urban centers are grown from rural areas and many urban residents are immigrants from rural places (Kleniewski & Thomas, 2011). This is particularly significant in countries undergoing rapid urbanization. In these countries, a large proportion of urban residents were born and raised in rural areas.

Secondly, rural and urban communities possess contrasting social structures and cultures in terms of general lifestyles, customs and values (Lane, 1994). According to Lane (1994), the rural character represents older ways of life and thinking as compared with urban areas. Frankenberg (1966) summarized the rural–urban social contrast, which includes the aspects of social fields, social roles, economies, labor division and networks. Rural–urban contrast can also be understood in a form of

continuum, that is, rural or urban societies are relative concepts (Robinson, 1990). Sparsely populated remote wilderness is one end of the continuum while the other end is represented by the so-called ‘world city’, the ultimate expression of urbanization. Most of the societies are located between the two ends. The distance between two points represents the degree of difference in terms of rurality–urbanization of the two societies.

Lastly, the physical environment of rural community can evoke the feeling of staying in a liminal zone that isolates from social norms of urban environment. Tourism destinations or touristic spaces may be perceived as a liminal zone when the physical environment (e.g., architecture, landscape, natural–cultural scenery, appearance of local people) is in contrast to home environment (Shields, 1992). Novel surroundings, long distance from usual environment, and the perception of temporary stay make tourists imagine that they are in a different world where norms and social constraints in everyday life no longer apply. In contrast to stressful, competitive, standardized, industrialized and complex urban life, rural settings reflect peacefulness, simplicity, authenticity, relaxation, tranquility, greenery, and pure air (Dong et al., 2013).

According to IOTD, the goal of building the new brand ‘Honest-to-Goodness’ is to create an umbrella brand that can merge seamlessly with branding campaigns by local convention and visitor bureaus, to define the essence of Indiana from the perspective of stakeholders, and to represent the brand experience that focuses on outdoor recreation, sport, agriculture, local dining, and heritage and art. The development of the new brand went through a systematic and research-driven process. IOTD conducted over 6,000 consumer sentiment surveys and conveyed a brand development panel of marketing experts within and outside of the tourism industry. ‘Honest-to-Goodness’ mainly represents the characteristics of rural tourism and Indiana’s rural heritage. The essence of ‘Honest-to-Goodness’ speaks to a sense of ‘genuine’ and ‘authentic’ qualities. The identity element back-to-trueself can be found in the narratives of ‘Honest-to-Goodness’ brand:

We have undertold stories to tell in Indiana. Stories that inspire visitors to create their own based on memories made here. In Indiana, our smiles are warm, our handshakes firm and our places have a certain charm. Our people don’t put on airs or pretend to be something they’re not, because they’re proud to simply be who they are. That genuine personality translates into authentic experiences for visitors traveling our state. In Indiana you can spend your days paddling a winding river, fishing an inland lake or browsing the shops on Main Street (Media FAQs, <http://www.visitindianatourism.com/>).

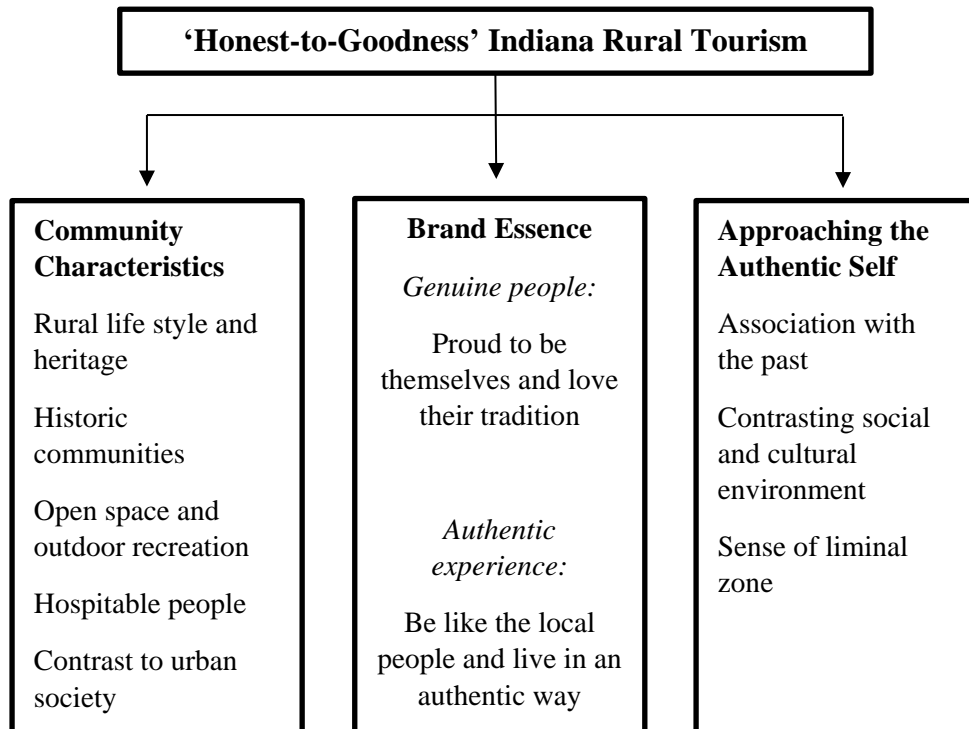
This narrative attests to the connotation of back-to-trueself in the branding model proposed in this study. The environment of Indiana encourages people to have an authentic way of living, to be honest to their trueself, and to reach existential authenticity. It tries to convey the image that Indiana people are genuine, dare to be themselves and have a welcoming nature. The Indiana hospitality serves as an invitation for tourists to create an authentic experience for themselves that they can

be simply as genuine to themselves as their hosts. According to Goffman’s (1955) dramaturgical framework of self-presentation, everyone has under-told stories in front of audience due to self-presentational reasons. But the authentic Indiana can become the back stage that inspires each tourist to create a story that only belongs to himself or herself and reflects trueself.

For example, the first state capital Corydon is now a famous historic destination. The local residents are proud of their heritage and keep a traditional way of life and hospitality. Like many smaller communities in the countryside, people here choose a slow life pace and prefer a smaller population and closer relationships. There is no mass development of tourism businesses. Visitors can experience the authentic local life and easily interact with local people while touring around heritage sites. There are many communities like Corydon, such as the Indiana Territory capital Vincennes, the riverside town Newburgh, and the maple town Nashville.

IOTD believes that this brand identity is suitable for a destination with strong rural characteristics and that positioning Indiana as a rural community destination fits the current trend of the tourism market in the United States. Mark Newman (personal communication, May 20, 2016) noted that, “As America becomes more and more urbanized, people are looking for things that remind them of those romantic images that they have in their mind, that they want to relieve themselves, so Indiana is the perfect place for that.” All in all, rural tourism in Indiana possesses the characteristics that facilitate approaching the authentic self and this feature is expressed in the brand ‘Honest-to-Goodness Indiana’. Figure 2 illustrates how the brand bridges the rural community in Indiana and back-to-trueself tourism experience.

Figure 2. Characteristics of Indiana rural tourism.



2.3 A Rural Tourism Branding Model

As shown in Figure 2, ‘Honest-to-Goodness’, with genuine people and authentic experiences as its core element, reflects the idea of Indiana hospitality. In order to convey the essence of the brand, the advertisements highlight that traveling to Indiana is an experience of “back to that simpler time, simple pleasure, that’s Honest-to-Goodness Indiana” (IOTD, 2014). It also emphasizes the rurality feature that ‘farm meets charm’. Along with these are recommendations of attractions and activities typical in rural spaces such as mountain biking, wineries and farms. The boyhood story of President Abraham Lincoln is used to demonstrate how the social environment of Indiana could create a great man with all the good qualities. These marketing messages consistently convey the image that Indiana provides an environment that facilitates back-to-trueself experience.

The concept of back-to-trueself as an identity element of rural tourism branding enhances the loyalty of tourists from the urban area to the rural one, as the attractiveness of the latter consists of the contrasting lifestyles between the two areas (Dong et al., 2013; Urry, 2002). Majewski (2010) claimed that rurality is a central idea in the production of rural tourism and in motivating tourists to visit a rural community. The term ‘rurality’ is used to capture generalized rural features which are then reproduced for tourist consumption (Lane, 1994). A crucial component of rurality is the rural idyll, which can take the form of the ‘farmscape’, the ‘wildscape’, or the ‘adventurescape’. The three forms combine the notions of natural wonders, romanticism, authenticity, and nostalgia (Bell, 2006). Integrating health and wellness tourism into rural destination marketing was suggested in recent studies (Rodrigues et al., 2010), as well as in extant literature on tourist motivation. Escaping from the busy and stressful urban life or seeking the authentic rural feelings has been identified by many as a primary motive for rural tourism (Dong et al., 2013; Park & Yoon, 2009; Pesonen & Komppula, 2010; Rid, Ezeuduji, & Pröbstl-Haider, 2014; Urry, 2002). Royo-Vela’s (2009) study showed that the “desire to disconnect” (p. 425) is the most prevailing motive for rural-cultural tourism and excursion.

The new brand ‘Honest-to-Goodness’ Indiana has been supported by an aggressive marketing campaign since spring 2014, targeting urban centers in the regions including St. Louis, Grand Rapids, Dayton, as well as Indianapolis which is within the state. IOTD spent \$1.05 million in 2014 and \$1.3 million in 2015 in total marketing expenditures. The multimedia and multichannel efforts included television, radio, outdoor ads, print, and online executions. The goals were to saturate each of the target markets and generate high levels of advertising recall, ultimately generating Indiana travel demands that would not have occurred otherwise. Television advertisements received the largest share of the marketing investment. Rural communities featured in them included French Lick Resort (a historical resort), Shipshewana (an Amish country), Brown County (for mountain biking), Fair Oaks Farm (an agriculture theme park), and Columbus City (a mecca of architecture).

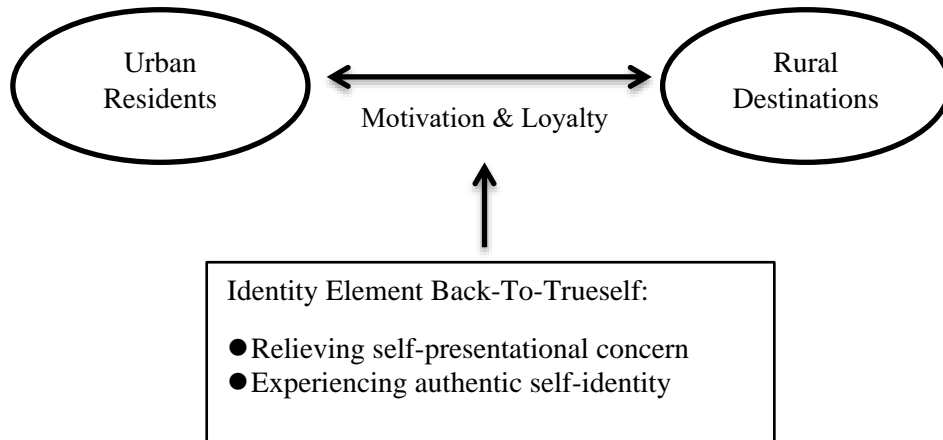
The ‘Honest-to-Goodness’ campaign has been conducted for two years. Its long-term effect on increasing the target market’s loyalty is yet to be accounted for. However, the advertising effectiveness research conducted by Strategic Marketing & Research Insights in 2014 and 2015 showed that the campaign successfully improved the awareness and attractiveness of Indiana tourism and conveyed a brand image favored by the target markets. The rating by the audience of Indiana is very

positive as the result of this campaign. The awareness of the brand increased from 48% to 60% in St. Louis and increased from 63% to 81% in Indianapolis. Its initial awareness in Grand Rapids and Dayton was 49% and 60%, respectively. The return of advertising increased from \$40 to \$79 in 2015 for every \$1 invested. The number of leisure trips generated by the brand campaign increased from 66,000 to 165,000 in one year. The overall image of Indiana as a destination for rural tourism improved, irrespective of actual travel to the state.

Figure 3 conceptualizes the model of rural tourism branding with the identity element of back-to-trueself as the linchpin to motivate urban residents to rural communities and to cultivate their loyalty. This model reflects a combination of the concept of back-to-trueself (see Figure 1) and the characteristics of Indiana rural tourism (see Figure 2). This model is embedded in the ‘Honest-to-Goodness’ branding campaign. The two core elements of the brand are genuine people and authentic experience, which are consistent with the characteristics of rural communities that are in contrast to urban societies. The rural communities in Indiana are proud of their traditional lifestyle, rural or agricultural heritage, traditional American hospitality, outdoor recreation, closeness to nature and genuine attitude. These characteristics facilitate approaching the authentic self of the urbanities. And the brand highlights this feature.

As shown in the model, the bi-directional linkage between the urban residents and rural community destination is indicative of the flow of the former toward the latter, on the one hand, and the branding efforts by the latter capitalizing the identity element and targeting the former, on the other hand. Urban residents are motivated by the opportunity of back-to-trueself at a rural community. If the community could deliver to meet their expectation by providing a sense of second life and allowing them to switch between two identities and regularly relieve the burden of their roles in urban society, the loyalty evolves. This effect may be more significant in countries undergoing rapid urbanization where many urban residents were born and raised in rural areas. Rural tourism for them may be associated with childhood when people felt freer, more spontaneous, purer and truer to themselves (Wang, 1999).

Figure 3. A model of back-to-trueself rural tourism branding.



3.0 Conclusion

This study conceptualizes a model for rural tourism branding and introduces the back-to-trueself concept as an identity element. The model and the identity element are illustrated by the case of ‘Honest-to-Goodness’ Indiana. The concept of back-to-trueself is rooted in the literature of existential authenticity, self-presentation sociology, and rural tourism. Individuals experiencing inauthenticity have the goal of reaching existential authenticity, being able to embrace an authentic lifestyle, and becoming an authentic self or trueself. In the context of rural tourism, the contrasting environments and lifestyles between rural and urban areas can lend opportunities for urban residents to untangle life’s complexity and approach the authentic self by virtue of alleviating the self-presentational concerns that are prevalent in urban life. As such, rural tourism branding that is aligned with authentic living can be attractive to urban residents.

Back-to-trueself as an identity element of rural tourism has two dimensions of brand experience: (a) relief of self-presentational concerns, and (b) experience of authentic self-identity. Such a brand experience should increase the rural community attractiveness and tourist loyalty because it satisfies the fundamental motivation for rural tourism and is conducive to tourists’ quality of life, which has become a significant issue of urban residents. The case of ‘Honest-to-Goodness’ Indiana demonstrates the applicability of this branding model. The core messages of this Rural Indiana brand, ‘genuine people’ and ‘authentic experience’, illustrate well the concept of back-to-trueself. Genuine people represent the social environment that encourages tourists to rid themselves of the self-presentational facade and simply be who they are. Authentic experience denotes staying true to one’s self-identity. The marketing campaign that targets populous urban centers has been successful in improving Indiana’s attractiveness in terms of travel intention and actual visitation, precisely because this projected brand identity stays true to the essence of Indiana and speaks to urban residents’ aspiration of staying authentic to one’s self.

The proposition that back-to-trueself as an identity element for rural tourism can be effective in increasing urban residents’ satisfaction and loyalty to the rural community has yet to be empirically examined. Even for the illustrative case of ‘Honest-to-Goodness’ Indiana, data has yet to be collected on individual tourists about their perceptions of Indiana as a destination for rural tourism that enables them to be back-to-trueself and enjoy the relief of self-presentational concerns and experience of authentic self-identity. Future empirical investigations are warranted to validate, challenge, and improve the proposed back-to-trueself branding model for rural tourism.

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