Investigating the role of the World Heritage brand in attracting visitors to protected areas in Queensland, Australia

Thesis submitted by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my father -

Dr. Elbert A. King Jr.

Earning his PhD from Harvard University in Geology, my father was a renaissance man who was interested and knowledgeable on a wide range of subjects. I grew up spending summers travelling all over the southwestern United States with him, looking for mineral specimens, searching for meteorites and tektites and hanging out with some of NASA’s best scientists of the time. These senior members of the science community never tired of answering the simple questions of a very little girl. My dad taught me to respect other cultures, love travel, value education and to care for the environment. He also taught me how to sing bawdy songs, recite limericks of questionable taste and share stories around a campfire on a starry night with his somewhat inebriated graduate students. He passed away in 1998. He would have been proud I continued my studies and submitted this dissertation.
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Statement on the Contribution of Others

I, the undersigned, declare that this dissertation is my work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any University or other institution of tertiary education.

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_________________________________________  ___________________________
Lisa Marie King                                Date
Declaration of Ethics

The research presented and reported in this dissertation was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the National Statement on Ethics Conduct in Research Involving Human (1999), the Joint NHMRC / AVCC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice (1997), the James Cook University Policy on Experiential Ethics, Standard Practices and Guidelines (2001) and the James Cook University Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice (2001). The proposed research methodology received clearance from the James Cook University Experimentation Ethics Review Committee (Approval # H2735).

_________________________________  _____________________
Lisa Marie King                     Date
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Abstract
Governments and communities increasingly expect protected areas not only to act as conservation cornerstones, but to deliver a broad range of social and economic benefits primarily through tourism. The brand category assigned to a protected area can dramatically influence tourism levels and be a valuable point of differentiation. However, with over 1000 protected area brand categories in use worldwide and more than 55 such categories in Australia alone, standing out from the crowd is problematic.

World Heritage, an internationally acclaimed brand category, recognizes properties containing resources of such outstanding ‘universal value’ to the entire world they must be protected in perpetuity for future generations to appreciate. The World Heritage brand heightens the international profile of properties and creates a unique point of differentiation.

Furthermore, some individual World Heritage Areas have attained ‘celebrity status’ possessing instantly recognisable brand names that are among the best known brands in the world. For example, the Galapagos Islands and Grand Canyon National Park are names that instantly convey a series of iconic images. With over 7,700 parks in Australia, famous World Heritage properties such as Kakadu National Park or the Great Barrier Reef have a competitive advantage over lesser known protected areas.

As protected area brands play a critical role in determining the level of visitation to any property, there is surprisingly little empirical research focused specifically on visitors and their relationship with the World Heritage brand. This dissertation is designed to expand existing knowledge on the relationship between World Heritage and visitors by undertaking research on the role of the World Heritage brand in attracting visitors to protected areas in Queensland, Australia.

Based on identified research gaps, five objectives were developed to collectively address the overall aim. The objectives for this study are:

1. to develop a practical framework on the roles protected site brands play for their primary stakeholders;
2. to create a set of standardized, comparable data sets across World Heritage Areas in Queensland and analyse the data to demonstrate the benefits of such monitoring efforts;

3. to identify the level of visitor awareness of the World Heritage brand when visiting a World Heritage site in Queensland;

4. to gauge the influence of the World Heritage brand in attracting visitors to World Heritage sites in Queensland; and,

5. to determine if some individuals specifically collect World Heritage sites; and if so, identify their sociodemographic characteristics.

The research methodology consisted of a four stage approach. Focus groups informed the development of the visitor survey instrument. A self-completion questionnaire was twice piloted and refined before being administered across Queensland’s World Heritage Areas on a monthly basis between 1 April and 31 July, 2008. A total of 1827 valid questionnaires were collected. The study sites were the Australian Fossil Mammal Sites (Riversleigh), Fraser Island, the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia, the Great Barrier Reef and the Wet Tropics of Australia. Semi-structured interviews with experts were conducted to gather background information pertinent to the present branding situation within each study site. Last, general on-site signage and visitor observations were made during the study period. Descriptive analyses, Chi-square along with analyses of variance were used to investigate the relationships between different variables.

Research findings were revealing. The Australian Fossil Mammal Sites (Riversleigh), the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia and Fraser Island possess distinctive visitor socio-demographic profiles while the Wet Tropics of Queensland and the Great Barrier Reef generally have more similar profiles. Only one-third of Queensland’s World Heritage visitors had ‘top of mind’ awareness of the brand when exiting the site they had just visited. Furthermore, visitors exiting the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia and the Wet Tropics of Queensland could not recall unaided the name of the World Heritage Area they just visited. There was no signage within in the
Gondwana Rainforests of Australia study sites containing the name of the World Heritage Area. Only visitors to the Australian Fossil Mammal Sites (Riversleigh) demonstrated significantly increased awareness of the World Heritage brand after time spent on-site, while visitors to the other four World Heritage Areas showed little change in brand awareness. Less than five percent of all visitors could correctly recall what a modified version of the World Heritage emblem represented.

However, approximately one in four visitors indicated the World Heritage brand influenced their decision to visit the study location. Approximately the same number of visitors indicated they would go out of their way to visit a World Heritage Area, visit a national park for a longer period of time if they were aware it was also World Heritage branded, and would prefer to visit natural World Heritage sites over other protected area brands in Australia. This research determined the World Heritage brand is a collectable experience.

The findings of this dissertation are significant. This is the first study in Queensland to explore in-depth the relationship between the visitor and the World Heritage brand. It establishes the first comparable baseline set of visitor sociodemographic data across all of Queensland’s World Heritage Areas. A published report based on the findings of this research has advised the Australian World Heritage Advisory Committee. A second report was forwarded as an IUCN endorsed briefing document to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee subgroup working on World Heritage branding issues. Thus, the findings of this dissertation have already impacted policy regarding the World Heritage brand at the national and international level. The researcher also advanced the literature by developing a practical framework identifying the roles of protected area brands among major stakeholders, a surprising gap in the literature.
Publications Based on Doctorial Research

Invited reports


Refereed journal article


Refereed conference papers


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</tr>
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<td>Table 5.8</td>
<td>Degree of familiarity with the world heritage brand</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Relationship between respondent familiarity of the National Park brand and different variables</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.10 Relationship between respondent familiarity of the World Heritage brand and different variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of the Australian fossil mammal sites (Riversleigh) brand</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of the Fraser Island brand</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of the Great Barrier Reef brand</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of the Gondwana rainforests of Australia brand</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of the wet tropics of Queensland brand</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of the heritage world brand</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of the number of World Heritage areas in Queensland</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of the heritage world brand compared with different variables</td>
<td>173%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.11 Percentage of respondents aware they were visiting a national park

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>162%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.12 Respondent awareness of the World Heritage branding of site being visited with a cue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>163%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.13 Respondent knowledge of site’s World Heritage brand tested with different variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>165%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.14 Percent of respondents aware the site being visited was a World Heritage area prior to visit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>166%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.15 Relationships between respondent awareness the site was World Heritage prior to visit compared with different variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>168%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.16 Awareness of the Australian fossil mammal sites (Riversleigh) brand after time spent on-site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>168%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.17 Awareness of the Fraser Island brand after time spent on-site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>169%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.18 Awareness of the Fraser Island brand compared with different variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>170%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.19 Awareness of the Great Barrier Reef brand after time spent on-site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>170%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.20 Awareness of the Great Barrier Reef brand compared with different variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>171%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.21 Awareness of the Gondwana rainforests of Australia brand after time spent on-site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>172%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.22 Awareness of the wet tropics of Queensland brand after time spent on-site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>172%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.23 Analyses of those who correctly named the wet tropics compared with different variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>173%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.24 Visitors’ self-rated level of World Heritage knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>174%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.25 Self-rated knowledge of World Heritage compared with different variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>175%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.26 Awareness of the World Heritage brand is the highest honour any protected area can receive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>176%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.27 Awareness of the number of World Heritage areas in Queensland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>177%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.28 Response to the Likert scale item, “Obvious signage in the park made it clear to me that this place was a World Heritage area”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>177%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.1 “Did the fact that this site was a World Heritage area influence your decision to visit this place?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>214%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.2 Influence of the National Park brand in the decision to visit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>215%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.3 “Did the World Heritage brand influence your decision to visit this place?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>217%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.4 Responses to the question, “Would you be more likely to visit a National Park if you knew it was also a World Heritage area?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>217%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.5 Summary of chi-square analyses for “Would you be more likely to visit a National Park if you knew it was also a World Heritage area?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>220%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.6 Responses to the question, “Would you plan on visiting a National Park for a longer period of time if you knew it was also a World Heritage area?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>221%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.7 Respondents who would plan on visiting a National Park longer if they knew it was also a World Heritage area with different variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>223%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.8 In general, would you prefer to visit natural World Heritage Areas over other natural areas in Australia?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>223%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.9 Chi-square analyses for, “Would you prefer to visit natural World Heritage Areas over other natural areas in Australia?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>224%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.10 Data tabulation for, “While in Queensland, if you learned a protected area reasonably close by was also a World Heritage area, would you probably change your plans to make sure you visited it?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>225%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.11 Chi-square analyses for, “While in Queensland, if you learned a protected area reasonably close by was also a World Heritage area, would you probably change your plans to make sure you visited it?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>227%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.12 Tabulation of the statement, “I like to visit World Heritage areas if I can fit them into my holiday plans.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>227%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.13 Chi-square analyses for the statement, “I like to visit World Heritage areas if I can fit them into my holiday plans.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>229%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.14 Tabulation of the statement, “World Heritage means it is something I must see if I am in the area.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>230%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.15 Collated responses regarding the statement, “World Heritage means it is something I must see if I am in the area.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>231%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.16 Responses to “I go out of my way to visit World Heritage areas.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>232%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.17 Chi-square analyses regarding the statement, “I go out of my way to visit World Heritage areas.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>233%</td>
</tr>
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</table>
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