

Framework for the successful Creation of a strong Destination Brand

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Abstract

Destination branding has become a powerful tool to differentiate countries or places and obtain competitive advantages by improving image as tourism destination. The purpose of this paper is to offer a closer view at this field through overview of an emerging literature and to present various views about these issues and accompany it with possible linkage among them. Paper also points on the main and most crucial threats the destination can face. It also indicates key factors and various methods of destination branding in sake of creating positive image a prevent from emerging negative.

Key words destination, branding, identity, image, marketing, reputation

INTRODUCTION

The paper provides an overview of the theoretical background for the field of branding in relation to tourism industry. It will explain and describe the main issues presented by works in the field of destination branding, destination image and its in the development of this industry. The review of a literature covers couple main areas as follows: destination branding, destination image and role of those factors.

1. DESTINATION BRANDING

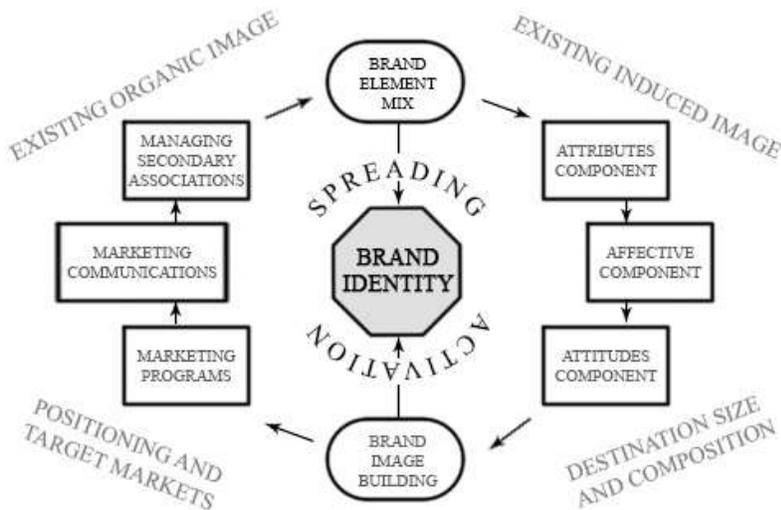
Branding of a destination is related with the promotion of the tourism of a country and helps to the enhancement of the overall image and to the creation of a powerful brand [2, 5]. It covers all of the perceptions that someone has about a destination based on experience, hearsay or prejudice. Those influence a mans attitude towards that place at an emotional level. It has to be trustworthy and real because it is not possible to manufacture it. [2]

The product of tourism is not a tangible good but an experience [4]. It is a highly competitive environment and tourist's awareness of different places is limited. It is necessary for a tourism destination to have a strong brand and an appealing image that differentiates it from the other places. [4] The decision process of vacation place selection is very complex and it is considered to be one of the greatest challenges the destination branding has to face [6]. The image of a destination is critical for the selection process. According to reference [7] and [8] a positive image is able to increase the international influence, restore credibility and enhance a destination's reputation. It's fundamental for a nation to have a good reputation that could increase its competitiveness and enhance the economic, political and social development [2, 3]

It takes a long time to change a reputation. Countries that do not care about developing a good reputation become the 'victims' of competitors and target markets that create stereotypes and negative sentiment. [9] There are several critical areas of reputation on which countries need to focus. Those areas are environmental credentials, technology and self-improvement. Self-improvement is related with destination branding: countries need to promote themselves and gain a reputation. [1, 2]

1.1 Model of destination branding

Reference [6] offers a conceptual model for branding of a destination focusing on building the identity of the destination by creating dynamic connections among the brand element mix which consists of an image building, brand associations and marketing activities.



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Fig. 1. Forming of destination appeal and experiences [6].

Figure 1 synthesizes various approaches to destination branding. It links the concepts from a perspective of consumer to the perspective of destination marketer [10]. The process begins with the selection of brand elements in sake of forming strong brand associations that reflect the attributes as perceptual features characterizing the destination, affective components as personal values and meanings related to the benefits expected from the attributes and attitudes of the image which is understood as an

overall impression [6]. Through marketing and management tools, the brand identity is enhanced through spreading activation. To build a brand image one needs to 'identify the most relevant associations and strengthen their linkages to the brand. [6, 10] The four outer elements represent the contextual preconditions of the destination branding process.

Each destination has to conduct a systematic tourist analysis to identify new trends and understand motivations for visiting the country. Following step is the analysis of the competitors, their advantages and disadvantages, possibilities to improve competitiveness and find new niche markets. The last step should be an analysis of the destination's actual position in the market. [6, 7] All models take into account both the tourists and the country's marketer perspective. Branding process should include positioning and definition of target markets, destination's size and composition and study of the perceived image.

1.2 Challenges

The main challenge is to differentiate the destination from others and to increase the awareness and recognition amongst potential tourists. It has to create a positive image for the destination and to create a strong brand and brand identity for the destination [2]. Tourism is often the most promoted sector therefore another significant challenge is probably reaching balance in the representations of a destination [11]. Next one tends to be an objectivity. Smaller countries' should try to present a real image of a country and not to highlight limited achievements or historical facts important to nationals but which aren't interesting for the world population. [1]

2. DESTINATION IMAGE AND IDENTITY

The most valuable assets a country can possess are a positive image and a positive reputation. Every destination has an image, but are not directly under the control of marketers [12]. Destination image can be defined as a sum of an individual's mental representation of knowledge, feelings, and global impression about an object or a destination [13]. Reference [10] propose an idea that destination image is multidimensional, with cognitive and affective elements. It is a mix of information, feelings, beliefs, opinions, ideas, expectations and perceptions about a certain place.

An image of a brand plays a key role in destination branding. Nevertheless, reference [6] emphasizes that the process of image formation is just a part of whole process. Brand identity is created by the destination marketer and supported by the touristic attraction, history, and people. On the other hand, the brand image is a perception of the receiver and depends on the previous experiences and on the marketer's communication skills [14]. The brand image is a reflection of the brand identity and plays an essential role in the construction of the identity. [14] It reflects how all the brand's elements contribute to the awareness and image. It is a main aspect of the brand's strategic vision because it gives purpose and meaning to the brand [15]. The elements of a strong brand complete each other and they unify the entire process of image building. In return it contributes to the strength and uniqueness of the brand identity [6].

2.1 Destination image and its role

Reference [1] says that the tourist goes to a destination to see the image rather than the reality. Images of destinations are often determined more by an area's image projection than its tangible aspects. Destination image helps to form a destination's brand and allow it to succeed. Branding process consists of two types of image. The first is projected which is promoted by the marketers and the second one is perceived image which is received by the tourists [16]. The image formation is end result of what stays in tourists minds as a result of sum of all information they know about the place.

2.2 Dealing with negative reputation

In our security-obsessed age is crucial knowing how to deal with a negative national reputation. The problem is that stories about war, terrorism, poverty, disease, corruption, crime and violence – whether entirely justified or not – tend to spread very rapidly, to be instantly believed, and to last for a very long time. If we want people to change from the story they currently believe about a country, we have to give credit to their attachment to that story. [1,10] Unfortunately, negative or shocking stories are very often more interesting than good or positive ones. [1] Proper benchmarking, accountability, transparency and clear goals for marketing are equally essential.

Reputation cannot be built by the destination, it can only be acquired. “*The way to gain a good reputation is to endeavor to be what you desire to appear*”, Socrates. The fundamental problem for destination branding is difference between the message and the context in which this message is perceived [17]. Messages are processed out of reach of marketing competences. It's processed in the minds of people [9, 17]. Message misunderstanding is closely followed by lack of patience so results can appear and insufficient creativity which results in destination branding inefficiency [9, 17]. Intense global competition in the tourism industry forces destinations to develop strong, unique and competitive destination brands [18]. However destinations are not a single product but a composite product consisting of a mix of different components [18].

Dealing with negative reputation is a matter of playing between tacitly acknowledging the problems and appearing to ignore or even lie about them. Marketing communications is not the right medium for addressing issues such as security, foreign policy or human rights, and neither is the tourist board. This is simply another example of how important it is for all sectors to work together when national image is at stake. [1] However, the multidimensionality and the abstract notion of a destination, as a whole, impose complex challenges in the development of an applicable framework for nation branding. Additionally, branding a nation requires the coordination of numerous stakeholders who are almost impossible to be managed and controlled in a free-floating environment. This imposes several restrictions while trying to build a powerful nation brand. [19]

CONCLUSION

The paper presented the knowledge in the field of destination branding and destination image. Place branding may be characterized as a domain that is currently very much practitioner-led and where academic research has been slow to follow, although high levels of academic interest in the topic are now beginning to materialize. There exists the close emotional ties between people and the places they live, visit and work. This brings an added dimension to consider when it comes to introducing practices such as place branding and marketing to a community. Destinations must constantly adjust to changing circumstances while maintaining a balance with the values and vision of their residents.

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