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Research Paper

Brand architecture management: The case of four tourist destinations in Catalonia

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ABSTRACT

Much literature in tourism is dedicated to brand management; nevertheless, even in a sector charac-terised by the coexistence of several brands, little research has been carried out on the critical issue of brand architecture. This study focuses on the process of developing and managing a set of interrelated brands and contributes to an understanding of how the concepts of brand architecture are practically applied, specifically in four tourist destinations of Catalonia. The results show that brand architecture concepts are only partially applied, despite the fact that a structured system of brands would stimulate synergies, adding more value to each brand.

1. Introduction

Tourist destinations are increasingly dedicated to developing and managing their brand in order to gain a strong differentiated position within a competitive market. To some extent, their whole marketing efforts are moving towards a branding-related perspective. This is mainly due to the fact that organisations, with the responsibility of attracting visitors, generally do not have (or have only a partial) control of all the tools of marketing, e.g., price of services and product development; although they could influence the image communi-cated to the market. The fact is that the general marketing concepts suitable for industrial goods and services, are difficult to apply to tourist destinations, which are composed and managed by a multi-tude of players from public and private sectors and include a variety of tourist products and services. The challenge for a tourism organisation is how to implement the appropriate governance model, defining public policies that mediate among the different and, sometimes, contradictory interests of private stakeholders, local population, environment protection, long term sustainability, etc. Moreover, the management of tourism brands is inevitably influ-enced by the administrative boundaries, as well as by the public policies and political interests that may change over time.

As more and more tourism organisations are focussing on brand-ing, the literature has been directed towards the study of the branding concepts, such as the brand identity, equity, benefits and character-istics. Nevertheless, little research has been carried out to study

tourism brand architecture (Dooley & Bowie, 2005; Harish, 2010). This is rather surprising, considering that the sector is composed of a multitude of private and public players, each of them promoting their own product brand, and that the territorial brands at local, regional and national level are necessarily overlapped and interrelated.

The aim of this research is to contribute to the understanding of the relationship among the different tourist brands, and how brand management is implemented in the case of Catalonia and its practical implications in the four tourist destinations selected as case studies. Thus, strategic relations among tourist brands and the brand architecture management will be analysed and described, through the definition of the roles and responsibilities of the different administrative levels, along with the challenges that tourist destinations are facing in the implementation of the theoretical background on brand architecture management.

2. Theoretical framework of brand management and brand architecture

According to Keller (2003), a brand helps consumers organise their knowledge about products and services. Currently, as high-lighted by Simoes and Dibb (2001, p.217), 'there is general agreement in the marketing literature that the brand is more than a name, given to a product; it embodies a whole set of physical and socio-psychological attributes and beliefs'. The fact is that still many tourism professionals identify the brand with its name, logo and slogan, while these elements are only the small tip of the iceberg, which could remain visible only if it is adequately supported by a bulk of other less evident (but more significant) elements, values and benefits that characterise the personality

of the brand. Keller (2003, p.7) observed that many managers 'refer to a brand as more than that—defining a brand in terms of having actually created a certain amount of awareness, reputation, prominence and so on in the marketplace'. Furthermore, Kapferer (2001, p.3) highlights that 'there is no brand without a product, a mark and an image (collective representation). The brand is both, the part and the whole; it is the mark on the product or service, but it is also the overall value conveyed with promises of tangible and intangible satisfaction'. Thus, Aaker (1996) define brand identity as providing direction, purpose and meaning to the brand, and Kapferer (2001, p.4) stated that 'the brand is here to differentiate between two products or services; it is part of an approach that carves up and segments the market'. In this sense, Dioko and So (2011) stated that a brand serves to differentiate a product or service by relating it to a unique identity.

In terms of branding tourist destinations, Ekinci (2003) stated that successful destination branding involves establishing a reciprocal relationship between destinations and tourists by satisfying their needs. Anholt (2007) highlights that developing a brand, or branding, is the process of planning and communicating the identity of the destination. Furthermore, Cai (2002) stated that it is necessary to select a consistent mix of elements to identify and differentiate a destination through building a positive image. Furthermore, it is also relevant that the concept of place branding is defined as the practise of applying brand strategy and management to places such as towns, cities, regions and countries (Anholt, 2004). Thus, Papadopoulos (2004, p.36) stated that 'the term refers to a broad set of efforts by country, regional and city governments, and by industry groups, aimed at marketing the places and sectors they represent'.

Qu, Kim, and Im (2011) highlight that it is of utmost importance for a destination to have an adequate and strong brand image in order to reinforce a positive and identifiable brand identity, which should be structured according to the needs and expectations of the demand. Thus, according to Leisen (2001) a destination brand is a powerful tool with the ability to create emotional appeal, so brand image is considered important to the success of marketing a tourist destination. Ekinci (2003) suggests that the most important part of destination branding starts when the assessment of destination image includes a strong emotional attachment. According to Cretu and Brodie (2007), some of the most substantial benefits of branding are related to a positive impact on the perceived quality of the product or service. Thus, Michell, King, and Reast (2001) also define the positive perception of the brand as providing an identity, a consistent image and as conferring uniqueness to the product or service. Thus, in a wider context, branding means defining unique values that describe a distinctive branding personality; for instance Tourism Australia associates its brand with the characteristics of being welcoming, irreverent, high spirited, and down to Earth. These values should be reflected in all activities, and at all times, when a tourist proposition comes in contact with the market. For example, they should influence the content and the images used in advertising, the attitude and clothing of the human resources, among other considerations. All these elements communicate the destination's character to the consumer and need be taken into consideration when structuring a brand strategy. Then, considering that the customer gets in touch with the brand, interacting with several companies and other actors (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009), it is also important to make the brand features explicit to all the destination stakeholders. As stated by García, Gómez, and Molina (2011), the creation of value to the demand is the final aim of the brand, while for the local population and entrepreneurs it is an intermediate goal and a necessary condition for the success of the destination branding strategy.

The strategic process to determine the personality of the destination should involve all the tourism stakeholders who are in touch with tourists, to make them support the initiative, to share common views and to agree upon branding strategy, in order to apply it with a positive sense of belonging. Gilmore (2002) stated that stakeholders should include several segments that are not mutually exclusive, and which Hankinson (2004) divided into four categories: consumers; primary services; secondary services and the media. Therefore, it has to be stated that stakeholders play an important role in tourism branding, due to the strong relationship among the destination's attributes and characteristics and the development of the branding. Furthermore, Webster (2000) considers that to create a brand value it is also important to take into consideration not only the relationship with the final consumer, but also the rest of the stakeholders participating in the marketing network. In any case, due the nature of the stakeholders and the diverse interests among them, some conflicts might arise among public and private stakeholders' interests as in the case of New Zealand (Morgan, Pritchard, & Piggott, 2003). It seems clear that, since stakeholders are a key component of the tourist destination, they should be involved in the brand management. It is important to consider that the different processes of brand management will occur, according to Hanna and Rowley (2011, p.433), 'whether or not any agency takes an active and strategic approach to brand management' and that 'without such proactive interventions, the outworking of the process may be a disappointing brand experience, negative word of mouth, and ineffective marketing communications'.

In order to be described properly, the personality of a brand should be defined by stating its proposition and all its benefits. Often in the literature, the elements that should characterise it are graphically represented by a pyramid: even if the sections may differ according to different authors and applications (Baker, 2009; World Tourism Organization and European Travel Commission, 2009; Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2010), some common features could be highlighted, such as the characteristics and attributes of the destination, the rational and emotional benefits, and, at the top of the pyramid, the brand values and brand essence or character. In fact, the basic requirement for positioning a brand is for it to be distinctive, so that the elements emphasised should be relevant to consumers and different from those communicated by both direct competitors, as well as by other related brands. This concept was reinforced by Baker (2009) and Phillips (2010) who define the destination's points of parity and points of difference in order to help destinations to differentiate from their competitors.

According to Harish (2010), brand architecture refers to how to structure and organise a portfolio of brands and how to establish a valuable relationship among them. In fact, the strategic organisation of brands would help, not only to avoid internal competition, but also to achieve synergies and a leverage effect that adds even more value to each brand. Therefore, brand architecture is a crucial issue to be planned for tourist destinations, considering the articulated structure of the sector and the coexistence of several brands. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2002) previously stated that brand architecture is an organised structure of the brands portfolio that specifies brand roles and the nature of the relationship among them. The authors proposed a spectrum of models to manage the architecture of a portfolio of brands, ranging from an unbound (house of brands) to a tight (branded house) relationship among them.

- **House of Brands**. This is the case of a company that structures independent brands, with its own values and characteristics. For example the multinational Procter and Gamble manages autonomous brands, such as Gillette, Pantene and Pampers. The advantage of this model is that each product can have differentiated positioning and the possible problems occurring to one brand do not affect and are not transferred to the other. When applied to tourist destinations, Balearic Islands apply a model that can be linked to the concept of House of Brands.