



Article

Role of tourist destination development in building its brand image: A conceptual model



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ABSTRACT

Tourism is truly an international/global industry. Tourism is vital to the economy of a country and sustainable tourism development requires an understanding of the complex interrelationships and interactions among a multitude of environmental factors and interdisciplinary forces that play a critical role in tourism development. While overall the field of tourism has been abundantly researched, there are certain areas where there is a paucity of research, namely, competition analysis, branding and positioning. Our research contributes to this extremely important but relatively less researched subject. Specifically, we study the relationship between destination development and its brand image. We develop a conceptual model which identifies various constructs, processes and linkages involved in the relationship between destination development and its brand image. We propose that the brand image has three components corresponding to the three stages of consumption/travel, namely, pre-travel, during travel, and post-travel. In developing this model we draw upon the interdisciplinary nature of tourism and discuss a variety of influences, such as, economic, social, cultural, political and psychological factors.

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El papel del desarrollo del destino turístico en la construcción de su imagen de marca: un modelo conceptual

RESUMEN

El turismo es un sector internacional/global. Es esencial para la economía de un país, y la sostenibilidad de su desarrollo demanda la comprensión de las complejas interrelaciones e interacciones que se producen entre la multitud de factores ambientales y fuerzas interdisciplinarias que desempeñan una misión fundamental en el desarrollo de esta industria. Aunque en general la cuestión del turismo se ha investigado abundantemente, existen ciertas áreas que no han sido convenientemente estudiadas, tales como el análisis de la competencia, la gestión de marcas y el posicionamiento. Nuestro análisis contribuye a esta cuestión extremadamente importante, pero relativamente menos estudiada. En concreto, estudiamos la relación entre el desarrollo del destino y su imagen de marca. Desarrollamos un modelo conceptual que identifica diversos constructos, procesos y contextos implicados en la relación entre el desarrollo del destino y su imagen de marca. Nuestra propuesta es que la imagen de marca tiene tres componentes que se corresponden con las tres etapas del consumo/viaje; es decir, el previaje, el viaje en sí mismo,

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y el postviaje. En el desarrollo de este modelo recurrimos a la naturaleza interdisciplinaria del turismo, y tratamos una serie de influencias tales como los factores económicos, sociales, culturales, políticos y psicológicos.

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1. Introduction

Tourism is an international/global industry that captures the complex interaction of a variety of environmental factors. Tourism development draws upon a multitude of disciplines and subject areas such as anthropology, business, communication, cultural, economics, geography, history, hospitality, politics, psychology, retailing, sociology, and transportation etc. The international and interdisciplinary nature of the field of tourism is well recognized by academics, professionals and policy makers. A testimony to this is the publication *Tourism: An International and Interdisciplinary Journal*, the first issue of which was published as early as 1953 in Zagreb, Croatia. The journal *Tourism* has been published in English language since 2000.

Vrdoljak-Salamon and Corak (2012) carried out a content analysis of the research articles published in the journal *Tourism* for the period 2000–2011. The authors note that there were 20 special issues of this journal during 2000–2011. However in their content analysis, the articles from the special issues were not included in order to assess the trends in the field independent of special issues. A total of 165 articles (excluding articles in special issues) were classified by the authors in 9 categories. It should be noted that an article could be listed in multiple categories depending upon its scope and coverage. The analysis of the authors reveals the following 9 subject areas (number of articles under each subject area): tourism theory, research, education, and human resources (35), tourism and economy (72), tourism and market (62), tourism and society (56), tourism and space (41), tourism policy and organization (19), registration and forecasting in tourism (8), types of tourism (84), and miscellaneous (6). This content analysis covered contributions from 51 different countries on the six continents (excluding Antarctica). The above analysis indicates that the journal and the field of tourism are truly international and interdisciplinary.

The tourism industry, which benefits transportation, accommodation, catering, entertainment, and retailing sectors, has been blooming in the past few decades. Tourism has been a critical factor in the economic development strategy of many countries (Lea, 1988) and tourist destinations. In recent years, tourism has been one of the most important and consistent growth industries worldwide, and is currently held to be one of the major service industries (Bansal & Eiselt, 2004; Zang et al., 2004). It is well recognized that tourism carries advantages for any country or destination and it should be utilized as an instrument for development at the particular destinations especially which are rich in terms of their tourist attractions (Wanill, 2001; Bodlender, Jefferson, Jenkins, & Lickorish). A tourist destination is then simply described as a “geographical location to which a person is travelling” (Metelka, 1990). Buhalis (2000) broadens this definition by stating that the geographical location “is understood by its visitors as a unique entity, with a political and legislative framework for tourism marketing and planning”. Lynch and Tinsley (2001) state that most studies tend to look at the tourist destination as a “system containing a number of components such as attractions, accommodation, transport, and other services and infrastructure”. Each of these components is “dependent upon other parts for success in attracting, servicing, and satisfying the tourist” (Mill & Morrison, 1985) According to Laws (1995) a destination’s primary resources comprise its climate, ecology, traditions and architecture. Its secondary resources are then those developments brought in

especial for tourists, such as catering, accommodation, transport and activities. In their study of 10 European countries, Manrai and Manrai (1993) identified three broad dimensions differentiating the tourism potential of these 10 countries. These were “necessities”, “attractions” and “environment”.

Several researchers have conducted studies on the relationship between tourism planning and development, visitor satisfaction, host perception (Tang, 2008) and psychology of tourist experience (Larsen, 2007). Tourism is regarded as an important and consistent growth industry in the service sector worldwide (Bansal & Eiselt, 2004; Zang et al., 2004). Destination marketing and management is one of the major concerns of any country or any region or destination in any part of the world. The nature of the destination, resources available, hosts, the visitor’s behavior and experiences and management of tourism resources optimally are extremely important research topics today.

Under the tourism and market category identified by Vrdoljak-Salamon and Corak (2012), a total of 62 articles were included. The main focus seems to be on destination (21 articles) followed by tourist demand (16 articles). The other subject areas under this category (and number of articles) include marketing in tourism (8), market research (7), tourism and prices (4), competitiveness (4), and tourist expenditure (2). Destination is the product which the stakeholders in the tourism industry try to market to their customers, namely tourists. Considering the global economy we live in today, the competition for tourist expenditures is fierce and tourism marketers resort to a variety of marketing mix strategies including destination (product) development, pricing, promotion and distribution including access to the destination and information about it. Tourism marketers have to compete against companies worldwide who are also trying to attract the tourists to visit their respective destination product. The study of tourism competition is thus an extremely important subject. Yet this particular subject area has received relatively less attention from the researchers as is evident from the above analysis of research on various topics under the tourism and market category.

Our research deals with this important yet relatively less researched subject of tourism competitiveness. Specifically we study the role the destination development plays in building a brand image for the destination which is a critical tool for establishing competitive advantage.

The objective of our research is to review the literature and develop a conceptual model capturing key constructs, linkages and processes involved in the relationship between tourist destination development and the brand image of the tourist destination. The conceptual model is given in Figure 1 and discussed below.

2. Tourist destination development and brand image

2.1. Tourist destination development

The development of a destination can be characterized by the phases it goes through (Laws, 1995). In the ‘pre-tourism phase’ there are two sub-phases. In the first sub-phase, the destination is visited and experienced mainly for the purpose of visiting friends and relatives, or for business. In the second sub-phase, the destination developers and the local residents or community members proactively begin to study tourists’ behavior in order to attract the tourists for a repeat visit, not just for visiting friends and

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