What marketing strategy for destinations with a negative image?

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Purpose

This introductory article provides a broad overview of the significance of this theme issue

Design

The introductory article sheds lights on issues that post-colonial, post-conflict and post-disaster destinations are facing, and more importantly provides strategies to overcome the issues. The solutions are tailored to the particular profile of the destination.

Findings

In order for post-colonial, post-conflict and post-disaster destinations to enhance their image to potential visitors and also to be able to compete equally with established destinations, it is important to provide solutions that are tailor made to their own case, as one size does not fit all.

Originality

The value of this article is that it re-establishes the truth about post-colonial, post-conflict and post-disaster destinations, while highlighting their potentials and barriers.

Introduction

For many destinations tourism is perceived as a panacea for economic and social development and hence, countries having strong reliance on tourism invest considerably for visibility, marketability and appeal of the destination. That said, not all destinations are vested with the same image. Because of this discrepancy not all of them are performing at the same level. A study conducted by Séraphin, Gowreesunkar and Blakeley (2016) on under-performing destinations showed that cognitive image formed on such destinations are derived from both internal and external sources; internal sources being from friends, peer and relatives and external sources being from media and public institutions. Likewise, another study by Gowreesunkar and Sotiriades (2017) indicated that image associated to underperforming destinations was termed as negative attributes in the tourism decision making process and hence, significantly influenced choice of destinations. According to the study, image of a destination is an important attribute, as satisfaction and dissatisfaction may occur as a result of customer's overall evaluation of the information associated with the destination' image. As a result, the type of information attached to a destination contributes in the image formation of a given destination. It is generally argued that marketing and more specifically branding plays an important role in overcoming some of the barriers related to image. However, a study of Séraphin, Ambaye, Gowreesunkar and Bonnardel (2016) showed that , the branding of a destination is difficult because of the ambidextrous approach that needs to be adopted, that is to say changing the image of the destination while maintaining its essence. For destination with a negative image developing a marketing strategy is even more difficult that a destination with a positive image, this due to the process involved in the image formation process of a destination. In order to understand why this process is even more difficult for destinations with a negative image, it is first important to understand what is meant by 'image'. Thus, according to Gartner (2000), the destination image can be defined as 'the attitude, perception, beliefs and ideas one hold about a particular geographic area formed by the cognitive image of a particular destination' (Gartner, 2000: 295). As for Cooper and Hall (2008: 223), the destination image is a simplified version of reality and it affects both an individual's perception of a destination and their choice of destination as the image of the destination is the only evidence that the visitor has of the destination before they visit. Both definitions highlight the importance of image in the decision making process to visit or not a destination. Both definitions also highlight how quickly and superficiality customers building their image of a destination. Likewise the study of Gowreesunkar and Dixit (2017) explained the mechanism of information search of tourists in the 21st century. The study shows that technology-savvy tourists often resort to internet and these interactive mediums not only gives information, but also provides feedback and hence influence image formation of tourists on destinations. The other side of the coin shows that, while exposed to various online sources, customers encounter a plethora of information, and very often search further on negative information associated with certain destinations in order to avoid these and they even share on their social network. On that basis and taking the example of Haiti (a post-colonial, post-conflict and post-disaster destination), Séraphin (2016) explained how important it is for a destination with a negative image to take full control of their online presence and capitalise on their unique attributes to attract tourists. That said, this is very difficult to achieve when we know on what the image of a destination is based upon (Gartner, 1993): (1) Induced agents (generally controlled by sources external to the individual such as advertisements); (2) Organic agents (that are acquired through personal experience and are normally the most trusted source of information); (3) and autonomous agents (are media sources or popular culture such as films or documentaries). Tourism, being an information-intensive industry, the search for its information is guided by various models (Gowreesunkar and Dixit, 2017) and the autonomous agents are considered as the most powerful because they can quickly alter a tourist's image of a destination. Even more important, no matter how the tourist acquired the image of the destination, but from his point of view the perceived image is reality (Cooper & Hall, 2008: 224). Based on the above, and particularly on the fact that the media play the major role in the way a destination is perceived, it becomes quite obvious that destination with a negative image and destination with a positive image can't use the same marketing approach. Moreover, technology-savvy customers readily capture negative information which reaches through real time and they share to online network. Once again, taking the example of Haiti, Séraphin, Butcher and Korstanje (2016) explain that in this respect, Haiti does not have a 'high profile'. The shantytowns, the coups, etc., are generally the types of places and events broadcasted. The title of this theme, that is also the research question of this theme, makes it clear that there is difference in the marketing strategy of destinations according to their image. The nature of the tourism industry makes it even more difficult for destination with a negative image 'to rise from the ashes'. Indeed, the tourism sector is especially vulnerable due to exogenous factors like political instability, economic crisis, natural disasters and the outbreak of diseases. Those factors can cause destinations to decline and sometimes even totally disappear from the tourism map (Avraham, 2015; Séraphin, Butcher & Korstanje, 2016; Alvarez & Campo, 2014). As elaborated above, technology-savvy customers of the 21st century are now increasingly resorting to online sources to acquire and share information on destinations. Therefore, identifying a marketing strategy for destinations with a negative image is not the main issue per se, rather it is the type of information created on the destination and the medium to be utilized to launch or re-launch the destination that need to be identified and worked upon. The crafting of appropriate marketing strategies of destinations with poor image needs to take into account various factors, in particular, their online visibility and types of information shared.

Morgan, Pritchard and Pride (2011) discussed a range of destinations (Singapore, Abu Dhabi, Macau, Milan, Australia, Namibia, San Antonio, Slovenia, London, New York, Barcelona, Northern Ireland and Jerusalem) with different histories, reputations, resources, markets, and levels of tourism development. In terms of branding strategies adopted to be competitive, three groups could be identified: (1) the first group that includes Singapore, Abu Dhabi, Macau, Milan, New York, London and Barcelona adopted a strategy based on the organisation of events and the development of landmark projects to gain the reputation of world-leading cities. (2) As for Australia, it focuses its effort of film's theme to build up its image. (3) As for the third group (Namibia, San Antonio, Slovenia, Northern Ireland and Jerusalem) they opted for a marketing strategy based on authenticity, culture and a sense of place. All three groups not withstanding their history, reputation, resource, market, and levels of tourism development, opted for solution focus on destination. They are traditional solutions that have so far proven ineffective (Alvarez & Campo, 2011, 2014; Avraham, 2015; Vitic & Ringer, 2008; Walters & Mair, 2012). In this theme, we are going to explore alternative solutions. Some will still focus on the destinations and others will focus on the tourist. The latter is of interest as limited research focus on the tourists.

As the image of a destination is based upon induced agents, organic agents and autonomous agents (as explained previously), Séraphin, Butcher and Korstanje (2016) argued the importance of educating tourists a pre-visit stage using Virtual Online Learning Material (VOLM) as educated potential tourists are less sensitive to adverse publicity as they develop a special bond with the destination. In this theme, we are going a step further by suggesting an ambidextrous approach by also suggesting education of the tourists during the visit as suggested by Orams (1996).

Ambidextrous management is presented by Smith (2017) as capital for the survival of any organisation on both short-term and long term. Research combining ambidexterity and tourism is quasi non-existent. Mihalache, M. and Mihalache, O.R. (2016) are the only who published in this area. They also highlighted the role of ambidexterity in sustainable tourism management.

Is there any particular interest from tourists to visit destinations with a negative image?

Because tourists are constantly looking for new destinations to visit and also because travelling appears as a need for our self-fulfilment, even destinations with a negative image are visited by tourists (figure 1). Iran (Islamic Republic) for instance received 5.327.000 visitors in 2016; Algeria 1.710.000 visitors; Chad 120.000; Yemen 366.700 visitors, etc. (WEF, 2017 [Online]).

[INSERT FIGURE 1]

These performances are all due to the efforts made by DMOs. For instance, Israel adopted intensive marketing activities based on repositioning the city as an attraction for the domestic Israeli population in order to achieve a decent level of hotel occupancy (Mitki, Herstein & Jaffe, 2011). Also, report on world destinations are available online, visitors who want to know more about the destination apart from the information provided by the media, can educate themselves and discover some aspects of the destinations that are generally hidden by the media. Thus, it is possible to read On the WEF website:

Israel - ‘Israel (61st) is one of the most improved economies this year, rising 11 places in the global rankings. Its performance can mostly be attributed to an improvement on contextual business conditions. The business environment (32nd, up 19 places) is becoming more open to competition and to foreign investment. Improvements in ground infrastructure (36th), especially ports, and in skills and labour regulations (21st) have also contributed to enhancing the business climate. The T&T sector is supported by sound tourism service infrastructure

(26th) and widespread use of ICTs (32nd). Israel's cultural resources (57th), including its nine World Heritage Cultural sites and several international association events, are a primary motivation to visit the country. Israel could further develop its natural tourism (93rd) to offer a diversified value proposition to all types of tourist. The main issues hindering Israel's T&T development are the low level of security (103rd), especially related to terrorism risks, and the limited openness (99th), which is linked to efforts to limit threats to security'.

Jordan – 'Jordan is ranked 75th, and the country's stable performance (up two places) should be lauded as a success given the regional context. Jordan has made remarkable strides in improving its ICT readiness (44th, up 21 places), through much broader use of mobile phone technologies, achieving the 5th and 19th highest mobile and broadband mobile subscriptions respectively. The nation has also managed to maintain a high level of security, ranking 38th globally, outperformed regionally only by the UAE, Oman, Qatar and Morocco. The impact of terrorism has been smaller compared to neighbouring countries, which has helped considerably in maintaining generally constant international tourism arrivals over the past four years. Jordan's T&T competitiveness is also driven by high government prioritization (22nd), including the 6th highest relative spending. The country's business environment (41st) supports the sector's development through low administrative burden to obtain construction permits, well-protected property rights and market concentration. To further develop its T&T competitiveness, the nation should upgrade its air and ground transport infrastructure (69th and 79th, respectively) and focus on its natural and cultural resources.'

Namibia – 'Namibia is the 4th most T&T competitive nation in Sub- Saharan Africa, taking the 82nd place globally. Namibia's natural resources (40th), its business environment (38th), air transportation (58th) and price competitiveness (30th) sustain Namibia's competitiveness as the country slowly continues to increase international arrivals. Nonetheless, Namibia loses 12 positions this year, resulting partially from statistical adjustments such as the inclusion of previously unavailable deforestation figures, which have significantly reduced the sustainability performance of the country. Despite these adjustments, which make comparison more challenging, Namibia has lost a considerable portion of its forest since the early 2000s (127th) and its water resources have deteriorated. Similarly, the re-assessment of car rental services (72nd) and the diffusion of ATMs have resulted in a lower performance of Namibia's tourism service infrastructure (73rd). Beyond these changes, Namibia still needs to improve its health and hygiene (117th) and under-appreciated cultural resources (127th), and renew focus on its inadequately qualified human resources (106th), which remain the main bottlenecks toward a faster development of the T&T sector in the country'.

The purpose of this theme issue

There are two main unifying themes for this theme. The first one is based on the resilience of destinations with a negative. Destinations with a negative image are most of the time post-colonial, post-conflict or post disaster destinations (or all three combined). These destinations are not equalled footed to compete against established destinations and yet, they are fighting their way through in order to get 'a slice of the cake'. This resilience can be evidenced by the efforts to develop (women) entrepreneurship or adopting innovative strategies to overcome some of their weaknesses. Because of the political, economic and social context of these destinations, the outcomes of the strategies are mitigated, most of the time because they are strategies borrowed from different contexts. In this theme, we are pretty much offering tailor made strategies. The other unifying theme is the strong tourism potential that these destinations have. Looking at these destinations resources (natural and man-made), these destinations have nothing to envy established destinations. Their context is the only thing holding them back. The improvement of the context of these destinations, therefore their emergence as fully fledged destinations could generate a new tourism world order.

Investing in People

The article: *The Small2Mighty Tourism Academy: Growing business to grow women as a transformative strategy tool for emerging destinations* stands out from the others as the focus of the strategy is on people. As tourists are interested to experience authenticity (Kowalczyk, 2014), the article explain that this unique experience can only come from the people (the locals) and more specifically locals entrepreneurs involved in the tourism industry. Taking the example of Haiti, Séraphin (2013a/b), explained that entrepreneurship is the best way for the sustainable development of the tourism industry in the destination, so doing it used the examples of guest houses and tour guiding. While this theme is about destinations with a negative image, the theme also brings together a variety of major topics closely related to the tourism industry like entrepreneurship, governance, human-resources, etc

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Figures

Figure 1: E.g. of destination performance (2016)

Iran, Islamic Rep. 93rd/136

Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index 2017 edition

Key Indicators

Sources: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC)

International tourist arrivals	5,237,000	T&T industry GDP % of total	US $10,145.7 million 2.5%
International tourism inbound receipts	US $3,483.0 million	T&T industry employment % of total	476,019 jobs 1.9%
Average receipts per arrival	US $665.1		

Algeria 118th/136

Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index 2017 edition

Key Indicators

Sources: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC)

International tourist arrivals	1,710,000	T&T industry GDP % of total	US $5,887.4 million 3.5%
International tourism inbound receipts	US $307.7 million	T&T industry employment % of total	327,306 jobs 3.0%
Average receipts per arrival	US $179.9		

Chad 135th/136

Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index 2017 edition

Key Indicators

Sources: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC)

International tourist arrivals	120,000	T&T industry GDP % of total	US $156.2 million 1.2%
International tourism inbound receipts	US $25.2 million	T&T industry employment % of total	20,468 jobs 0.9%
Average receipts per arrival	US $210.2		

Yemen 136th/136

Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index 2017 edition

Key Indicators

Sources: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC)

International tourist arrivals	366,700	T&T industry GDP % of total	US $1,560.2 million 4.4%
International tourism inbound receipts	US $100.0 million	T&T industry employment % of total	183,424 jobs 2.9%
Average receipts per arrival	US $272.7		