

Destination Branding by the Brand of Hotel

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Most destinations around the world are alike in the services delivered to the tourists. Hence, it is becoming difficult for tourists to differentiate one destination from the other due to the similarity of resources, activities, and other services. Tourism destination, just like any other product, requires a distinguishing factor and that is where branding comes into play. Hence the aim of the study is to critically examine the impact of hotel brands on the branding of a destination.

Keywords: destination, branding

Introduction

Due to the growth and development of tourism around the world, destinations are developing but they all seem to be offering similar features to the consumers in terms of quality accommodations, beautiful scenic views, and/or friendly people (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011); hence creating a differentiated destination image has become a basis for survival within a globally competitive marketplace where various destinations compete intensely (Hanzaee and Saeedi, 2011). It is not just all about branding, but what makes up the brand and gives it the unique feature is very important.

Effective marketing and management of tourism industry may be difficult as a result of the increasing competitive nature of the tourism market (Fyall & Garrod, 2005). Therefore, the Destination Management/Marketing Originations (DMOs) are to play a major role in bringing all the stakeholders together to have a common goal for the destination and its branding by integrating marketing process (Elbe, Hallen, & Axelsson, 2009). This was exemplified by Dioko and So (2012) who identified the place of internationally branded hotels in creating an image for the destination. This therefore is the basis of this research.

Dioko and So (2012) conducted a study on how the brand of hotel in the destination determines the choice of a gaming destination. The result of their study showed that the brand of hotel does not determine the choice of destination. Although they have concluded on the topic, but they stated the limitations to the study, one of which is the basis of this study as they have recommended a further study on the topic. Their study was limited to a destination—Macao and also a stereotyped destination (Gaming); therefore, they said, a conclusive statement cannot be made on the topic and to make a generalized statement, visitors to other destinations have to be surveyed. The aim of this study therefore is to critically examine the impact of hotel brands on the choice of destination.

Destination

Destination according to Pike (2008) is a geographical space accommodating the existence of a cluster of tourism resources and being less of a political boundary. These tourism resources can be seen as

accommodation, attractions, transportation, entertainment, and other supporting services. Leiper (1995) defined a tourist destination as a place where people choose to visit for the purpose of having an experience of certain features of the destination. Destination according to Periera, Correia, and Schutz (2012) is the combination of tourism products and services consumed in the destination and constitutes the tourists' integrated experience.

Destinations are representation of the tourism industry as it is a place where tourism activities take place and where the service providers of the industry are located to meet the needs of the tourists. Destination by definition is the amalgamation of attraction, amenities, and activities; it also refers to as a point of access to all facilities and services that meet the needs of tourists (Cooper, Fletcher, Gilbert, Shepherd, & Wanhill, 1998).

Destination branding. Destination marketing also known as place marketing, which according to Ashworth (1993) is special. It requires more complex managerial activities than product brand in its branding (Karavatziz & Ashworth, 2005). Of all the products of tourism, destination is one of the most difficult to manage and market (Fyall & Leask, 2006) and the most important (Cooper, 2012).

To Elbe et al. (2009), destination marketing is the deliberate strategically developed activities carried out in order to attract visitors to a destination. According to Helfert, Ritter, and Walter (2002), the nature of a destination is complex, hence a relational approach of marketing be adopted as a result of the product's complexity and the relationships existing among the components of the product—the destination variety of stakeholders as well. Even with the complexity of marketing destinations, Fyall and Garrod (2005) suggest that for a destination marketing to be successful it is important that the customers are engaged in the marketing activities, provide information, and possess experience they demand.

Destination branding is the set of marketing activities that support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark, or other graphic that readily identifies and differentiates a destination (Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005). According to Hanzae and Saeedi (2011), the branding literature commenced during the 1940s (Guest, 1942), the first journal articles related to tourism destination branding, did not emerge until 1998 (Dosen, Vranesovic, & Prebezac, 1998; Pritchard & Morgan, 1998). They continued by saying that in tourism context, a destination brand “represents a unique combination of product characteristics and added values, both functional and non-functional, which have taken on a relevant meaning, which is inextricably linked to that brand, awareness of which might be conscious or intuitive” (Morgan & Pritchard, 1998).

Prebensen (2007) suggests that the destination brand consists of a mix of brand elements to identify and distinguish a destination through positive image building. A destination brand can also be a fully integrated system of experiences focused on the customer (Ephron, 1996). These definitions suggest that from the destination marketer's point of view, a destination brand should represent a combination of tangible and emotional experiences communicated to the consumer through brand elements that should facilitate brand choice. From a consumer's point of view, the destination brand is a cluster of perceptions attached to various destination experiences sold under a specific brand name (Graves & Skinner, 2009).

Destination branding is a marketing tool and a tool for destination image creation. In creating an image for a destination through branding, it is important to have a differentiating element in the destination. Most destinations around the world are alike in the services delivered to the tourists. Hence, it is becoming difficult for tourists to differentiate one destination from the other due to the similarity of resources, activities, and other services. Tourism destination, just like any other product, requires a distinguishing factor and that is where

branding comes into play. According to Qu et al. (2011), consumers of tourism products are being offered diverse destinations with similar features but the destinations need unique features to be able to compete and to make it easier for consumers to make their choice of destinations to visit. It is not just all about branding, but what make up the brand and gives it the unique feature is very important.

The term “destination branding” is recognised as that most commonly used in tourism literature to describe the method of creating a unique identity for a destination that enables potential visitors to differentiate one destination from another (Tasci & Kozak, 2006). Although the concept of branding has been applied extensively to products and services, the notion of branding has only recently started to expand into tourist destinations and became apparent as a topic of examination in the late 1990’s (Pike, 2004; Wagner & Peters, 2009; O’Neill John & Carlbäckb, 2011).

Hotel branding. The expansion and importance of brands and branding is evident in all segments of hospitality, from small take-out food and beverage outlets to large multinational hospitality organizations (Bailey & Ball, 2006). According to Bailey and Ball (2006), branding is prevalent within the hotel industry. This has enhanced the prominence of hotel brand names such as Hilton, Sheraton, and Holiday Inn in many countries of the world (Jiang, Dev, & Rao, 2002). An appropriate brand and correct positioning are key drivers of success in the hotel industry (Ambler, Bhattacharya, Edell, & Keller, 2002; Brady, Bourdeau, & Heskell, 2005; Leone, Rao, Keller, & Luo, 2006; Kayaman & Arasli, 2007; Pike, 2005).

Destination and Hotel Branding

Although accommodation providers are not the only service providers that make up the destination brand, it is seen from the perspective of the researcher as the major service provider without which destinations cannot be complete. Accommodation is a very important component of a destination along with other components of the destination. Hence the thought of hotel branding influences the image of the destination brand. According to Pike (2005), Morgan, Pritchard, and Piggott (2003), and Pritchard and Morgan (2001), branding of destination is a complex thing due to the fact that there are still many destinations that are yet to be studied in the relative application of branding to the marketing principles of the destinations (Dioko & So, 2012). This is due to the makeup of the destination as it is not just a place for tourism, but a place developed to include tourism activities for the improvement of the economy of the destination.

As visitors seek out differences in culture, heritage and landscape from their everyday life when they choose a destination, destinations should develop images based on their unique features to differentiate themselves from their competitors (Lee, 2011). To successfully differentiate it from other destinations with similar attractions, hotels must incorporate the unique characteristics of the local culture (Riewoldt, 2006). Hotel design that capitalizes on the unique aspects of a destination will maintain appeal for these “new” tourists (Baker, 2002).

Managing Destination Brands

Managing destination brands can be likened to managing corporate brands (Hankinson, 2007; Trueman et al., 2004). This is due to the fact that the destination comprises of various service providers which are referred to as the stakeholders with individual objectives. The interactions between these stakeholders with conflicting objectives needs to be managed effectively (Knox & Brickerton, 2003). The responsibility of managing a destination is paced on the Destination Management/Marketing Originations (DMO); hence, they are also saddled with the responsibility of branding the destination. According to Hankinson (2009), in identifying and

categorizing the managerial practice which might be regarded as critical antecedents in branding a destination, five categories are to be considered and these are: brand culture, brand leadership, departmental coordination, brand communications, and Stakeholder partnerships.

As a result of the increasing competition among destinations and the need of each destination to be unique in its own offering to the tourists (Qu et al., 2011), according to Hakinson (2004) cited in García et al. (2012), it became paramount that the destination should be branded and this is dependent on a solid relationship among stakeholders.

Materials and Methods

The following illustrates how the research was carried out and the result of the findings.

Research Design

A survey research method was used to collect empirical data through the use of questionnaire (online). An online questionnaire was designed to access a variety of people through social media such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. This methodology was adopted to be able to answer the research questions set such as: Based on the concept of brand loyalty, are the people loyal to the brand of destination or the brand of hotel? How important is the hotel business to the promotion and development of the destination brand?

An online questionnaire was designed to include both closed-ended and open-ended questions to obtain the necessary data for the research. The online questionnaire linked was emailed to the researcher's contact, posted on the researcher's social media pages—LinkedIn, Facebook, and twitter. A total of 95 people responded to the online questionnaire.

Research Sample

Sampling is very important in research because the whole population cannot be reached for the purpose of the research/study (Baker, 2002). Due to the fact that the questionnaire was uploaded online, there is not a specified sample frame for the research, and the sample frame for an online questionnaire survey is based on convenience (Veal, 2011). The questionnaire was responded to by people from different countries of the world.

Research Duration

The researcher made use of a cross-sectional study to carry out the research. Cross-sectional study according to Saunders et al. (2007) is the study of a phenomenon at a particular time which according to Robson (2002) often employs a survey strategy. In line with this explanation, having reviewed literature on the subject matter, the researcher designed an online questionnaire which was uploaded for a period of three weeks to allow for adequate response. This time frame was due to the limited time available after reviewing literature to the submission of the dissertation.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is very important in any research because without it, the data collected might not be of good use. The data collected using questionnaire were analyzed using both descriptive and explanatory method of analysis. The closed-ended questions of the questionnaire were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) while content analysis was used in the analysis of the open-ended questions. This package was used for the descriptive and inferential analysis of the data collected using questionnaire. Bar charts and table were used in the presentation of the data collected.

Result of Findings

The study's assumption is that the availability of internationally branded hotel in a destination enhances the brand image of the destination. From the analysis of data, it was made obvious that the influence of branded hotels on the destination is at a minimal level and not a sole determinant of patronizing a destination as shown in Figures 1 and 2 below. Though, there are some of the respondents that claim that they are loyalists of some hotels but they are not making that a measure of the destination to visit.

Figure 1 below shows that although people have interest in branded hotels, if they are not able to get a room in such a hotel or such a hotel is not available in the destination of choice, it will not hinder their choice of destination. This is shown by the 83% of respondents who indicated they will look for another accommodation in the destination of interest.

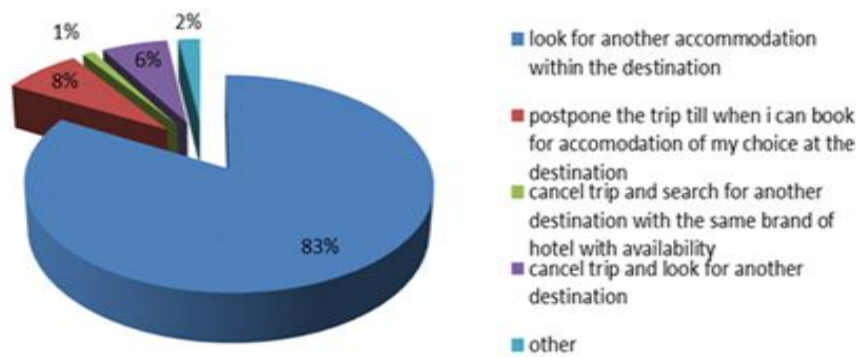


Figure 1. Loyalty to destination brand or hotel brand.

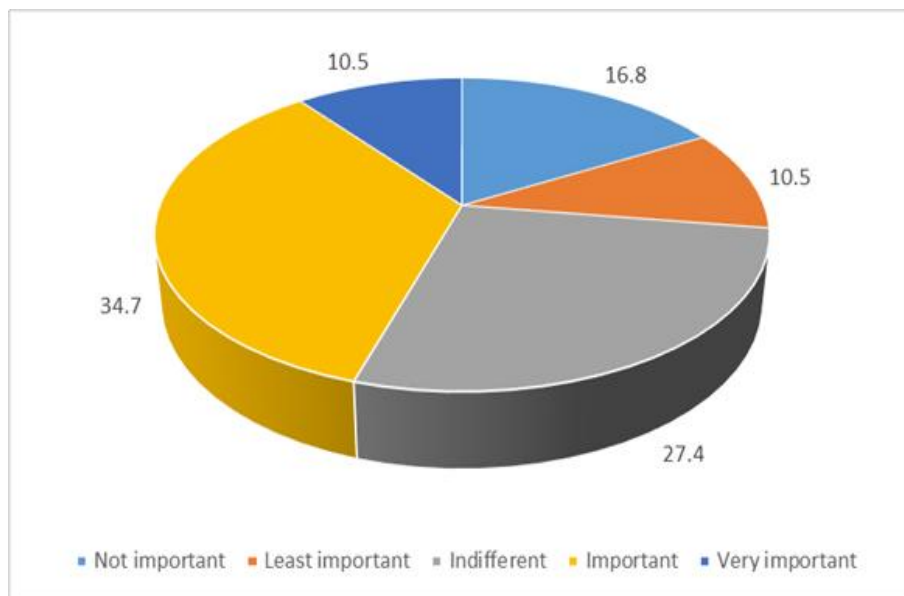


Figure 2. Brand identity selling point—availability of popular hotel brands.

Based on the result presented above, it can be said that branding a destination is not solely dependent on one of the stakeholders of the destination; all of the stakeholders are to be jointly involved in the branding of a destination. This is because each of the stakeholder plays an important role in the branding and promotion of a destination; hence, it is important that all of the stakeholders are aware of the brand culture of the destination

and deliver services based on what the destination is claiming to provide to the customers/tourist, and are not expected to fall short of this.

Therefore, it is expedient that the DMOs build strong relationships not only with the customers but also with the suppliers, the community, stakeholders, and even competitors to deliver a long term economic, social, and environmental value which is the heart of contemporary marketing (Murphy et al., 2005).

Conclusion

The findings indicate that, although the brands of the hotel at the destination creates an image for the destination, the level of influence is minimal compared to the influence of specifically the available attraction and other components such as accessibility, infrastructures, and the local people-culture and food. From the literature review and the discussion of findings, it is made obvious that accommodation is an essential which cannot be in existence without the attractions at the destination. Therefore, the brand might be a good influence, but the attractions is very important and the main determining/influencing factor of the choice of destination.

Hence, in branding the destination for uniqueness, the balance mixture of both attractions and the essential support services is important. The availability of hotel brand alone cannot make a successful branding of a destination due to the availability of competition among the stake holders because the market is not monopolistic.

In conclusion, it is believed that this research is of great importance to the branding of the destination. Often times, DMOs could get the idea of branding destination slightly wrong; therefore, it is important to carry out studies in this context, which would allow for making right decisions on how to be unique amidst other available destinations. Hence the recommendation is that there is the need for pleasant relationship between the DMOs and the service providers to help promote a destination and also create a good image for the destination. It is not just about carrying out the research, but it is to identify what is really important in branding the destination not forgetting the complexity of marketing the destination as a brand.

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Table 1

Accommodation as an Element of Destination Branding

Brand identity selling point-availability of popular hotel brands					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Not important	16	16.8	16.8	16.8
	Least important	10	10.5	10.5	27.4
	Indifferent	26	27.4	27.4	54.7
	Important	33	34.7	34.7	89.5
	Very important	10	10.5	10.5	100.0
	Total	95	100.0	100.0	
Response		Percentage			
Not important		16.8			
Least important		10.5			
Indifferent		27.4			
Important		34.7			
Very important		10.5			
Total		100.0			