The key factors contributing to an effective destination marketing essay

According to Blain 2001, before defining the concept of destination branding, it was essential to define branding in its general term. Henceforth to provide a better insight of the traditional definition of a brand a definition by Aaker (1990) in Managing Brand Equity was firstly identified. He defines brand as " a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors". According to the traditional perspective, a brand was solely associated with the product/service which would help the product/service to be distinguished amongst others. Moreover, Kotler (2000) also shared the same viewpoint as he defined brand as " the name associated with one or more items in the product line, which is used to identify the source of character of the item(s)" (Kotler 2000, p. 396).

In addition, as the word keeps evolving and becomes more challenging, Blain (2001) in his definition of branding explained the difference between ' brand' and ' logo'. He argued that the logo design is the symbol or visual representation of the brand, which includes image, identity and perceptions of the perceived product. Creating a logo is one key aspect of branding but the branding of a product/service involves more than just a logo as the brand name also is an important factor. Hence, both the ' brand' and the ' logo' are interdependent. Within this view, Keller (2003a) states that, "…whenever a marketer creates a new name, logo, or symbol for a new product, he or she has created a brand" (p. 3).

However, Kapferer (1997) mentioned that " the brand is a sign- therefore external- whose function is to disclose the hidden qualities of the product which are inaccessible to contact" (p 28). Here, the perception of branding is

totally different compared to previous research. Kapferer put much emphasis on the identity that a brand name projects and which will further help the product/service to distinguish itself from competition. Taking the example of the global fast food industry namely McDonalds, Ghosh et al (2010) stated that there are certain value propositions that the company offers to its customers to satisfy their needs. McDonalds offers hygienic environment, good ambience and great service. It can hence be considered that the ' hidden qualities' as mentioned earlier by Kapferer here is the perception which people have with regards to the ambience at Mc Donald. Henceforth, Kohli and Thakor (1997) suggest that, " The challenge today is to create a strong and distinctive image" (p. 208).

Initially, a brand was simply a name, it gradually became a representation of a product and now a brand not only represent a product or service alone but marketers can also brand a city, a state, a nation or even a country. Branding is also about creating awareness of a destination. According to Upshaw (1995), it is useful to review a summary of the terminologies of branding as it helps to understanding the various terms of branding used in the branding of destinations.

Brand Equity

The total accumulated value or worth of a brand; the tangible and intangible assets that the brand contributes to its corporate parent, both financially and in terms of selling leverage.

Brand identity

Part of the brand's overall equity; the total perception of a brand in the marketplace, driven mostly by its positioning and personality.

Brand positioning

What a brand stands for in the minds of customers and prospects, relative to its competition, in terms of benefits and promises.

Brand personality

The outward face of a brand; its tonal characteristics most closely associated with human traits.

Brand essence

The core or distillation of the brand identity.

Brand character

Having to do with the internal constitution of the brand; how it is seen in terms of integrity, honesty and trustworthiness.

Brand soul

Related to the brand character, defined as the values and emotional core of the brand.

Brand culture

The system of values that surrounds a brand, much like the cultural aspects of a people or a country.

Brand image

Generally synonymous with either the brand's strategic personality or its reputation as a whole.

Table 1: The basic terminologies of branding (Upshaw 1995)

With these terminologies as a foundation, a definition of destination branding can be developed which will help to have a better overview of the tourism destination branding.

DESTINATION BRANDING

Despite being uncertain about referring the branding concept to the tourism destination context (O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy 2000), that concept has only recently captured the interest of tourism destination researchers and practitioners (Curtis 2001; Anholt 2002; Cai 2002; Morgan & Pritchard 2002; Olins 2002). The notion of branding in the tourism industry has only recently to come in the limelight and apparently became a debatable and examinable topic in the late 1990s according to Pike (2002) and Tasci & Kozak (2006). Ricardo (2009) also supported the fact that although branding has been an old aged concept, the study of destination branding is a relatively new addition in the tourism research field. With reference to the definition of branding that Aaker (1991) derived from his research, he explained destination branding as a ' distinguishing name and/ or symbol (such as a logo, or trademark) intended to identify the destination and to differentiate it from competitive destinations.' (p. 7). Here also, the researcher put much emphasis on the name and symbol that would contribute to the personalization of the destination from competitors.

However, some researchers do not limit their definition of branding to a simple name and symbol. According to Ritchie and Crouch (2003), the destination branding concept is also about feelings and emotional attachment that the visitor would experience when visiting the destination. Within this perspective, they proposed the following definition: ' A destination brand is a name, symbol, logo trademark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination; furthermore, it conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination. It also serves to consolidate and reinforce the post- travel recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience.'

Henceforth, a destination brand is far more complex than a product brand. The destination brand must have two attributes to be efficient compared to the brand of a product/service. Firstly, it is necessary to differentiate itself from other destinations as put forward by Aaker (1991), and secondly people visiting the destination should also experience the promise associated with the brand message. The marketer must make sure to deliver the experience promised. Taking the example of Columbia, the brand associated is " The only risk is wanting to stay". According to Buncle (2009), when a sightseer visits Columbia, he should want to prolonged his visit, only then the marketer could have the satisfaction of a successful destination brand. Additionally, Cai (2002) defined destination branding from a much similar perspective. He described destination brand as " perceptions about a place as reflected by the associations held in tourist memory" (Cai 2002, p. 273). His definition reflects that of Ritchie and Crouch (2003) as both consider destination brands as an essence, a perception that tourists have when

visiting a destination. However, Kerr (2006) considered the concept of competitiveness, the " promise of a memorable travel experience" and the " recollection of pleasurable memories" to derive his own definition. To summarize the concept of destination branding, De Chernatony & McDonald (1992) commented that ' the concept of branding is increasingly being applied to people and places.'

Furthermore, Kotler et al (1999) argue that the ' concept of a brand name extends to tourist destinations. Acapulco, Palm Springs and the French Riviera have developed strong reputations, consumer perceptions and expectations.' In similar ways, Virginia builds on " Birthplace of Presidents", Mississippi on " The Heart of Dixie", Niagara Falls is " Romance", Greece is " The Birthplace of Democracy" and Florence " The centre of the Renaissance". According to Kotler et al (1993), the concept of destination branding is linked to the specific attraction that the destination has to offer and is a platform for building a place's image.

Finally, the most comprehensive definition of destination branding to date was proposed by Blain et al (2005, p. 337), which includes both supply and demand perspectives: Destination branding is the set of marketing activities that

(1) support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that readily identifies and differentiates a destination; that

(2) consistently convey the expectation of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; that

(3) serve to consolidate and reinforce the emotional connection between the visitor and the destination; and that

(4) reduce consumer search costs and perceived risk.

Collectively, these activities can help a destination have a positive influence on the visitor while the latter makes his choice of destination. The definition proposed by Blain et al (2005) covers all the needs and wants a traveler would want to have for his trip. To summarize, defining destination branding is a complex process as it is not only the marketing of a destination but also the sense of promise that the marketer would associate with the brand to all the potential visitors. It also encompasses the satisfaction the visitors would derive when experiencing the destination.

COUNTRY BRAND VERSUS DESTINATION BRAND

Not much research has been done till now to differentiate between a country brand and a destination brand. However according to Szondi (2007), the aim of ' destination branding' is to attract visitors and boost tourism, while ' country branding' promotes economic, commercial and political interests at home and abroad. Szondi (2007) further suggest that a country brand can consist of different brands, such as a destination brand, an export brand, an investment brand, a political brand, which can be all different rather than having a central, all-encompassing country brand. Some of these sub-brands can be stronger and more successful than others. He further argues that country brands have both intangible and tangible elements, such as the products or services of the particular country. The more specific aims of country branding are to create or advance the ' country-of-origin' effect, to

promote exports or attract investors or a skilled workforce. Country brands can serve as a sort of umbrella under which further sub-brands can be developed.

Taking the case of Mauritius as example, it can be noted that its country brand is " Mauritius- it's a pleasure" whilst its tourism brand is " Les Iles Vanilles", on technological grounds, Mauritius has branded itself as " Cyber-Mauritius" and ecologically, the island has been termed as " Maurice- Ile durable". Sub- brands are very important for a destination as it helps both investors and travelers to have an overview on the political, economical, social, technological, ecological and legal aspect of the destination.

Another concrete example which shows an evidence of the difference is the case of India. The country brand of India is " Incredible India", but several destinations of the country itself are branded separately. Table 2 clearly shows the difference between the country brand and the destination brand.

Country brand

Destination brands

Table 2: Difference between a country brand and a destination brand

REASONS DESTINATIONS DEVELOP BRANDS

Research has proved that branding improve destination image among visitors and help Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), who are the stakeholders of the tourism industry of a destination, in measuring the success of that branding concept. Branding successes include the Courtyard by Marriott (Alford 1998), Forte Hotels (Connell 1994), and Florida (American

Marketing Association 1997). In addition, the 1998 Annual Travel and Tourism Research Association conference has reported a number of destination branding success stories. These included New York, Tasmania, Australia, Canada, New Orleans, Lousiana, Texas, and Oregon. The branding success in the hospitality firms (Beirne 1999; Higley 1999; Hodge 1998; Salomon 1998) has also been recognized. Also, from a nation branding perspective, Hamilton (2000) viewed Scotland as uniquely strong in integrity, inventiveness, tenacity, and spirit. Henceforth, it can be concluded that all the studies stress the importance of reinforcing a unique image and personality as well as differentiating the destination from competitors to be successful and to be a recognized destination and nation around the world.

Additionally, according to Rainisto (2004), a successful brand is a ' key national asset' that is why every nation brands itself. In other words, branding is considered as a marketing tool to promote a destination and in the process of developing a successful brand the place itself is developed. Brown et al (2002) took the example of Australia and the Sydney 2000 Olympics to describe such a development. Branding Australia as a whole has changed the perspectives of many. With the Sydney Olympic game, other countries and even the local population viewed Australia differently as the targeted group was satisfied with the Sydney Olympic and Australia brand image was boosted. To summarize, destinations develop brands to be economically stable and develop as well as exploit existing resources for the benefit of the destination itself.

Moreover, destinations develop brands so that they can sell themselves by citing only category benefits. For example, several tropical destinations

mostly islands like Jamaica, The Bahamas, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, Bermuda, Mexico and the Cayman Islands praise their clear blue water and white or pink or black sandy beaches to attract maximum number of tourists1. They sell fun, excitement or relaxation or the various activities that their destination offers with an added value of local culture which will outsmart the destination when compared to others as each destination has its own culture. Thus, it can be concluded that destinations develop brands to achieve fame and success by selling themselves to potential visitors.

1: http://www. stealingshare. com/pages/%20Destination%20Brand %20Development%20and%20Tourism%20Brand. htm

DESTINATION IMAGE:

The aim of destination branding is to put emphasis on the importance of a tourism brand and present the targeted market a favorable image of the mentioned brand according to Jalilvand et al (2010). It can therefore be understood that the image of a destination holds much importance and is considered as one of the key success factor brand. Moreover, Lin et al (2007) also agrees with the fact that destination image plays an important role in shaping tourists' preferences and decisions to visit a particular destination. Henceforth, according to Morgan and Pritchard (1998), " There is undoubtedly current interest in image. Image is exhorted as the defining experience of the decade, as the new reality." It is commonly recognized that destination image is, " the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination" (Crompton 1979, p. 18), it is also an important aspect in successful destination marketing (Tasci & Gartner 2007). Some researchers relate destination image as one of the key component for the

overall success of a destination in the field of tourism (Chen and Kerstetter 1999; Dadgostar and Isotalo 1992; Hunt 1975). Additionally, according to Echtner and Ritchie (1991), destination image is defined as " not only the perceptions of individual destination attributes but also the holistic impression made by the destination" (p. 8). Therefore destination image has proved to be a major factor in determining visitor choice (Lee, O'Leary, and Hong 2002).

The 3- Gap tourism destination image formation model:

Moreover, as destination image has a great impact on the tourist behavior, researchers has been trying to identify the determinants that define, modify, and strengthen this concept (Tasci & Gartner 2007). Therefore, past studies have considered destination image as a dependent variable suggesting that several factors play a role in the destination image formation (Alhemoud and Armstrong 1996; Bramwell and Rawding 1996; Gartner and Shen 1992; Gunn 1972; MacKay and Fesenmaier 1997; MacKay and Fesenmaier 2000; Smith and MacKay 2001; Sonmez, Apostolopoulos, and Tarlow 1999). Figure 1 below illustrates the destination image formation model and subsequently identifies those elements that have a direct influence on how the perceived destination image is formulated in the mind of the visitor. According to the diagram, there are three main types of destination image namely the cognitive, affective and the conative image that bridges the gap for a successful and effective destination image formation which will eventually lead to a successful destination brand.

FIGURE 1

THE 3-GAP TOURISM DESTINATION IMAGE FORMATION MODEL

Figure 1: Adapted from Govers et al- 2007

Assurance of Quality

According to Blain et al (2005) a recognized brand is an assurance for consumers who would generally derive satisfaction from that brand and trust that their expectations will be met. Viewed within a hospitality context, visitors will likely expect high-quality facilities and customer service at a renowned internationally recognized chain (brand) of hotels like the Oberoi Hotel Group as they are already acquainted with the service being provided by that particular firm. At the same time, visitors can also expect to pay a premium for this assurance of quality and reduction of perceived risk (Blain et al 2005). L. Berry (2000) states that " a brand reduces customers' perceived monetary, social, or safety risk in buying services, which are difficult to evaluate prior to purchase" (p. 128). Henceforth, the image that a destination projects in the tourism market and its product offering as illustrated in the diagram above is primordial.

DESTINATION AND BRAND PERSONALITY

Furthermore, one of the other key factors for an effective destination brand is the personality of the destination. As places seek to become distinctive and unique in their own ways, destination personality is viewed as a possible means for understanding tourists' perceptions of places and for designing a unique destination identity (Caprara et al 2001; Crask and Henry 1990; Morgan et al 2002, Triplett 1994). As we have seen in Table 1 above, Upshaw

(1995) defined brand personality as human traits associated with the destination. Taking Dubai as an example, it is portrayed as a friendly, safe and virtually crime- free country and where hospitality has been a tradition for centuries2.

2: http://www. dubaitourism.
ae/DubaiataGlance/WelcometoDubai/tabid/309/language/en US/Default. aspx

BRAND PERSONALITY:

In the tourism literature, the study of destination image has been of utmost importance during the past three decades, but destination personality has remained largely unexplored. However, since Aaker (1997) developed the Brand Personality Scale (BPS), which consists of five generic dimensions namely excitement, sincerity, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness, further studies on destination personality has been conducted and the brand personality dimensions have been applied to various destinations across different cultures to have a better overview on consumers' opinion on that particular area and how it is being consumed by visitors (Aaker et al 2001; Supphellen and Grønhaug 2003). The brand personality of a destination must have the ability to provide a sense of uniqueness in the minds of the consumers which will in turn help to build and enhance brand equity (Keller 1993; Johnson et al 2000; Phau and Lau 2000). If a brand has a strong personality, consumers would be influenced (Sirgy 1982; Malhotra 1988) and would tend to develop stronger emotional ties (Biel 1993), trust, and loyalty with the brand (Fournier 1998).

DESTINATION PERSONALITY:

Similarly to brand personality, a unique and emotionally attractive destination personality can influence the perceived image of a place and influence the choice of the tourist. For example, According to Crockett and Wood (2002), the rebranding of Western Australia has reflected another personality of the country. The destination was promoted as a premier nature-based tourism destination which in turn resulted in an increase in tourism. Although there has been little experimental investigations, destination personality has been adopted by many tourism academics at the conceptual level (Crockett and Wood 2002; Henderson 2000; Morgan et al 2002).

For example, through an analysis done in a travel and tourism advertisement in the US travel media, Santos (2004) revealed that Portugal was represented with personality attributes such as contemporary, modern, sophisticated, and traditional. Morgan and Prichard (2002) observed that England was portrayed as being conservative, pleasant, refined, civilized, eccentric, and down to earth in the UK tourism media. Furthermore, Henderson (2000) revealed that the New Asia-Singapore brand composed of six personality characteristics namely cosmopolitan, youthful, vibrant, modern, reliability, and comfort. Moreover, destinations can be described using human personality traits, such as Europe is traditional and sophisticated; Wales is honest, welcoming, romantic, and down to earth; Spain is friendly and family oriented; London is open-minded, unorthodox, vibrant, and creative; and Paris is romantic (Morgan and Pritchard 2002).

When choosing among competing products, consumers assess the degree of similarity between the personality traits communicated by the product (Plummer 1985) and by so doing; they reflect their own personality (Zinkhan et al 1996). Hence, a sportsman buying an energy drink like Red Bull will give the latter the impression that when consuming the drink, it would help him to be as strong as a bull. Therefore, there is both a physical and emotional consumption of the product. This notion is supported by Brown's study (1992), which advocates that through tourism experience, there are symbolic as well as physical consumption of places. In contrast, whether the tourists have had a direct or indirect contact with the destination, perceptions of destination personality traits can be outlined (Plummer 1985). Destination send a variety of messages, most especially through advertising and tourists would receive and interpret those messages and form a personal opinion on the " behavior" of the destination. Personality traits can be associated with a destination in a direct way through citizens of the country, hotel employees, restaurants, and tourist attractions, or simply through the tourist's imagery, defined as the set of human characteristics associated with the typical visitor of a destination (Aaker 1997). In an indirect manner, personality traits can be attributed to destinations through marketing programs such as cooperative advertising, value pricing, celebrities of the country, and media construction of destinations (Cai 2002).

Accordingly, Ekinci and Hosany (2006) argued that, similar to consumer goods/brands, tourism destinations are rich in terms of symbolic values and personality traits, given that they consist of a bundle of tangible and intangible components (e. g., visitor attractions, hotels, and people)

associated with particular values, histories, events, and feelings. Henceforth, it can be perceived as one of the key factors which contribute to an effective tourism destination brand.

DESTINATION POSITIONING

Another key aspect of an effective and successful destination brand is the positioning of the destination. In their classic book, Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind, Ries and Trout (1981) argued that the concept of positioning is not only applicable to a brand but also to a company, service, person, or even a place.

A great number of researches have been conducted in the area of destination image and positioning (Gartner, 1989; Woodside et al., 1989; Woodside, 1990; Etchner and Ritchie, 1993; Chacko, 1997; Walmsley and Young, 1998; Botha et al., 1999). Most of the previous studies have followed the traditional approach to positioning that is based on image creation using a number of attributes that reflect the destinations' most attractive products. Moreover, Etchner and Ritchie (1993) also believe that the image of a destination should be seen as having components that are attribute-based and holistic. They argued that an analysis of these attributes, integrated with personal variables such as the type of tourism needs sought, can help in identifying the relative strengths and weaknesses of the destination and can also contribute to identifying potential niche markets that could be used in developing the destination's positioning strategy. Buhalis (2000) also suggests, based on Butler's (1980) destination life-cycle model as shown in Figure 2, that destinations at the later stage of their evolutionary development, that is the rejuvenation phase, should focus on alternative

marketing strategies that support the image alteration, redesign or re-positioning of the tourism product.

Figure 2: Adapted from Butler (1980)

According to the figure above, the following represents:

A: Exploration phase

B: Involvement phase

C: Development phase

D: Consolidation phase

E: Stagnation phase

F: Decline/ Rejuvenation phase

According to Butler (1980), each stage contributed to the expansion of tourism in the destination. However, the last phase namely decline/ rejuvenation phase recommend a repositioning and rebranding of the destination to boost the tourism level of the destination. Moreover, Trout and Rivkin (1996) believe that repositioning strategy becomes necessary when

(1) Customer attitudes have changed;

(2) Technology has overtaken existing products; and/or

(3) Products have strayed from the customers' long-standing perception of them.

Furthermore, Crompton et al (1992) also suggested that, for effective positioning of a destination, the strong attributes that are perceived as important by visitors should be first identified. Also to be identified are other relevant attributes that are unique to the destination and capable of differentiating it effectively from its competitors in its ability to satisfy the customers' needs. Consistent with this line of thought, Chacko (1997) in a study of the US tourism market combined the ten highest-ranked activities among Japanese tourists with their specific image attributes of the destination in order to get an indication of how to position the USA as a destination for Japanese visitors. Henceforth, the positioning of a destination is the process of establishing a distinctive place of that destination in the minds of potential visitors (Gartner, 1989).

From the above, it can be concluded that to ensure success for the positioning strategy of a destination, it is imperative that the image of the destination and the specific product attributes that satisfy the customer should be identified. Authors such as Gunter and Furnham (1992), Sleight (1993) and Weinstein (1994) believe that markets are no longer as mass-oriented or colossal as they once were due to a change in visitor's tastes and needs. Most tourists are in need for unique and unspoiled destinations. Therefore, as explained by Etchner & Richie (1993), the measurement of the customer's image of the tourism product and the satisfaction of the product attributes, combined with the identification of the tourist needs and desires in a tourist destination (Cho, 1998), can be perceived as factors leading to an effective destination positioning.

BRAND EQUITY

Apart from destination image, destination personality, destination positioning, another factor which can be considered as important for an effective brand is brand equity. Recently, much emphasis has been put in the tourism literature to the concept of brand equity (Ind 1997; Kapferer 1998; de Chernatony 1999; Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000). The Marketing Science Institute (1989) described brand equity in the perspective of customers as "...the value that is added by the name and rewarded in the market with better profit margins or market shares. It can be viewed by customers and channel members as both a financial asset and as a set of favorable associations and behaviors." Keller (2002) also defines brand equity from a customer's perspective. He explained that an identifiable brand would urge customers to respond favorably to the product.

On the other hand, from a managerial perspective, Aaker (1991) defined " brand equity as a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or that firm's customers." He stated that the assets and liabilities linked to a brand's name or symbol can be grouped into five dimensions namely brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other proprietary brand assets. He suggested that brand equity can be generated by strengthening those dimensions.

Besides, Faircloth (2001) stated that recent definitions of brand equity have evolved and include the added value of name and expand to a broad set of attributes that drives customer choice. He also argued that " brand equity actually represents a product's position in the minds of consumers in the

marketplace." Nevertheless, researches on the brand equity concept and its dimensions have been mostly investigated within products and services context; the brand equity concept within a tourism destination context is currently in its infancy (Konecnick & Gartner, 2007; Pike, 2007).

CONCLUSION:

Branding has evolved from product brand to destination brand. However, destination branding is far more complex than branding itself. There are four key factors in the literature review that have been developed. These are destination image, destination personality, destination positioning and finally brand equity. Yet, destination image is still considered as one of the most important aspect for an effective brand. Moreover, the 3-gap tourism destination image formation model is an integral tool for marketers have a better insight of the loopholes that should be tackled when promoting a place. Henceforth, whenever any DMO want to create an effective brand, the four key brands must be given due priority.