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**BRANDING A DESTINATION IDENTITY
– A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Abstract

Globalization has been playing a big role by mainly diminishing traveling barriers between countries. This trend had brought also an increase in competition between countries to identify and to distinguish themselves and to define how they want to be perceived by the tourists. In this case, developing a clear destination brand identity is crucial for success. Brand identity and brand image are two concepts that are related to each other but their meanings are different. There are several studies from the demand side concerning with destination brand image. Conversely, there is a lack of studies conducted in destination brand identity by considering the supplier side. Thus, the main purpose of this study is to investigate the brand identity creation from the supplier side and develop a conceptual model based on theoretical and empirical analysis.

Keywords: Destination branding, destination identity, Albania, strategic brand analysis, supplier side

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Introduction

International tourism, which is major component of international trade, can be used as a strategy for economic development in developing countries (Jafari, 1974, p. 237–245). In highly competitive world economy, an enormous role is played by global tourism environment where developing a clear state identity is the key for being successful in this sector (Crockett and Wood, 2004, p. 185). This global tourism environment also offers likelihood for developing countries to leave the poverty cycle by a global brand formation and maintaining a continuous wealth-creation performance (Morgan, Pritchard and Pride, 2004, p. 29).

In tourism management and marketing, Schubert, Brida and Risso (2010, p. 377) clarify the role of tourism as a positive influence on the long-term growth of small economies through various channels, e.g., foreign exchange earnings, positive impacts in investments, human capital gatherings and stimulators in various industries. Thus, focusing on tourism sector is crucial for developing countries. Tourism industry's competitiveness has a rising trend and calls for marketers to create a center of attention for consumer-travelers (Pike and Ryan, 2004, p. 333). This issue also has reflections in tourism and marketing researches. During the last five years, place branding has been one of the newest research areas (Moilanen and Rainisto, 2009, p. 8), in spite of great popularity of branding studies. The implication is that destinations are now in a challenge of branding. Indeed, destinations can be counted as amalgams consisting mainly of tourism products and they serve combined incentives to travelers (Buhalis, 2000, p. 97), so destination branding involves branding of these products to consumer-travelers. Particularly concentrating on destination researches in branding and tourism literature, there are not many studies deliberating mobilizations and implementations through how local support can be analyzed and provided for a brand (Ooi, 2004, p. 108). This fact proves that exiguous studies implemented in destination identity compared to destination image. Pike (2009, p. 861) indicated three research areas, which are needed in destination branding: "destination brand identity development", "destination brand positioning" and "destination brand equity measurement and tracking". The sequence of these research areas also designates process of establishing a destination brand. Besides, Go and Konecnik (2008, p. 178) states that demand side perspective has been considered by vast numbers of researchers in destination studies and there are still research gaps concerning with identifying a brand for destination. Associating what Pike (2009) and Go and

Konecnik (2008) point out, brand identity development should be investigated more in order to contribute to established theories in the literature. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000, p. 44) constructed a planning model for analysis, development and implementation of brand identity. Prior to development and implementation process, conducting strategic brand analysis (customer, competitor and self-analysis) is advised to present required features for planning. In attempt to highlight constructing tourism destination brand identity via supplier side, Go and Konecnik (2008, p. 179) introduced a theoretical framework for strategic brand analysis by adjusting brand identity planning model (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000, p. 44). Slovenia was the case in that research and fundamental point of the view was formed by considering the supplier side. This framework matches with Pike's (2009, p. 860) notification on concerning research gaps in brand identity construction in relation to supplier side perspective. However, Go and Konecnik (2008, p. 181) emphasize on the need for further improvements in practical and theoretical level. This study appropriately focuses on developing a new strategic brand analysis within application to the tourism destination identity framework by considering again supplier side perspective but in different country range. For the incorporation of brand identity in marketing, Alsem and Kosteljik (2008, p. 913) explain that the identity paradigm will bridge the gap among marketing science and practice; and might provide a balanced marketing paradigm mutually referring to supply and demand side. This statement also proves that identity-based brand analysis by means of how suppliers identify their brands will contribute to both practical and theoretical level.

Brand identity/image concepts

Melin (2006) argues that the brands identity is what gives the brand meaning, what it stands for, and what makes it unique. The brand identity can be changed and repositioned over time if the identity is for example vague or hazy. Brand identity is nothing that can be defined, it varies in every business and it is up to the leaders in the organization to define what the brand identity is for the company. It could for example be described as the characteristics that define how a business through their product or service create added value in the world. tA brand is a symbolic embodiment of all the information connected to the product and serves to create associations and expectations around it (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000, p. 40).

Brand identity collectively means widespread aspects by sending messages across products, slogans and actions (Kapferer, 1998, p. 91). In case of any need for modification of these aspects, Perry and Wisnom (2003, p. 5) emphasize on brand identity that it is composed of “controllable elements” designed for services, products or organization. As the notion of identity in branding is a current issue, many previous researches have been mutually conducted by academicians and practitioners (De Chernatony and Riley, 1998, p. 420). According to Kapferer (1998, p. 17), a brand cannot merely be considered as a product; it reflects product meaning by defining its identity. Hereby, brand identity is crucial for value transformation to receiver. Drawing attention to the importance of brand identity, Perry and Wisnom (2003, p. 5) also claim that “image is nothing without strong identity”.

The perception of a brand from a customer perspective is what is identified as brand image (Hedin et al. 2009). A brand does not have one specific image, but rather multiple images, some more predominating than others that are generally accepted in the eye of the public. The idea of brand image is to find the most powerful images of the brand and develop these in favor of the business through strategic communication (Aaker 1991).

Through strategically working with the brand image the company aim is to ensure positive customer associations with the brand, by using three concepts which are perception, cognition and attitudes (Keller 1993). Hedin et al. (2009) found these three concepts the most important due to the fact that the customers perceive the brand, they cognitively evaluate the brand and form attitudes related to their perceptions and cognitive evaluations.

The feelings and images that are associated with a brand are strong purchase influences, when customers purchase a product they do not strictly buy the commodity but also the image that is connected to the brand (Aaker 1991).

Brand analyses

On the purpose of being effective, a brand should be capable of separating itself from others in the market by reflecting its identity that needs to resound through customers. Indeed, current and forthcoming ability of organization should be considered in those of capability elements (Aaker, 2002, p. 76). In that case, Cravens and Piercy (2009, p. 298) proposed “Strategic Brand Analysis” which

consists of “market and customer”, “competitor” and “brand” analysis. This analysis considers that analyzing the brand is crucial since a brand might have a particular product, several products, a product line or portfolio of product lines. As brand reflects all dimensions, the identity should be analyzed in strategic level. Additionally, Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000, p. 44) established “Strategic Brand Analysis” which is emphasized a lot in branding studies (De Chernatony and Riley, 1998; Ghodeswar, 2008; Go and Konecnik, 2008; Pike, 2009). This analysis facilitates to figure out insights of the customers, competitors and the brand by covering needful aspects for building identity of a commercial brand. Compared to Cravens and Piercy’s framework, it is believed that Aaker and Joachimsthaler’s analysis is more suitable for conducting a research of identity in branding. First, the analysis is assumed as an initial step for brand identity planning and then the concern passes through development and implementation of identity.

All studies related to tourism, in partnership with the public and civil initiatives being carried out demonstrate until today, in determining the quality and quantities of the destination. The only media planning and carrying out all the functions of similar public authority, is now functions jointly conduct with the civil initiative. Ability to obtain this transformation assumed the responsibility of all sectors of today’s managers (political will, tourism bureaucracy and industry organizations) the driving force of local civil initiative, the correct formula without waiting for a structure that must implement. Planning strong local civil initiatives in the process, should aim to be active. Tourism is very versatile and is a dynamic industry and services system, sector interest and support from the state plans and policies related to certainly be. Branding destinations for government, private sector, and studies of public institutions in a coordinated manner is required.

Destination brand

For current consumer-travelers, preference for holiday destination is a major point, which is associated with hardly finding time for vacation and allocating earned money (Morgan, Pritchard and Pride, 2004, p. 4). This holiday destination can be country, city or region. As cultural, political, commercial and social operations now exist in a single global market, all destinations have to compete in order to get concerning shares of those (Anholt, 2009, p. 6). This observation is supported by The World Tourism Organization since the development of tourism

destinations will be the same as fashion products in 21st century (Morgan, Pritchard and Pride, 2004, p. 4). *How interesting the destination is considered to be* is crucial aspect for attractiveness of any place and such a strong brand for destination contribute to marketing efforts in tourism (Moilanen and Rainisto, 2009, p. 11).

Buhalis (2000, p. 97) states that destinations, which have set of suppliers and services, are now recognized as sort of brands by tourists. Public administrations now consider branding destinations as an essential phase (Hankinson, 2009, p. 97) since repositioning the destination in competition entails large investment and great amount of time (Pike, 2009, p. 864). Thereby, destination branding is comprised of supplementary marketing activities. Blain, Levy and Ritchie (2005, p. 337) define destination branding as a group of these activities by dividing into four components:

- “Supporting formation of a name, logo, symbol or word mark for suitable identification of destination and its differentiation,
- Expressing the expectation based on tourist experience with exclusive associations of the destination,
- Consolidating and reinforcing the relationship among the destination and travelers within suitable servings,
- Concentrating on decreasing perceived risk and search costs of travelers.”

Pike (2009, p. 857) accordingly clarifies these marketing activities as destination branding’s involvement in both demand and supplier side perspectives. It is absolutely concerned with different products (supplier side) and sights (demand side) for creating a cohering source for destination (Ooi, 2004, p. 110). This source includes jointly pulling the destination, providing cooperation among several organizations and motivating tourists and tourism agencies (Ooi, 2004). In that case, destination cannot be considered as a single product. It is different from other products due to having set of several components, serving touristic attractions and entertainments, consisting of constant cultural values and natural environment (Morgan, Pritchard and Piggott, 2002, p. 337). Buhalis (2000, p. 98) also points out that the mixture of tourism products puts marketing and management of destinations in difficult position during production and development processes since a destination brand reflects local people’s interests in that area instead of belonging to visitors. Uniqueness is therefore distinctive element for a destination brand compared to corporate brand.

Albania as a case study

Even though Albania has gained its independency in 1912, researches have revealed that this country has passed through different ancient civilizations and the antecedents going back to the middle and late Palaeolithic period (100,000–10,000 BC), Illyrian, Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman periods (Pollo and Puto, 1981, p. 1–4). Albania was announced as an independent state with the end of the Balkan war in 1912 and its formal borders were acknowledged during “London and Peace Conference” in 1913 and 1921 (Draper, 1997, p. 126–128). In several time intervals, the country had surpassed different regimes from a short life monarchy to being a republic under Italian ruling (Pula, 2008, p. 574–574). The country turned into Socialist People’s Republic of Albania in 1945 and this regime was lasted until 1991 (Schwartz, 2009, p. 51–52), when Albania was part of the subgroup that communism was more strict in elsewhere of Eastern Europe (Griffith, 1963. p. 146).

Transition from centrally planned economy, which is focused on heavy industry, to liberal market economy cannot prevent political and socio-economic instability at all. Unfavorable competitive position of heavy industry infrastructure led to development of Albanian service sector, including tourism industry that was untouched before (Ivy and Copp, 1999, p. 425). Accordingly, exploiting tourism industry by focusing on its potential covering historical and cultural heritage will assist in creating both a niche market (Hall, 2000, p. 42) and reconstructing the fragile economy of a country, such as Albania.

Methodology

The case study is considered as the most appropriate for this study since Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007, p. 30) clarifies that case study submits relevant research strategy in building a conceptual model and developing theory among these different approaches. The nature of this research brought on selecting qualitative single case study by gathering primary data to conduct the exploration in the field of destination brand identity. In addition to obtained knowledge from the literature, documentation and practical sources; the empirical research pursued the framework of qualitative methods.

The interview was established in the form of six open-ended questions and each question had a sub-question depending on the answers. The participants were free to respond in any preferred way since the depth-interview technique was applied. Nargundkar (2008, p. 39) clarifies that the open-ended questions in depth interview provide rich data due to depending on the face-to-face and semi-structured discussion with minimized restrictions. In this research, ten semi-structured depth interviews were conducted. As the main purpose of the research is to develop a new theory (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007, p. 27), the theoretical sampling was seen reasonable by the authors. Accordingly, the respondents in the study were chosen according to their role in constructing and developing a destination brand identity in the case of Albania. Two of the representatives were from government organization, three of them were from non-governmental organization, three from private tourism agencies, whereas two of them were from academic environment related with economic, marketing and tourism of Albania.

Results and analysis

The respondents elucidated several important strategic factors for developing Albanian brand identity. Accordingly, country differentiating strengths and comparison of market perception can be used as driving sources for attracting more and various tourists. Consequently, new segmentation based on historical heritage, geographical position and natural beauties will contribute to Albania in terms of reputation, financial gains and international connections. Transferring the identity with respect and protection into current time can provide unique identity elements for the destination. The usage of various communication channels in tourism market should be considered to reach more tourists. Long-term strategies with action plans are needed. Accordingly, repressive laws are required for the raise of environmentalist movements in order to protect the natural resources such as lakes and rivers. Direct governmental supports for sustainable development of tourism are crucial since many private business enterprises act different based on concerning interests in the market and it damages the national tourism. As regional projects with neighbor countries will raise the market share, more practical implications of the projects should be fulfilled by government. The infrastructure should be improved by the investments of national and regional governments. Superior education of tourism might present professional integration of the youth with the

tradition and culture. Desired quality in services should be considered as an initial tourism effort of the destination and the government should encourage private entrepreneurs to invest in tourism.

Branding in destination identity context – conceptual framework

Empirical data was analyzed with theoretical data and specific attributes of destination were detected. *Internal Analysis of Stakeholders* is suggested through four main aspects with combining aspects. Accordingly, the order of analysis refers to “local people”, “local enterprises”, “regulators” and lastly “existing brand image”. Internal analysis is correspondingly expected to bring central elements to core identity that was discussed by Aaker (2002). Local people and values are combined together on account of the role of values in the construction of destination identity. Following analysis of local enterprises has two combining aspect consisting of environmental concerns and values in relation with their capabilities of saving and presenting them. Analyzing the regulators, on the other side, consists of five combining aspects crucial for internal stakeholders: tourism strategies, tourism education, tourism infrastructure, environmental concerns and political stability/instability. Moreover, it mainly focuses on the role of internal analysis in macro level. Lastly, evaluating existing brand image outlines the importance of considering the aspects, geographical capabilities and historical heritage, while conducting internal analysis. *External Analysis of Stakeholders* is concentrated on three main aspects: “trends in tourism”, “communication and promotion” and “destination image versus satisfaction”. In addition, analyzing the trends in tourism can be conducted by focusing on both needs and segmentation. As the sequence of analysis depends on transmission of identity to image, it contributes to the enlargement of identity which can also be said as extended identity (Aaker, 2002). All these three aspects are supposed to define the route of the owners of destination brand in order to attract more tourists. The main aspects of *Tourism Competition Analysis*, are “brand identity” and “brand image”. Brand identity’s major combining aspect is tourism management that comes from the analysis of three other sub-aspects: “investments”, “capabilities” and “natural resources”. Brand image formed as a result of this analysis is integration and interaction of both “tourism gap” and “competitors” strategies”. Accordingly, tourism competition analysis will result in deeper evaluation and understanding of suc-

successful competitor destinations in tourism market. While this model, “Strategic Brand Analysis in Destination Identity Context”, is suggested as an initial step for constructing or developing destination identity, it is believed that the results are applicable for the analysis of destinations identity in global tourism market.

Conclusions

This study results that establishment of strategic brand analysis by considering destination identity context is propitious for theoretical contribution to the literature. While the analysis is useful to provide initial results for identity development of destination brands, suggested processes and aspects are assumed to be useful and beneficial in terms of marketing destinations in tourism industry. Hence, the paper is systemized in that the way of what and how the owners of destination brand should perform in order to position the destination as a strong brand in tourism market.

“Branding”, what it will be like a destination branding. If the answer to a bank, cosmetic product or car brand to be done to create sessions that branding is no different. Just a product of being in integrated more carefully and in detail the design of features given by is required. Branding, who live under the requirements of some concept. One personality, slogan, symbol, logo, color, music, but most of all he all other competitors to make a separate point must be a difference. Based on these features, a possible public relations effort on customers created with the help of emotional bag, with repeated purchases take place, a customer with a brand addict. These stages regardless of the desired destinations are just advertising the brand the result will be frustration and that they try to market their products with the image it will be damaged if not a destination. To be permanent, brand components to customers with the support of public relations must pointed out.

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