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Destination branding: an insight on strategy planning and brand development.

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CONTENT OUTLINE

GRAPHIC OUTLINE

SUMMARY

This paperwork pools the basic arguments that prove the importance of branding as a marketing technique based on a clearly defined strategy.

By having a clear image of the current situation of the destination and its desired image, any destination can develop a strategy to achieve that vision.

However, branding a destination differs to branding a product in the number of stakeholders it involves and the great amount of dimensions that have an impact on it.

Even so, a destination is made of unique attributes exclusive from that place and it is the experiences only that place provides those that characterize its essence that branding helps to define.

INTRODUTION

During the twentieth century took place the most important technological revolution. This tide of high-tech innovations set the startup of globalization, which brought businesses' competitiveness to a brand-new stage.

All along the previous years, companies were oriented towards production, so the challenge for them was not only to adapt to these new technologies, but also to develop new methods to improve their products in order to differentiate themselves from competitors and attract more clients.

At this point, marketing arose as the solution to keep customers, create awareness and become valuable. To do this, branding became the tool in charge of defining and giving personality and values to the brand, so that they can be defined as unique and different from competitors.

As Jöel Desgrippes said,

> Branding does not only have to do with the ubiquity, visibility and functions of a product; It consists on connecting emotionally with people in their daily life. A product or service can only be done when they raise a message with the consumer. (Gobé, 2005)

Due to this huge revolution, tourism industry boomed the second half of the twentieth century, allowing people to travel to the main recreation areas. Consequently, marketing and branding took charge of promoting the destination and making it more desirable for potential visitors.

Nowadays, tourism has become a global business which covers all places and destinations. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2018) tourism in 2017 reached 1.322 million of international tourists, which represents an increase of a 7% compared to 2018. This remarkable growth is expected to continue in 2018.

The challenge for destinations then, is to make people think beyond stereotypes, modify the preconceived idea people may have regarding a place and at the same time to make a promise of the unique experiences that only that place can provide.

Destination branding is far more complex than product branding since there are more stakeholders, which are internal and external to the region.

A destination brand is not only related to the marketing department of a Destination Management Organization, but also to its government, politics, economy, safety… All these areas define the image of a place and have a great impact on the branded destination.

Thus, destination branding is more than attracting tourism. It must also draw the attention of investors and talent and make them work together towards the same shared future vision of the place, always bearing in mind who the best ambassadors of that place are, its residents.

INTRODUCTION TO DESTINATION MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING CONCEPTS

1. What is a destination?

A tourism destination can be defined as a geographical area that attracts visitors. It is made of the sum of the different products and services offered by a particular region that complement or compete with each other. These destinations are limited by borders, which can be real or not.

Generally, most of the travelers choose to go to a destination within a nation. But there are certain destinations, such as Costa Rica, a minor country, where the country itself is the destination.

There are many diverse opinions on whether borders set the limit to a tourism destination. According to Barrado (2004), "a destination, therefore, is neither only a territory nor it is all territory. It is a system of interdependent relationships that must take place in a specific spatial scope, because it is not possible to transfer resources and products".

However, the experiences each place provides are specific, and so are the reasons of travelers to go to a specific place.

2. What is a DMO?

A destination's management is lead and coordinated by the Destination Management Organization (DMO), which sets the goals and visions for a tourism destination.

DMOs are basically groups of professionals that work in the tourism industry and who lead and coordinate all the tourism stakeholders. They can exist in national, regional, territorial and city levels.

Destination management includes the integrated and coordinated management of the destination mix (facilities, transportation, events, attractions…)

> DMOs today should not only lead on marketing but must also be strategic leaders in destination development. This role requires them to drive and coordinate destination management activities within the framework of a coherent strategy. Promotion must attract people to visit in the first place; creating a sustainable environment and quality delivery on the ground will ensure that visitors' expectations are met at the destination and that they then both recommend the destination to others and return themselves, on a future occasion. (UN World Tourism Organization, 2007)

3. Functions of a DMO

There can be identified six different roles of a DMO in destination management. The Destination Consultancy Group (DCG) classifies them as follows:
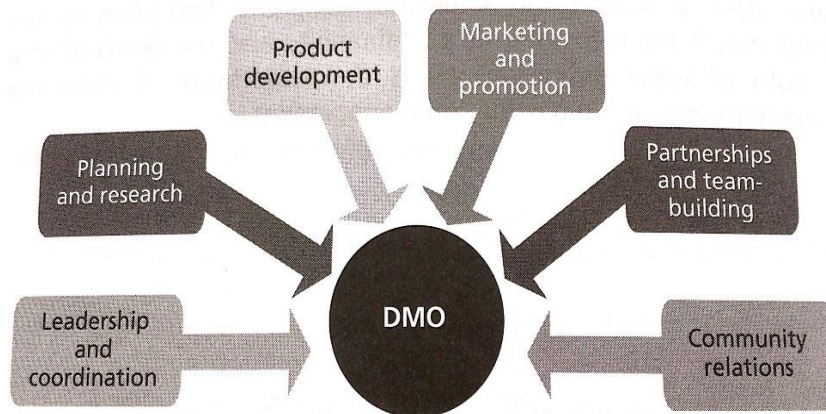
I.   Leadership and coordination: A DMO must coordinate the efforts of all the stakeholders so that they can achieve the goals of the organization regarding the destination. The DMO should be the leader of the tourism sector in its location as well as an advisor to visitors.

II. Planning and researching: it involves all the planning and research developed to set the DMO's vision and mission, as well as its tourism goals. All the stakeholders should be involved in the DMO's planning process so that they are aware of their part in the region's development.

III. Product development: it is related to the proper development of the destination product and includes physical products (like hotels, restaurants, facilities…), people (interaction of hosts and guests), packages (to be offered to tourists) and programming (events, festivals…).

IV. Marketing and promotion: promoting the destination abroad and approaching the most convenient markets are very important tasks together with positioning and branding the place.

V.   Partnership and teambuilding: cooperation and partnerships with both, public and private sector, is very important to reach specific goals. Partnerships can benefit DMOs by providing funds, sharing information, gaining greater expertise from other parties, increase their market appeal and even sharing facilities.

VI. Community relations: improve the image of tourism among residents and locals and follow up their attitude towards tourism. Having a positive support for tourism in a community depends on: the contribution of tourism to the economy, their attitude as well as the minimization of the negative impacts of tourism on the community.

These steps are fundamental on the strategic planning of any DMO. That is to say, DMOs are responsible to ensure and optimize the relations between locals and tourists, companies and clients, and therefore, economy and tourism.

4. What is destination marketing and branding?

Destination management also includes marketing tasks to properly manage tourism in a destination.

The main objective of destination marketing is to assist its stakeholders and to bound them with potential clients. A DMO needs to position itself in order to know which target market approach and to satisfy its customer's needs by defining its identity.

Morrison defines marketing as a "continuous, sequential process through which management plans, researchers, implements, controls and evaluates activities designed to meet customers' needs and wants and their organization objectives" (Morrison, 2010).

Hence, DMO's marketing strategies also depend on the activities performed by other organizations within and outside the destination.

Then, marketing can be defined as a way of thinking, that gathers the values of a company and its communication tools, but it also contains all the techniques and procedures taken to reach a company's goals. Thus, marketing is both a technique and a philosophy.

Branding is very important because brands influence people's lives and they are also determinant in the purchasing decision of consumers. By branding itself, a destination increases its value and its marketing campaign's efficiency, which at the same time, it generates trust among its stakeholders, which turns into brand loyalty.

A brand goes beyond its logo, it is related to what people say, feel or think regarding a product, service or even a company. Branding is related to the intangible, to what a brand is or represents, alongside to its values and DNA. Certainly, a brand is the soul of the company.

The difference between marketing and branding lies in the communication of the message. Marketing consists of the actions taken to communicate the promise made to customers, while branding is the promise itself.

Therefore, branding includes an emotional factor, which is the promise that marketing helps to deliver.

Consequently, both concepts are interrelated, "marketing without branding has no soul; branding without marketing is mute, has no voice." (Stalman, 2014)

THE ORIGINS OF BRANDING

The term branding began as a simple application of a symbol or a mark on a piece of pottery or brick. It was a way to identify who made it and where he or she lived.

According to Sean Adams "from most of our civilization's history, the general public has been illiterate. Government, commerce and religion used symbols and images to communicate a message". (Adams, 2018)

Moreover, Adams (2018) explained that the ichthys symbol resembling a fish identified the early Christian church. Jewish communities used the star of David as symbol, while Muslims adopted the color turquoise as identifier.

These symbols represented an entire belief structure. Every story, action and interaction of each religion was embodied on them.

By the eighteenth century, the term "brandr" appeared for the first time. The term brand comes from "brandr" which means "burn". In the middle ages this word referred to mark the cattle with fire. Thus, brands were originally created to differentiate one's goods from the competitors'. This way, it was easier for merchants to distinguish their products.

As reported by Ollé and Riu:

> Brands were created to distinguish our offer from the competition, to 'mark' it to avoid confusion and facilitate its memory, to identify the manufacturer and to facilitate the purchase decision. Progressively, they were focusing on endowing said offer of what can become the favorite option of the buyer. (Ollé & Riu, 2009)

Branding differentiated one product pot from another of lesser quality. The brand identified who made the product, where it came from and its quality. From that point, competitiveness was about to get much different.

By the twentieth century the industrial revolution was in full swing, and mass production changed the economy. To the manufacturers, this meant harder competition. To succeed, a product required quality, value and a good reputation.

Here is where advertising began to be more competitive. Most of the companies' campaigns included a clear illustration and a slogan. The most remarkable companies understood the importance of its audience's emotional connection to the brand. This way, the basics of modern branding were founded.

From the second half of the twentieth century, television became the dominating advertising tool. Ever since, companies focused more on visual media and nowadays due to internet and mobile communication, imagery is the primary way of communication.

Companies need to understand the importance of a unified visual message. Advertising made the core brand message important, the campaign idea could change to maintain interest of consumers, but the brand and DNA had to stay the same.

Social media and internet help successful companies to use their channels not as a duplication of their ads, but as a way to dig deeper into the brand.

Effectively, branding is far more complex today. The means to communicate may be more complex and they must be constantly changing, but still companies have the same job: to determine a strong, clear, unique and compelling message for the brand and to use every opportunity to promote that message.

WHY BRANDING

Brands influence people's lives and they are determinants in their purchasing decision, here is the importance for companies to manage their brand properly.

A brand is the business' personality, a promise delivered, composed by passion, confidence, belonging, action, security and specially a set of unique values.

Nonetheless, branding goes beyond promises and advertisings. Psychology says that people surround themselves with people who share their beliefs, then trust happens. A company that does everything it promised, does not mean people will trust it, but that the company is reliable. Just like destinations.

As Simon Sinek (2011) said, trust comes from an essence of common values and beliefs. So, it's very important that companies define themselves by sharing their values, their mission and vision statements and mostly, a coherent branding strategy.

Multiple components are responsible of the brand image created in the consumer's mind. Then, it is very important to control that every point of contact with the consumer reinforces the brand perception. A brand must be policed but allowed to evolve, and the primary reasons to achieve brand development are increased value and perception.

 According to Sean Adams (2018), a brand is composed by different variables such as: visual components, customer service, the product, company actions, employees and expectations.

Good quality and useful products are key to attracts customers' attention, even though they are just a small piece of the brand experience.

The visual world is responsible for the logo, the website, printed matters… while providing an efficient service, emotional connection belong to the customer service experience which also needs to be stable and reflect the values of the company.

The actions taken are increasingly important, they reflect how engaged a company or government is to its values and the environment. In today's market the consumer is especially aware of the ethical conduct of a company and a place.

Simon Sinek (2009) explained in one of his speeches, great organizations in the world think, act and communicate the same way, which is the opposite to everyone else's.

All the organizations know what they sell, some of them also know how they do it but very few know why they do it, which is their inner purpose and their reason to be.

On the other side, successful companies or leaders start with why, their purpose of life and the reason why they're investing their time and efforts, then they communicate how they do it, and finally, they say what they do.

Nowadays people do not buy what companies do, but why they do it. This is the result of globalization, where high competitiveness leads to a huge variety of

products with the same features that need to differentiate from each other but most importantly, to communicate it properly to the end client.

The purpose of communication is not to do business with consumers that need what the company is producing, but to do business with other people that believe what the company believes (their why) and this is the starting point of brand loyalty.

According to Hatch (2008), "people do not buy things for what they are [or possess], but for what they mean". This is to say that the consumption of a determined brand is related to our identity values, which need to be shared by the brand.

> The brand is not an element of the company, it is a philosophy. It is our way of concretizing all business efforts, concrete our culture and connect with our consumer. The brand is our way of communicating with our employees, with our customers and with our suppliers, with the competition and with society in general. (Ollé & Riu, 2009)

With all this, a brand is simply the communication and association by stakeholders of a company's intrinsic nature and human personality, which must add trust to the consumer to facilitate their purchase decision.

Moreover, regarding the building of a brand, they specified that:

> It is not enough to define a list of attributes and values that we want to link to our brand, but to ensure that each of the consumer's contacts with our offer becomes a correct perception and assimilation of those values. (Ollé & Riu, 2009)

It is very unlikely for big companies to manage every single touchpoint between the company and its clients, even though it's very important to manage as many of them as possible to generate value for the brand.

All in all, branding makes a company easy to recognize and remember. It can attract more consumers, boost sales and it produces consumer loyalty.

DESTINATION ANALYSIS

Destinations play a different role from companies in their promotion and communication strategies. They are fixed places with fixed natural resources with short-time visitors and many variable factors that can have a great impact on its tourist's experiences and their perceived image of the destination.

Hence, it is important to have a convenient analysis of the destination, to gather its strengths and weaknesses, so that it can be managed properly.

The DMO should develop a set of criteria for analyzing a destination, such as the natural and cultural resources, safety and security, air transport infrastructure, affinity for travel and tourism, price competitiveness, environmental sustainability, policy rules and regulations…

To do so, DMOs must first analyze the current situation of their destination. Then, it's necessary to develop a marketing strategy in order to know where the destination would like to be. Next, developing a marketing plan will help the

DMO to know how to get there and finally, by controlling and evaluating, the DMO will make sure to achieve the goal.

To set a goal for the destination and develop a main strategy plan to achieve, it will facilitate the decision-making process. Then, this strategy needs to be split into minor strategies that will play different roles according to their functional areas.

Besides of having a well-defined inner strategy, any organization can be affected by different external and internal trends such as market trends, social and cultural trends, politics, tourism sector and market trends… Consequently, once a destination has clarified its purpose, it needs to analyze its current situation to develop a main strategy.

1. Measures to be analyzed

In order to analyze the current situation of a destination, a DMO should develop a SWOT and a PESTLE analysis.

A SWOT analysis is a technique used to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for strategic planning.

Strengths and weaknesses are internal factors of the organization that define the characteristics that advantage or disadvantage it over competitors. While, opportunities and threats are positive and negative external factors from the environment that the organization cannot control such as consumers trends, political stability…

On the other hand, the PESTLE analysis identifies the political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental aspects that also influence the organization's procedures. This report shows a framework of the macro-environmental factors related to the external analysis of the industry.

Here, the external factor analysis is wider and more complete than in a SWOT since it includes matters of importance from all over the world like economic growth, exchange rates, political stability, economic barriers to entry, health consciousness, consumer law and climate change among others.

Moreover, a destination analysis covering topics such as natural resources, safety, policy rules, tourism infrastructure… will assess the features of the destination. While a competitive analysis sort by target market will help the DMO to have a proper benchmarking of their current situation regarding competitors.

Other important measures for DMOs are: the visitor market analysis, which will help to develop a more targeted strategy to fit their needs, a marketing plan analysis, in order to improve next year's marketing plan after reviewing activities that worked and those that didn't, and the destination image analysis, to understand the position a destination has in the minds of past and potential visitors and planning actions to adjust it when necessary.

To make comprehensible these analyses it's necessary to divide them by segments to have an accurate idea of the perception of the destination's visitors and the future action plans of the DMO will be tailored according to its target markets.

Market segmentation means focusing on specific groups of tourists that are suitable for the destination rather than trying to appeal the mass market with one strategy. Hence, the DMO must divide its market into different segments and select the target markets from these groups towards who develop their strategy.

2. Life cycle of destinations

To be able to develop a proper strategy it is very important that DMOs understand the current situation of the destination.

Destinations, as well as products, have a life cycle. The destination life cycle can be analyzed using Butler's tourism area life cycle (TALC).

It divides the life period of tourism destinations in seven stages: exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, decline and rejuvenation.
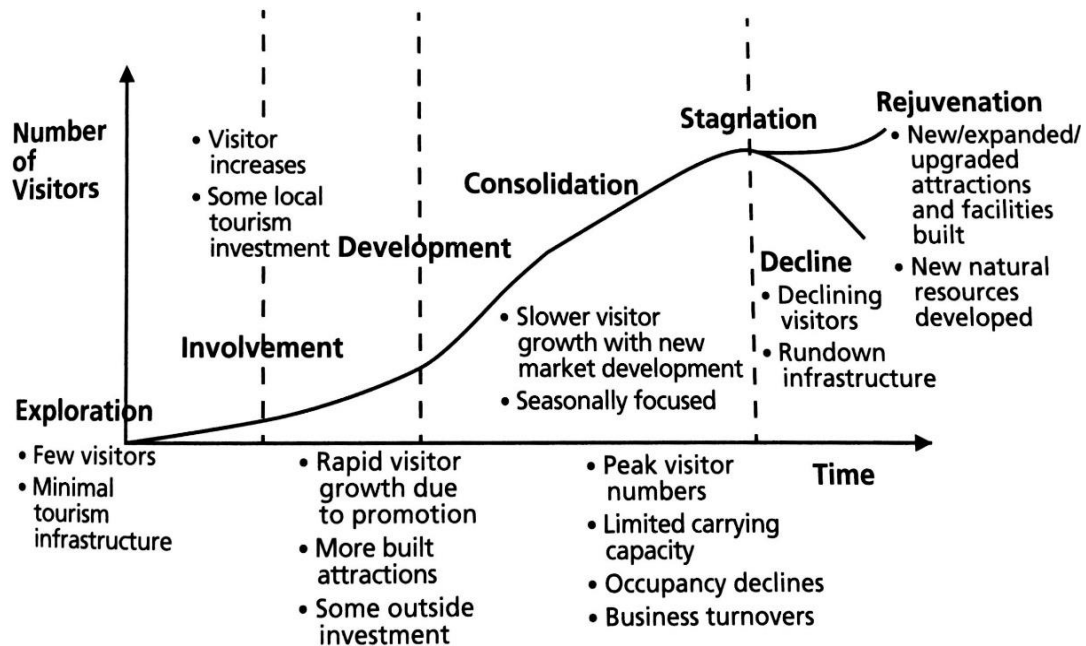
FIGURE 2. THE TOURISM AREA LIFE CYCLE (TALC)
SOURCE: MARKETING AND MANAGING TOURISM DESTINATIONS (MORRISON, 2013)

The TALC model, developed by Butler, identifies six different stages involved in the life cycle of a tourism destination. These stages are classified as: exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation and decline or rejuvenation.

The first stage represents the inspection of the new tourism area, which is usually made by adventure tourists seeking for new experiences. The involvement stage takes place when the local community becomes part of the tourism development process and infrastructures for tourism are developed.

The next stage is development, this happens when tourism is becoming powerful in a destination and investments for its development increase continuously.

Then, consolidation and stagnation take place over time when large masses of tourism arrive at the destination and its development is stabilized.

Finally, to exit the stagnation point, local authorities musts develop a plan to improve their destination, so tourists find it more attractive and decide to go there. On the other side, if a destination is not adapted to new market trends and remains the same, it will enter a decline process.

This model helps to describe how tourism destinations evolve from their discovery until their fall. Along the curve, demand increases progressively until it reaches the inflection point where destinations fail to manage tourism demand leading to higher pressure on the available resources.

For this reason, having a good knowledge of the destination and a clear vision of the goal it is aiming at, will be necessary to assist the DMO to define minor tasks and actions that will allow the proper development of the destination for its stakeholders.

DESTINATION MARKETING PLANNING

A marketing planning strategy is mainly composed by the destinations goals, strategies and the actions to take in order to achieve the initial goals.

The main goal of the destination will be backed up by its mission and vision statements, which at the same time are supported by the brand value.

As stated by Morrison, "a core part of the destination marketing planning process is the creation of a time-ordered hierarchy of marketing goals and objectives. This hierarchy consists of the following: destination vision, DMO vision, destination marketing goals, and destination marketing objectives." (Morrison, 2013)

1. Destination vision and DMO vision

A destination's vision can be defined as a "very long-term goal". It must be articulated in a vision statement, which represents the desired "word picture" that a destination wants to achieve in the future. This vision provides a clear objective of what the destination aims to become.

On the other hand, the DMO's vision statement must define a vision of its future regarding a destination's stakeholders. It should be more concrete than the destination's vision, since a DMO is also responsible to achieve the destination's vision.

2. Destination marketing goals and objectives

In order to achieve the destination's vision, a DMO requires to break it down into different goals that will eventually achieve this objective. These goals are long term (from 3 to 5 years) and must be target-market and time-specific, as well as measurable to the DMO.

Even though, a DMO must also rely on its public- and private-sector partners to achieve the destination marketing goals within and outside the destination.

Besides, destination marketing objectives are short-term and must also be measurable to the DMO. They must also be marketed towards a market and be time-specific. All in all, these objectives must contribute to achieve a destination's marketing goals, and therefore its vision.

After establishing its goals and objectives, a DMO must declare its purpose and values through its mission statement, where it is described what the DMO does and who it serves. A DMO's mission statement must be consistent with the destination marketing goals and its vision.

Once the current situation of a destination has been analyzed, the next step is deciding where to go next and how to do it. To be able to carry out these strategies effectively, it's necessary to market them towards their purpose.

Morrison (2013) stated that, "the DMO's strategy is a combination of the selected target markets and the positioning-image-branding approach".

Therefore, the DMO should analyze their market segments according to different criteria such as: country of origin, distribution channel, trip purpose... And then select the target market they want to focus in among their market segments.

Another important aspect is the competitive analysis. The best way to analyze a destination's competitors is by target market since a destination may have a different set of competitors for each target market.

3. PIB Approach

The concepts of positioning, image and branding (PIB) were also related by Morrison (2013). This concept is the result of the branding and positioning efforts made by the DMO.
A positioning approach is important to communicate the desired image of the destination to its target market and the DMO should develop a destination positioning statement to communicate the uniqueness of the place.

> Positioning starts with the destination. But positioning is not what is done to the destination. Positioning is what the DMO attempts to do to the mind of the prospective visitor. That is the DMO positions the destination in the mind of the prospective visitor. (Morrison, 2013)

Essentially, destination positioning's main objective is to identify and communicate a unique destination image.

It is how the destination chooses to differentiate itself from competing destinations and to stand for something distinct and remarkable that will make a place for the destination in the consumer's mind. While destination branding

develops and communicates an identity and personality for its destination that differs from the competing destinations.

Hence, the sum of the differentiator factor of the destination, its unique personality and the communication of it creates an image in the tourists' mind that should match the destination's desired image.

Whenever there's a gap between the desired image of the destination and its actual image among tourists, DMOs should analyze and redesign their strategy to match them effectively.

Therefore, DMOs must brand a destination according to its positioning approaches and the type of images supporting this positioning.

In order to have a consistent brand, every destination needs to understand its image and position in the minds of past and potential visitors. The DMO must decide how to brand the destination given its current positioning. To do so, the DMO should match the destination's chosen positioning (desired image) with visitors' images (perceived image).

4. Marketing mix

The basic principles of marketing are based on the marketing mix, which gathers the tools any company can use to accomplish its objectives.

McCarthy (1960), was the first person to define the concept of the "4Ps of marketing", that represent: product, price, place and promotion, which set the framework for marketing decision-making.

DMOs have little control over each stage in a place but have an influence on them. They need to ensure all the companies in a destination are acting according to the destination's strategy.

The product refers to the complimentary offer a tourist can find in a destination, as well as its facilities, events, attractions, infrastructures, transportation and all the components that a destination offers.

The price is a proof of profitability in the private sector and a DMO has little control but can have an influence over it. High prices may define a destination as exclusive or oriented to luxury, while low prices generally attract mass tourism.

The place in a destination represents the distribution and the trade channels the DMO uses to draw visitors to the destination.

The promotion is the most important tool for the DMO in customizing the destination for each target market and attracting visitors.

However, Morrison (2013) includes four extra Ps as part of the main factors to manage in destination marketing which are: packaging, programming, partnership and people.

In tourism, packaging includes the combination of complementary services in a destination for one price. Programming is to the arrangement of special activities such as festivals that can be very powerful when combined with packages. Partnership refers to the relations with other DMOs or companies to attract more tourists. Finally, people applies to the personal relations that take place in the service industry of tourism.

5. The marketing plan

All of these measures used to analyze the destination (SWOT, PESTEL, market analysis…) are the necessary to properly develop its marketing plan.

After understanding the current situation of the destination and setting its goals and objectives (long and short term) as well as the DMOs', it is required to develop specific strategies, which will specify the path to follow in order to reach the set objectives.

These action strategies can be classified as Porter's generic strategies, growth strategies and Kotler's strategies against competition.

"Porter classifies the strategies according to the competitive advantage pursued (costs or differentiation) and the breadth of the market to which the company is heading (all the market or some segments)." (Serra, 2011)

As explained by Serra (2011), there can be found three different generic strategies by Porter: the cost leader strategy (aiming to get the lowest costs), the differentiation strategy (aiming to offer the most unique products or services) and the specialization strategy (focusing on specific market segments to gain competitive advantage).

On the other side, growth strategies can be classified as: intensive growth (identifying new opportunities and develop new products or expanding towards new markets), integrated growth (entering or acquiring related businesses) and diversified growth (developing new businesses in new markets).

While Kotler's strategies against competition can be divided as: leader strategy (occupying a superior position related to competitors), the challenger strategy (aiming to reach the market leader), the follower strategy (acting according to competitors and following their decisions) and the specialist strategy (focusing in a niche market to be dominant).

The aforementioned action strategies can be helpful for destinations to develop their plan more effectively.

Afterwards, these strategies require to be broken down into small action plans according to the marketing mix. Hence, a proper organizational structure is necessary so that every department of the organization can work towards the same strategy.

The assessment and control of both, the destination and the external factors are very important since the environment is constantly changing.

When it comes to destination marketing, the social benefits for the community should also be considered as well as the impact of tourism that cause negative externalities and the focus on developing long term sustainability for the destination.

Destination marketing is one of the most important DMO roles. Creativity and innovation are highly required to market and promote a destination. Therefore, having a good marketing plan is crucial for DMOs.

DESTINATION BRANDING

> The image of a country is its most valuable asset, that it is tremendously important, that it is possibly the most significant determinant of its ability to trade profitably and effectively and happily in the global community and yet at the same time that image is a thing over which it has virtually no direct control or even indirect influence. (Anholt, 2010)

Branding was initially used to differentiate products and add value to companies, but since tourism boomed and it became accessible to everyone, destinations started competing against each other to attract more tourists and to increase its revenue.

The essence of destination branding is based on its personality, made of all the intangible elements that give a place a character, also on the fixed environments (like the architecture, geography…) as well as the services and entertainment provided in the destination and the culture, which includes language, music, food and many others.

Ritchie *et al.* (1998) provided the following definition of a destination brand:

> A name, symbol, logo, word mark 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 recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience.

Therefore, branding a country, a city or a region is a manner of creating value and return, as well as driving demand in tourism. Understanding tourism drivers can help create more effective business models, marketing and managing strategies.

In accordance with Simon Anholt (2010), the countries that are capable to coordinate between government, business and society, and between the different sectors that also have a stake in the country's image seem to achieve a certain amount of traction in taking control of their reputation and leverage it for their own benefit.

In destination branding, brand identity is a great differentiating attribute as it is what makes a customer identify a destination. In that case, visual elements are the ones that provide a city the identity mark, through values intrinsically associated to the images which are tangible, such as architecture and infrastructure.

Christopher Nurko (2016) identified three different dimensions that destinations aim to be and need to manage in order to be successful. These are: to be distinctive, desirable and differentiated.

Distinction makes a destination appealing, interesting, unique, iconic… Desirable stands for the experiences or activities that can only be carried in the destination and that encourage consumers to go there, while differentiation refers to memorable destinations (what they are known for) and their comparison to others.

As a matter of fact, products and brands in countries help destinations to differentiate themselves and make associations.

The elements that define them are developed around a brand intentionally or not, since the brand itself also includes its name, symbology, design and meaning.

Then, it should be taken into account that DMOs do not have a total control over the destination mix that is being branded since the destination itself is a mix of the different products, services and also stakeholders, which are responsible for delivering a consistent brand experience.

Simon Anholt developed a concept that identified the different factors to be managed that determine the place brand through the "Nation Brand Hexagon".

"The nation brand is the sum of people's perceptions of a country across six areas of national competence". (Anholt, 2018)

This model helps measure the quality of a country's brand image by combining these six dimensions:

FIGURE 3. THE NATION BRAND HEXAGON.
SOURCE: WHAT IS A NATION BRAND? (ANHOLT, 2018)

All of these dimensions value the different areas that constitute a country's brand, such as the public image of the products and services from the country, the public opinion regarding the national government and its commitment to global issues, the power of attracting people to study or live in the country related to a good quality of life, the perception of the country's heritage and culture, the people's friendliness, openness and tolerance and also the natural tourist attractions that are appealing for tourists.

Thus, it is not only the touristic image of a country that needs to be managed, but also its global brand.

Certainly, every branding campaign needs to be aware of the perception of the brand of the country abroad which is related to the touristic brand of the country. It is very important that both brands, country and touristic brands, are coordinated since both are included in the global brand strategy of the destination.

In fact, there are many areas that should be contemplated when thinking of the design of a brand destination because not only tourism related issues will affect a potential visitor to choose a destination.

In addition to the marketing plan of the DMO, any destination should focus on developing a branding plan to create brand awareness and draw more visitors to the destination considering its aforementioned dimensions.

Morrison (2013), identified four different steps involved in destination branding:

I. <u>The situation analysis</u>: having a clear analysis of the current situation of the destination is basic to develop a proper strategy. Hence, understanding potential tourists for the destination and their needs and experiences they want to live within the destination will help attract more tourists.

II. <u>The tourism sector stakeholders</u>, who should agree and collaborate to the unique positioning and image of the destination. Tourism stakeholders have a great knowledge on the market and should be considered because they are either tourists or have direct contact with them.

III. <u>The unique selling propositions</u>, which define and outstand the unique characteristics of a destination compared to its competitors. These features can be social, natural, artistic, cultural…

IV. <u>The destination brand development</u>, which is a plan to position the destination, increase its awareness among potential visitors, create a positive image of it and to get a strong brand identity.

These steps will define the new destination brand look, the targets for the destination brand, the new image that the destination brand wants to communicate, its new objectives and most importantly, why a new tourism brand is needed in the destination.

GOLDEN BRANDS

Every destination in the world has exclusive attributes that reinforce the brand of the place, such as unique architecture, warm weather, beautiful landscapes, friendly people…, which must be iconized and shown to external communities.

As a matter of fact, some mayor cities with a great history and architectural heritage have always been an attractive place for visitors.

According to Resonance (2018), London was ranked the world's best city brand in 2017, followed by New York and Paris in terms of promotion.

1. London

The British capital has an array of globally recognized landmarks from the Tower Bridge and the majestic Big Ben as well as Piccadilly Circus to the London Eye and many others.

Resonance (2018) stated that "no other city generates more online reviews […] and no other city surfaces as much content online for visitors". The city has an important range of activities and its international reach, together with the vast airport connectivity to other major cities makes London an easy and attractive place to visit.

However, tourism related activities are not the only ones taken into account in the purchase decision. During the past years, several events have influenced

the image of the city positively and negatively, as the Brexit or the Olympic games of 2012.

Brexit was announced as a catastrophe for the city and a drop in all of its financial assets. Thus, the uncertainty of the impact expected from it was totally negative for the image of the brand. Nonetheless, as stated by Resonance (2018) "given that the brand is more global city-state than Britain's capital, it will only come back brighter from adversity".

On the other side, an event such as the Olympic Games in 2012, the greatest sports event in the world, was taken as an opportunity to reinforce the brand of London City. The challenge then was defining and translating London's peculiar DNA to such a broad mass of stakeholders.

The only problem then, was "how to market a vast and rarely homogenous city to hundreds of different and demanding overseas clients." (Jones, 2012)

The marketing campaign developed for such event was massive, and it included from mascots and merchandise to official songs, video games, stamps and even coins representing the games.

Prior to the Olympics, the British society became famous in the 1990s for their slogan "Cool Britannia", used by media to highlight the evolution and avantgarde to the British society.

Here is why it is important for destinations to eventually create special events or campaigns to remind people from any country of them, their unique attributes and turn them into regular visitors.

2. New York

New York, the world's greatest branded city, started to get the attention of inveterate travelers in the early twentieth century due to its fast growth and its iconic skyline made of unique architectural pieces.

Ever since there have been hundreds of movies, songs and even other cities inspired by the world-wide-known NYC (New York City).

New York is also considered America's cultural mecca and was named the capital of the world for many years.

> Everyone understands the hardware of the place, the buildings, the infrastructure and the industry and business that happens in New York. But what people talk about is the energy that they feel within the place, and that's the software of a place brand. It's the experiences, the energy, the culture, the sights and sounds […]. (Fair, 2013)

The name of "The Big Apple" which was used initially by local writers or the popularization of the "I love NYC" logo by Milton Glaser during the 1970s are just examples of how locals are the best ambassadors of a destination, because it's their own experiences those that attract new visitors to discovers them by themselves.

3. Paris

Paris, also known as the city of light, was the cradle of the romanticism artistic stream, which sowed the roots of the well-known association of the French capital to the most romantic city in the world.

Paris is the most touristic destination and the local government of Paris is aware of the importance that French culture has over visitors, so it developed a plan to keep Paris as a world reference in terms of museums, culture and landscapes.

By knowing its strengths, the city is positioning itself, not only in its citizens' minds but also worldwide.

Thereby, a city is not just a brand, it is a whole experience made of those things only that place can offer. It is all about how people feel within a place and how the local authorities make those experiences reach potential visitors from all over the world.

Furthermore, it is important for mayor cities to eventually create content through special events and redesign the local offer to keep tourists interested on the destination.

Even though it might seem easier for destinations with a great history to have an inherent attractive component, there are also emerging destinations creating very strong tourism campaigns to become known all over the world and promote tourism in their countries.

SUCCESSFUL BRAND DESTINATIONS

1. Amsterdam

Amsterdam has always been a top tourist destination in Europe, but by the start of the 21st century it lost visitors due to increased competition from other tourist destinations in Europe.

Therefore, it was in 2005 when the "I Amsterdam" campaign was launched to serve as the new brand of the city and its motto.

The main goals of this campaign were to show the destination as an attractive location to live, study, generating residents as well as to attract tourism, businesses and host events.

It also focuses in three core values that identify the city: creativity, innovation and the spirit of commerce.

As in any other destination, formerly people had a preconceived idea of Amsterdam, which was related to sex, drugs and canals.

In accordance with Stamp (2012), the previous slogans created for other campaigns of the city were among others "Amsterdam Has It" and "Small city, big business", which happened to be too vague or too focused.

The "I Amsterdam" is certainly inspired by the "I love NY" logo and at the same time it invites people to go to the city and to be a part of it.

There are also placed in two different spots of Amsterdam the now-famous two-meter tall red and white letters spelling out the slogan, one in front of the museum of The Netherlands and the other at the Schiphol Airport of Amsterdam, which are estimated to be photographed eight thousand times a day.

Altogether the campaign was a success, tourism went up and it is still nowadays among the top destinations of Europe all year around and in less than a decade, the destination has become a landmark and an example to follow.

2. Barcelona

Barcelona may not be an emerging destination, but it is a worth example of successful destination branding. It is one of Europe's most visited cities because of its architecture, culture and good climate.

The Barcelona Olympic Games in 1992 helped the city to develop the strategic plan for design of the new Barcelona brand. Ever since, Barcelona has positioned itself among the top cities of the world.

However, this city has always had a lack of stability. Until 1980's it was considered the "grey" period of Barcelona due to Franco's dictatorship, after which the city could finally transform itself and become an open destination.

More recently, the great exposure to tourism in the last years has made the city suffer from protests of over-tourism, also terrorist attacks and the great political instability of Catalonia in the past years have triggered an important decrease of number of tourists and the cancellation of important annual events like the Barcelona World Race.

Despite these negative events Barcelona has faced, it is still a world reference and a city that is a destination itself. The brand Barcelona is even more relevant that the brand Spain itself.

Stalman (2014), stated that "This is given to the independent promotion of the different regions in Spain, where tourism promotion is a regional issue".

Nevertheless, it should be emphasized the performance of the competent organism on tourism promotion of the city of Barcelona.

3. Thailand and Malaysia

Thailand and Malaysia are an example of how rethinking destination branding towards a collaboration scope can impact positively both economies.

While there are similar destinations that compete against each other to get more visitors via aggressive marketing campaigns or reducing prices, these south Asian countries work together in a win-win strategy.

As a result of the massive increase of tourism in Thailand in the past years, Malaysia introduced a double destination package that included both destinations, Thailand and Malaysia in one trip.

This way, a minor country like Malaysia would take advantage of people visiting their neighbor country and at the same time making visitors stay longer in Asia.

As the minister of Tourism and culture of Malaysia, H.E. Abdul Aziz, mentioned in the Wold Travel Market Summit (2015):

> Malaysia can't be Thailand, so we join them. We take advantage of the fact that Thailand has attracted many tourists to the country and what Malaysia is asking is, fly over to Kuala Lumpur, so we are not competing; we are taking advantage of each other's branding.

Using two countries as one destination is a win-win strategy. The main issuing market of Asia is Europe and due to the long-haul trip, travelers will not spend a weekend in Asia, but over a week time.

By doing this, unlike the top European destinations, Asian countries are collaborating together towards a common goal: attracting investment to their nations.

5. Perú

Perú's destination campaign went viral on 2012 and ever since this discreet south American country hasn't stopped growing due to its brand image.

The video launch of the international campaign of *Marca Perú* in 2012 has over 5 Million views on YouTube, this was the kick-off of a brand new image and positioning strategy by the government of Perú.

Prior to the launch of its first international campaign, *Marca Perú* redesigned its country brand with a logo created by *Futurebrand* to unify the image of the country. From that point, the south American country has developed continuous actions to reinforce its country image.

Some of these actions include naming ambassadors of the country as well as the acknowledgement *Amigos del Perú,* given to only five persons in the world, among who two of them are Spanish: Jordi Roca and Adolfo Dominguez, for promoting local quality products from Perú.

Furthermore, the national coin, one *Sol,* has the logo of the *Marca Perú* coined in one of its sides to reinforce the country brand.

Marca Perú (2017) announced in 2017 the results of such campaign that made the country go eleven positions up in the "Country Brand Ranking" by Bloom Consulting on the period 2017-2018 compared to its position on the period 2014-2015. In the Americas region, Perú now occupies the sixth place behind USA, Canada, México, Brazil and Argentina.

The great investment on developing a consistent and attractive image for the destinations has resulted into a successful branding campaign for this, until short ago, little unknown country.

5. Iceland

Known as "the land of fire and ice", Iceland is possibly the country that created the most benefit out of a disastrous event.

In 2010, the now-famous Eyjafjallajökull volcano erupted in Iceland creating a huge ash cloud covering thousands of square kilometers, which stopped for six days air travel from all over Europe provoking the cancellation of over ninety thousand flights. (Wikipedia, n.d.)

This event, besides of having a huge impact on the air travel, did a great damage to Iceland's image as a safe destination and dropping tourism in the country a 30%.

The challenge then, was to prove otherwise to the world and in that point the campaign "Inspired by Iceland" was created. The idea was to invite Icelanders and tourists to tell a story about the beautiful country of Iceland, fighting negative opinions with positive stories.

Likewise, the government placed live webcams to share with everyone in the world the beauty of the country and its unique nature. They also broadcasted a live concert to the world thanking everyone who shared their stories.

The result of this campaign, which is still going on, resulted in over 20 Million shared stories, 60 Million web hits and almost 140 Million pounds on extra tourism revenue, the best results ever (The Brooklyn Brothers, 2015).

Currently, Iceland still develops different promotional campaigns like "Iceland Academy", that educates tourists how to travel around Iceland or "The Icelandic Pledge", to learn to become a responsible tourist and take part in keeping Iceland clean and unspoiled.

However, the latest hit was a video launched by *Inspired by Iceland* named "The Hardest Karaoke song in the world", where according to Will Coldwell (2017) "Iceland challenges foreigners to sing along to The A-Ö of Iceland – a song featuring words and phrases from the notoriously difficult language".

THE IMPORTANCE OF A COHERENT BRAND IMAGE

Contrary to the prior successful cases, there have also been incoherent promotional tourism campaigns in major destinations.

According to El Mundo (2010), the government of Spain launched a new image for the promotion campaign of the country abroad in 2010, its logo "I need Spain".

In 2010 Spain started to come out from a great economic crisis and this message became quite confusing for some countries. In such case, the image of the country abroad was not considered due to either a mistaken analysis of the destination or the eagerness to attract investment to Spain.

As said by Andy Stalman (2014), the touristic campaign brand launched by the Spanish government to promote tourism in the country in 2010 was named "I need Spain" during a time where the only news that different countries received

from Spain were the great unemployment rate, bankruptcy of companies, the persistent crisis… but still the campaign was "I need Spain".

As result, external stakeholders did not take the message seriously since all the news regarding Spain in those years were referred to the political instability and the economic crisis.

This type of messages can create a rebound effect. When trying to reach the audience by telling them how much they need to visit the country, it may seem to be the other way around.

Therefore, it would have worked better to create a new image that reflects their evolution and ambition to become a powerful destination again rather than creating this type of campaigns that affect negatively the destination's image.

CONCLUSION

"A nation's brand image is its most valuable asset: it is national identity made robust, tangible, communicable, and, at its best, made useful". (Anholt, 2018)

As it has been argued throughout this paperwork, a brand's destination is its soul and how people perceive it. Defining the destination's ambitions and objectives will add value to it.

Certainly, the technical part of branding a destination is complex due to all of its dimensions and the great number of stakeholders involved in it, but it is also emotional, branding a destination is about how people feel within a place and sharing those feelings.

A Destination Management Organization or the local entity responsible of the destination management must collaborate with local companies to share the same vision for the destination and work together towards the same goals.

It is also important to be aware that unpredictable events can happen and those can also damage the destination's image, such as the terrorist attacks in Paris or the volcano eruption in Iceland.

Even so, the destination must always work to share its essence and values through its residents and best ambassadors, which means that in any case it is more relevant the human than the economic recovery.

All in all, a destination brand must be defined carefully but it is their locals, who with their business, relations, culture and behavior will spread the essence of the destination.

Then, it is a common labor to create a place with esteem and devotion to generate a feeling of connection and belonging to the destination, only this way people will feel attracted to a destination.

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