EVOLVING PARADIGMS OF DESTINATION MANAGEMENT AND BRANDING: A RESEARCH NOTE FOR FUTURE AGENDA

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Abstract

Destination branding is a comprehensive strategic process that facilitates the destination management organizations and policy makers in not only creating salience about their destinations, but also position the destinations with wider values that caters to various segments of tourists in the competitive industrial outset. Many of the advancements and strategic formulations in strategic destination branding have been emerged from the insights acquired from academic research. Though there are many studies and evidence added to the arena with distinct perspectives, there is still lack of evidence that caters to the changing tourism market structure, expectations and uncertainties. This research note focuses on five such critical phases of destination branding and management that can be researched further to derive value addition to the industry. This research note indicates the further potential spaces that can be researched in the areas such as image and personality of destinations, marketing communications, destinations sustainability and strategy, emerging tourists' motives and virtual reality in tourism that significantly lacks perpetual evidence and the voids that can be researched. The note has also indicated the interlinkages of these pointers as the implications and expected researchable spheres. Being a short research note, the ideology of this note is to ignite the further research areas that support the core destination management and branding process and thus, the inferences and indications of research paradigms in this note is fully limited to the authors readings from the literary sources.

Introduction

Destination branding has become one of the highly sought-after fields in marketing arena, perhaps in tourism industrial outsets. With growing competition in the industry, destination management organizations and marketers are trying to position their tourism destinations as a valuable offering that serves wide range of tourists' motives. Though tourists (consumers) expectations, lifestyle and motives enhance day after day, the complexities in creating or identifying the values and perhaps delivering those lucratively, with the existing tourism resources elevate drastically. Having such vibrant challenges in strategy formulations, destination marketers strategize those to opportunities for effectively branding their destinations. Moreover, with the world confronting Pandemic, the industry is undergoing huge transactional crisis that has significant impact on the tourist's inflow, destinations income, local economies, and other allied industries such as transport and hospitality. Policy makers and Government, though imposes huge amicable regulations and touring facilities, still couldn't reach the frontier, mainly in two perspectives such as managing the exiting tourism attractions and offering it to the tourism market, and second is on achieving sustainable development despite the external crisis. Managing the destinations effectively and lucratively require careful integration of marketing efforts that evolves with the inculcation of insights generated from the research fraternity. This research note focuses on such key evolving paradigms of destination management and Branding, the recent studies that could be researched further in distinct perspectives and recommends the exclusivity of such research insights on industrial betterment.

Image and Personality of Destinations

Destination Image and Destination Personality are the two critical facets of Destination Branding and have huge impact on the tourist's behaviour and tourists' self-image (Ekinci, 2003; Shankar, 2019; Shankar, 2020a; Shankar, 2021a). Research on Destination Image focuses on the cognitive image – the existing belief of the destination, affective – the experience acquired in the destination and conative – the tourists' action to revisit or recommend, and these three aspects have been widely researched as these factors significantly impact tourists' perception and behaviour (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010; Shankar, 2020b). There have been

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many conceptual and hypothetical models portraying the distinct approaches of destination image on distinct countries, tourists' perception, behaviour, intention & recommendation and even on their changing motives (Pike & Ryan, 2004; Agapito, do Valle & Mendes, 2013; Basaran, 2016; Woosnam, Stylidis & Ivkov, 2020; Shankar, 2021). Literature indicates that though the studies in this arena has begun in late 1970s (Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010; Agapito, do Valle & Mendes, 2013) there is a need for further penetration on the aspects of destination image. One of the reasons is, the sustainability of destinations has become quest (Shankar, 2021b). Including that, changing perceptions due to the impact of consumers changing expectations, wants, motives and lifestyles, continuous research on this arena stands out as the need and mainly with different research approaches.

Destination Marketing Communication

Marketing destinations is highly critical for the tourism industry as the businesses associated with the outset require cutting edge competitive advantages (Walder, 2006; and Fernandez-Cavia, Marchiori, Haven-Tang & Cantoni, 2017). Most of the marketing executions happen through communications. There is enough evidence in the literature that people – that include destination marketers, tourists, and stakeholders communicate about the destinations through information sources. With the advent of Information and Communication Technology in tourism, the number of sources of information has been widely identified that facilitates the industry (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012) that includes social media, Search Engines, Online Contents, Video Streaming Services, Tourists blogs and even the corporate websites (Escobar-Rodríguez, Grávalos- Gastaminza & Pérez Calañas, 2016; Buhalis, 2003; Tan & Chen, 2012; Welbourne & Grant, 2016; Shankar, 2021c). Though the research focuses on the effectiveness of these digital communication tools, there is a void in terms of controlling information. That is, the information generated by the destination marketers would have primitive control whereas the *User Generated Contents* would not. For example, there is no research in tourism perspective that focuses on social listening of tourists on such platforms (the emotional psyche of tourists behind such writings on digital sources). This is critical as such materials online would impact not only tourists' perception (Destination Image) but also their behaviour – choice process, intention and recommendation.

Destination Sustainability and Strategy

Sustainability has become an integral aspect of Managing Tourism Destinations (Shankar, 2021b). Though there are research that focuses on the

destinations' behaviour towards sustainability - cannibalizing the sustainable cues (Yu & Hwang, 2019), still there is lack of clarity on the tourists' perceptive. Existing research works portray on tourists' salience on sustainability and knowledge about the sustainable tourism (Garg & Pandey's, 2020). However, the ultimacy of such studies have found the implications towards the environmental management and sustainability whereas the focus on social issues hasn't been covered (Shankar, 2021b). Accordingly, there are many destination management organizations and even the government authorities impose stringent adherence and policies on sustainability of the tourism destination. However, the scales or instruments measuring the effectiveness still not seen with greater importance. Similarly, as far as strategic management in tourism is concerned, research lacks evidence in measuring the reflection among tourists on the sustainable initiates by the thereof. Hence, this note indicates that the requirements of research in sustainability and strategy formulations are highly in demand.

Destination Governance

With fierce tourism industry's growth, the competitiveness of the destinations can be enhanced through professionalising the Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) through implementation of corporate governance policies (Pechlaner, Volgger & Herntrei, 2012). Stakeholders Management is one of the critical indicators of Destination Management, as it has huge relevance in imposing the consistent destination image to the wider tourism market segments and subsegments and perhaps positioning the destination in global outset (Heding, Knudtzen & Bjerre, 2008; Byrd, 2007; Hult, Mena, Ferrell & Ferrell, 2011; Shankar, 2020a). There are studies that focuses on stakeholders' cooperation and involvement (Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005; d'Angella & Go, 2009; Hall, 2011). Some studies focus on the role of stakeholders in Destination Branding (J. Morgan, Pritchard & Piggott, 2003), marketing on internal stakeholders (Kemp, Williams & Bordelon, 2012), destination branding identity in stakeholders' lens (Yusof & Ismail, 2014), and even stakeholders as the determinant for destinations success (Bornhorst, Ritchie & Sheehan, 2010). However, still there is a void in the stakeholders' perspectives in Destinations' Governance and branding and thus, this notes emphasis on the need for studies focusing on various perspectives of stakeholders in destination management and governance. Its decisive to indicate that stakeholders management is also a factor for destinations brand success (García, Gómez & Molina, 2012).

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Emerging Motives

Tourists characteristics have been highly looked referring to varied tourism studies that includes destinations image and personality, varying motives, information search behaviour, intention, recommendation and loyalty (Kim, Kim, Park & Guo, 2008; Alén, Losada & de Carlos, 2015; Shankar, 2019). There are various studies that are catering to tourists sociodemographic and travel characteristics, yet majority of the studies have been portrayed on tourists' motives. Eventually, the research in tourism and destination marketing arena have found some emerging motives and perhaps that transforms into tourism market segments such as meeting people of similar interest, family reunion, exploring distinct foods, experience flavours of wines, sun seeking, wildlife tourism and even gay tourism (Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002; Sekulić, Petrović & Dimitrijević, 2017; Yun & Lehto, 2009; Prebensen, Skallerud & Chen, 2010; Moscardo & Saltzer, 2004; Hughes, 2003). This research has explored the new tourism markets based on the motives however, with given pandemic era and changing lifestyles and lifecare of people, there are viability for new micro tourism markets within the segments based on tourists' motives. Research lacks evidence to support the forecasted tourism niche markets.

Virtual Reality in Tourism

Tourists demand for digitalized tourism, elevation of sharing economy, social media presence and penetration and perhaps the digitalization in tourism elements have acquired the importance of digitalization in tourism arena (Kumar & Shekhar, 2020). Also, tourism industry has been witnessed as the significant in digitalization of service economy (Khurramov, 2020). One of the most sought-after aspects in the digitalization of tourism destinations is Virtual Reality and has been highly found correlating with destination promotions and marketing (Rauscher, 2020; Lin, Huang & Ho, 2020). A Research work by Yung and Khoo-Lattimore (2017) raised 5 predominant research questions that focuses on the tourism sectors that has research viability referring Virtual Reality, the forms of Virtual reality, methodologies of research in virtuality, the theories exist and potentially be formulated, and the voids that exists connecting Virtual Reality and Tourism marketing. The research also indicated that the Destination Marketing Organizations had begun to invest on Virtual Reality as a marketing tool (Yung & Khoo-Lattimore, 2017). Though the research pertaining to this arena is being emerging, still there is limitation of evidence on various perspectives of Virtual Reality in Tourism (Yung, Khoo-Lattimore & Potter, 2020). There is research that even portrays on the how the

virtual platforms can be enhanced to attract potential tourists through effective information management (Huang, Backman, J. Backman & Chang, 2015). However, research in this arena lacks variety of evidence. For example, the focus on social listening in the virtual reality platforms seems unaddressed. Also, can virtual reality be an alternative form of physical tourism or as a strategical platform for effective branding.

Notes Implications

This research notes five has selective key paradigms that contributes to the destination management and marketing such as image and personality of destinations, marketing communication, sustainability and strategy, destination governance, emerging motives, and virtual reality in tourism. Though the research in Destination branding has focused on the generic aspects such as tourists' characteristics (Shankar, 2019), motives (Shankar, 2020b), information search and preference behaviour (Shankar, 2021c), behavioural intention and recommendation (Shankar, 2020a) etc., the outcomes have been facilitating the industry and organizations in the creating destinations salience campaigns, enhancing tourists experiences, serving all market segments, effective destination positioning through imposing the branding elements that determines competitive advantages. However, with the recent advent in technological interventions in the industry, there is a huge need for the researchers to produce evidence that interlinks the destination marketing and branding, perhaps destination management too. That is, image and personality of destinations have been looked at various countries' contexts, however having sustainability as the emerging need and strategy, do the destinations image and personality reflects on the aspects of sustainability elements? Also, where do such reflections happen – in the cues of destination? Or in the destination's behaviour? Or in the destination management organizations strategies? Being the digitalizing economy, do virtual reality influences the way in which destination identity is actually the same as destination image? In this case, is the focus on stakeholders or tourists or the organizations perception or combination of all? Is virtual reality, a digitalized strategy for destination marketing or as the new segment of tourism in due of pandemic? With growing sophisticated lifestyle of tourist perhaps the generations Z, have the market segments identified or created based on tourists' motives? Could marketing communications influence such emergence of motives or acts as an antecedent for such motives? Does the digital communication and information sources enhance the tourism destinations sustainable image and in such as what is the role of Argument and Virtual Reality? These are some of the

potential research opportunities that this research note indicates. Proceeding these notes to effective research through robust research methodologies and actable choice of contexts, the outcomes would create colossal evidence and theories that facilitates the destination marketing organizations, perhaps in the process of destination branding and positioning.

Conclusion

This research note has been framed with the intention to ignite the research works that are lacking, perhaps if executed would facilitate in destination branding and management strategies. Tourism industry, being one of the fastest growing arenas in the world commerce has been conceiving varied opportunities for the destination marketers to brand and position their destinations (could be with the natural or artificial tourists' attractions and attributes) in the global outset. However, the pandemic has hit the industry's transactions and tourists' inflow, perhaps the allied businesses in revenue generation and industry's economy. Academic research has contributed to the growth and development of tourism industry at various levels however, applications and recommendations require time to time updating so as to collide with markets expectations and organizations execution. Also, evidence from research has immensely contributed to the policy making and budgeting on the management of tourism resources. Hence, the research has to be more robust and sophisticated in all of its parameters and design. Accordingly, this research note has the viability of such inculcations in contributing to evidence creation and thereby contributing to the thereof. The indicated notes are solely based on the authors readings from the literature and other literary sources. Pointers of this notes are strictly limited to the number of readings gathered and inference drawn by the authors research interests.

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