

Some Theoretical and Practical issues on Tourism Destination Branding

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Abstract: *Along with the current trend of deeply and widely international economic integration, tourism is striving for prosperity and sustainable development. Building a tourism destination brand is seen as a significant lever in utilizing tourism industry strengths and potentials, a compass for its development, aiming to promote unique image and distinct values of the tourism brand. As tourism asserts its significance, countries around the world need to address the need of building a tourism destination branding strategy to position the national or local tourism brand to help the tourism industry grow rapidly, sustainably, effectively, contributing to the socio-economic development of the country.*

Keywords: *tourism brand, tourism destination, local tourism brand.*

1. Concept of “tourist destination” brand

According to the Law on Tourism⁽¹⁾, a “tourism destination” or tourist spot “is a place having attractive tourism resources that satisfy the sightseeing demand of tourists.” Researchers clarify this term from many different perspectives - “a tourism destination is a specifically defined geographical area in which tourists enjoy different types of tourism experiences”⁽²⁾ or “tourism destinations are also considered a special form of tourism product/market from business administration and tourism marketing views”⁽³⁾. The World Tourism Organization⁽⁴⁾ introduces a more specific definition: “a tourist destination is a unique place where a visitor spends at least one night and exhibit(s) tourism products such as attractions, support services, and tourism resources complete with defined management, physical and administrative boundaries, and a well-known image defining its market competitiveness.” Tourism destinations can be identified on different scales, from a nation (Vietnam, Australia...), a large area covering several countries (Indochina peninsula, Africa), a region (the west coast of the United States, Normandy, Central Highlands...), a province or a corresponding administrative territory (Guangxi, Thua Thien Hue...), an island (Phu Quoc, Bali, Hawaii...), to a city, a town, a village or an independent center with a strong appeal (national park, Disneyland world, Sentosa...). A tourist destination is a special tourism product created, managed and introduced with the participation of different organizations including state management

agencies, tourism associations, tourism service providers, communities, media agencies, etc. According to UNWTO⁽⁵⁾, basic components of a tourist destination include factors that create the appeal of the destination ensuring tourists' satisfaction such as the attractiveness of tourism resources, public services and amenities utilization, accessibility to the destination, tourism human resources, destination image, price, and so on.

Based on the above-mentioned brand definition, a destination brand can be defined as a collection of positive impressions of tourists based on the destination image and personal experience, with differences and identifiability among other destinations.

Destination branding includes the building, marketing and promotion of national, regional and local brands. That is, the process of building, promoting the image and reputation of a locality by developing and creating comprehensive brand identity based on the characteristics of that place.

The purpose of this activity is to create real experiences for different target groups, creating a new ideology in the community towards improved quality of life as well as competitiveness in the current economic context. More importantly, local branding is to contribute to building trust, passion, interest and connection through unique stories, innovations in identity, creativity and new exciting experiences in a "no longer new" place.

This activity includes a set of tools and activities communicating to promote brand recognition; It also includes the processes of designing, editing and promoting the brand over time.

Local destination brands not only bring practical benefits to the government, but also create positive effects on investment efficiency and the market while stimulating internal forces. In short, they contribute to the sublimation of identity values and bring sustainable benefits to the local development.

2. Some practical experiences in building tourism destination brands in some cities and countries around the world

Ha Long City

On the 20th anniversary of Ha Long Bay's recognition as a World Natural Heritage by UNESCO, Quang Ninh province aimed to become a locality with strong development in services, industry, international tourism center, one of the economic locomotives of the North and the whole country by 2020. To achieve the above goal, along with overall socio-economic strategies, it was necessary for Quang Ninh to build a strong local brand in order to create better competitive advantages to attract investment capital, business partners and tourists.

The idea of “Ha Long Smile” was chosen based on the core values of the land and people of Ha Long, Quang Ninh, which are: *Happiness, Peace, Hospitality, Friendliness, Joy, Openness, Desire to make friends, Desire to do business, and Enthusiasm.*

“Ha Long Smile” calls upon every Quang Ninh citizen to smile sincerely, openly, hospitably, politely, brightly in the building a brand of a hospitable, friendly and polite land; thereby helping to increase the efficiency of the tourism and service industry of Quang Ninh province, contributing to economic growth and social progress.

Originating from the “Ha Long Smile” brand positioning, the communication strategy has been deployed with various measures: from raising awareness to changing behavior. People are provided information on the significance and effectiveness of an amicable attitude towards tourists, investors, and business partners; knowledge and skills about friendliness; importance and meaning of hospitality. They are encouraged to smile when meeting guests - to be friendly, hospitable, and enthusiastic. This has shaped the “Ha Long Smile” culture.

Many ideas proposed to promote the effectiveness of the “Ha Long Smile” program have been professionally researched and developed with a methodical and specific communication roadmap, namely building a Green Ha Long program to protect the Ha Long Bay environment, organizing a three-day high-class Ha Long Music Festival with a series of events at different locations...

The communication campaign “Quang Ninh welcomes you with both genuine smiles and open hearts” and a key video clip “Ha Long Smile” was the first opening campaign with the participation of all provincial leaders. It features nine leaders standing at famous tourist destinations calling on people to show hospitality with sincere smiles.

The provincial leaders’ appearances are followed with the message: “Ha Long Smile” program will be the first step in the long journey to build a local brand, aiming to position Quang Ninh as a place attractive to investors as well as domestic and international tourists.

Following the launching of the “Ha Long Smile” program, Quang Ninh Provincial People’s Committee immediately set up a hotline to receive all feedback and recommendations from people and tourists regarding tourism services. The Provincial People’s Committee also issued an official letter assigning tasks to sectors and organizations to build the “Ha Long Smile” program into a unique brand of the land and people of Quang Ninh.

Along with the specific action programs introduced by provincial leaders, many meaningful actions have been taken by associations, groups, unions and businesses in a response to the recall.

Da Nang City

Da Nang's tourism brand is positioned as "*The most livable city in Vietnam*" with the idea of the "*FantastiCity!*"

The branding strategy is well defined in the brand identity of Da Nang tourism. The logo and slogan express the diversity and vitality of Da Nang tourism; shapes in the logo are featured with strong rising lines and vibrant colors. The strategy of building the Da Nang tourism brand is based on the values of its nature, landscapes, culture and people. Each color, each beauty that visitors perceive upon coming to Da Nang is for them to embrace good feelings for the land before fully enjoying the complete beauty of Da Nang. The message of the campaign "Joining hands for an increasingly civilized, friendly and hospitable Da Nang" aims to create a good impression on delegates and guests attending APEC 2017 in Da Nang, thereby building and forming civilized habits, behaviors, polite and friendly attitudes of cadres, civil servants, and public employees of organizations, businesses, and companies in the city as well as calling on and mobilizing people to readily warmly welcome friends and tourists with a friendly smile. The campaign's action plan is divided into three phases: Phase 1, launching and promoting the campaign on media and social networks; Phase 2: organizing training courses and fostering behaviors and communication skills for service staff at restaurants, food and beverage establishments, shopping centers, tourism service establishments, etc.; Phase 3: organizing interdisciplinary inspection teams to inspect the organizational work of relevant functional units, accommodation establishments, service facilities, and tourist attractions throughout the city to evaluate the implementation of the Campaign.

In addition, Da Nang tourism brand has been developed with smart technology application, towards a smart city. Da Nang is a leading province in the country in developing tourism in a smart direction and has initially obtained some achievements. In addition to regularly using electronic marketing methods to promote tourism, Da Nang has built software systems and utilities to support tourists such as "Da Nang Tourism", "in Da Nang", "Go! Da Nang," and "Da Nang Bus".

Currently, in Da Nang, in addition to promoting tourism on famous social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, developing smart technologies in tourism will be a bridge to bring tourists to Da Nang. People and tourists can use utilities from the smart application of the Da Nang Tourism industry at any time. The application operates 24/7 and is regularly updated with cultural and tourist events in the city and surrounding areas.

Las Vegas, USA

In the “hottest” entertainment city in the world, Las Vegas, one may easily lose track of time. It is a bustling and lively city filled with tourists. Las Vegas is the most populous city in Nevada and is a world-famous city for entertainment, resorts, gambling and cuisine. It can be said that Las Vegas is also the most famous tourist destination in the United States.

However, it is no coincidence that this glamorous city has attained that fame. Part of the city’s appeal has been created from the success of the promotional campaign, building the brand of Las Vegas as a city that brings freedom and openness to anyone who sets foot here. The impressive advertising campaign of Agency R&R Partner, also the slogan, the consistent message that Las Vegas tourism sends to visitors is “What happens here, stays here”. This is also one of the most famous slogans in modern tourism marketing and one of the most recognized and mentioned advertising campaigns in any industry. This phrase is not only a spark that attracts millions of visitors to the “City of Sin”, but it also inspired an Usher’s song and the movie Hangover, it was also quoted by Laura Bush and used to close the Oscars ceremony.

In order to turn Las Vegas into the largest adult entertainment center in the world in general and the United States in particular, in 2003, the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Bureau (LVCVA) published a series of promotional videos over a decade aimed at making Vegas into something more than just a gambling center. These commercials convey a distinct sense of humor that makes everyone laugh. The campaign includes other forms of advertising which are the means of delivering the message most effectively and clearly.

The connection between Las Vegas and tourists is freedom. Freedom on two levels. The freedom to do anything, eat anything, wear anything, and to feel anything. In short, the freedom to be someone we can’t be at home. And the freedom from all the constraints of everyday life. Just a thought of Las Vegas wards off worries and bad things. At that point, the branding strategy becomes clear. Talk about that need. Create an indelible connection between Las Vegas and the freedom we all crave for.

Scotland

One of the tourist destinations that has witnessed a surge in tourist arrivals is Scotland. Statistics from the UK Office for National Statistics show that tourism in Scotland increased by 2% in 2017 to 14.1 million visitors including domestic and international visitors⁽⁶⁾. To achieve such impressive results, in 2016, VisitScotland launched its biggest global campaign “*Scotland. A spirit of its own*” to attract visitors by evoking emotions via various aspects, including

the country's media, its outstanding and diverse landscape, cultural elements such as arts and cuisine.

In February 2016, VisitScotland launched its global campaign "Spirit of Scotland" following a consumer survey which shows that the spirit of Scotland is one of the best factors that attract tourists.

The campaign consists 25 videos promoting the seven spiritual values that tourists gain when traveling to Scotland: "spirit, courage, humour, fun, shine, determination and warmth". The image of Scotland via movies is the country with a spirit of its own. That spirit is reflected in everything: majestic landscapes, great cities, a proud heritage and warm people.

people of Scotland. The campaign aims to raise the spirit and values of Scotland to historic heights by evoking the strength of a nation via tourism promotion.

The consumer research shows that Spirit of Scotland is one of the most evocative ways to attract visitors to Scotland, and the campaign has been implemented across television, digital and print marketing. The soundtrack was composed by Giles Lamb, a British composer based in Glasgow, and performed by the Royal Scottish National Orchestra.

In the first nine months of the campaign, VisitScotland saw the highest levels of visitor engagement, with 65 million people watching their film. In addition, the hashtag scot spirit, with which people were encouraged to use to share their stories about Scotland, previously launched alongside the campaign and was used more than 1,000 times a day. As of 19 April 2018, it was used 377,963 times on Instagram.

In November 2016, VisitScotland had 841,000 Facebook followers, 231,000 Twitter followers and 258,000 Instagram followers. As of 19 April 2018, the figures grew to 1.2 million Facebook followers, 479,000 Instagram followers and 315,000 Twitter followers, and around 12,000 YouTube subscribers.

Singapore

Singapore's tourism brand positioning is: "*Singapore - Passion Made Possible*". This is based on a quantitative and qualitative study of the country - a survey of more than 4,500 people on their views of Singapore. The survey subjects were local residents, foreigners in Singapore and people from 10 other countries (Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, China, India, Australia, the US, the UK, Germany and Belgium). The results show that "passion" and "potential" are the factors that characterize the spirit of Singapore. In which, "potential" is seen as the attraction of Singapore, while "passion" is seen as the driving force behind those potentials.

Accordingly, the idea for the strategy emphasizes a unique, culturally diverse Singapore where any tourist can enjoy its beauty and values. The image of Singapore is not only as a country, but also as a persona with full of passions, and it is those passions that will unlock the potentials of people. This is clearly expressed in communication activities.

With regards to digital media channels, the rebranding campaign continues to use a drive-to-web strategy, taking visitors to the VisitSingapore.com website - where they can explore Singapore online, plan itineraries and share travel experiences. The information posted on the website is carefully crafted in terms of content and format, providing tourists many suggestions for exploration. To run the campaign effectively and unanimously, Singapore's tourism brand campaign continues to engage users on media and social networks. Singapore call the KOLs representing its campaign "Passion Ambassadors", including Chef Malcolm Lee, a foodie who shines on the global culinary stage with the dishes his grandmother used to cook when he was a child, his restaurant, Candlenut, is now the only Peranakan restaurant to be awarded a Michelin star; Mark Ong, a designer who turns his childhood passion for skateboards to streetwear designs and customizations, his clients are celebrities, including Kobe Bryant and Mike Shinoda; Kyra Poh, an active person who, at the age of 14, made a name for herself by becoming the fastest person in the world at the Wind Games, an indoor skydiving competition. The Singapore's tourism branding campaign has resulted in an accelerated growth of the tourism industry. From January to May 2019, there were 7.8 million international tourist arrivals, up 1.49% compared to the same period in 2018. According to the forecast of the Singapore Tourism Board, the number of tourist arrivals in this country could reach 18.7 million to 19.2 million in 2020. The continuous increase in the number of tourist arrivals in Singapore shows the appeal of Singapore's national tourism brand and the success of this campaign./.

(1) Law on Tourism No. 09/2017/QH14 dated June 19, 2017.

(2) Cliff Shults (2007), *Competition and Destinations*, Full Bright Curriculum.

(3) Nguyen Bach Khoa - Nguyen Viet Thai (2008), *Tourism Textbook*, Statistics Publishing House.

(4) UN WTO Annual Report (2017), World Tourism Organization.

(5) UN WTO Annual Report (2017), World Tourism Organization.

(6) Greg Dickinson (2018), *The Rough Guide to Scotland*.