Tourist destination strategic planning:
The role of stakeholders, internet and marketing in the brand development

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Abstract
The tourist destination strategic planning should include, from the beginning, the brand image to be divulged. For that, the role of stakeholders, internet and marketing should be taken into consideration to empower the brand image.

This article enlists those roles, so that the tourist destination strategic planning can include them in the elaboration of its plans.

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Introduction
A tourist destination´s strategic planning is no easy task and must incorporate knowhow. The success of the destination will always be linked to its brand image. To understand what knowhow is linked to the brand image, we studied the following concepts: tourist destination strategic planning; the role of stakeholders; the role of internet and marketing; brand image empowerment; tourist destination brand image.

Methodology
We analyzed several research articles published between 1999 and 2016 about tourist destination strategic planning, as well as the fundamental characteristics used to consolidate brand imaging.

At this moment, we still regard literature review as one of the main means to find out the state of the art of the topic under study. It enabled us to elaborate this article through the comparison of several sources of information and identify various basic viewpoints in the strategic planning process of a tourist destination. We used literature review related to the following topics: tourist destination strategic planning; the role of stakeholders; the role of internet and marketing; brand image empowerment; tourist destination brand image.

Tourist destination strategic planning
Tourism has been assuming an increasingly vital role in the economic development of nations and economic globalization. Being an import and export industry, it promotes currency exchange between countries. There is a growing number of investigators that characterize it as a phenomenon that conditions the global economy (Mota, Ladeiras & Costa, 2007).

As per Mota, Ladeiras & Costa (2007), tourism activity cannot be seen solely from the macroeconomic point of view, but also as a local phenomenon, that plays an important role in the lives of people and in the locations. Seen as a “miraculous solution” by local, regional and national authorities of depressed economies, it needs proper planning.

In order to ensure the sustenance of the destiny, and maintain or increase its competitive potential, it is imperative to create and develop Tourism Development Plans, in order to make tourism...
the economic development engine, without harming the culture, the heritage or the human factors (Mota, Ladeiras & Costa, 2007).

For the Tourism Development Plans, there are four phases to be followed:

- **Phase 1 – Auditing**: To characterize all the tourist destination components.
- **Phase 2 – Planning**: To establish a role model adapted to each case.
- **Phase 3 – Development**: To create programs/actions to implement the role model above.
- **Phase 4 – Monitoring**: To continuously evaluate the results achieved, in order to evaluate the planning efficiency.

In strategic planning it is essential to understand the role of stakeholders, internet and marketing in the empowerment of the brand image of the tourist destination.

**The role of stakeholders**

Tourist destination stakeholders are all those who work in the said market, such as: all the companies located in the destination, their competitors, workers, resident population, tourists, government and its local bodies, lodging, boarding and leisure units, tourist operators, transport companies, etc. If all these elements are not duly coordinated among themselves and well informed, the possibilities of failure are quite high, bringing failure to their individual services too. Effectively the tourism performance depends on the relationship between stakeholders and their individual characteristics (Pais, 2013).

The involvement and participation of all stakeholders depends on the synergies created amongst them and that will ultimately bring fame to the tourist destination. Tourism related expenses are one of the first factors that show which stakeholders are involved in the region and depending on the economic structure of the same, these expenses could result into a multiplier effect. They may result in increased production and job creation, based on various stakeholder relationships (Pais, 2013).

The initial tourist spending will create direct revenue sources for the airlines, travel agencies, hotels, shops, restaurants, among others involved in the tourism system; these will subsequently create indirect revenue sources, while purchasing whatever they need to sell their services, such as food supplies for restaurants, products for shops, etc. The ultimate beneficiaries of these direct and indirect revenue sources will generate further revenues in other markets, as is the case of their personal lives (housing, leisure, food, etc.). Here we have the economic multiplier of the tourism system, making it clear that it transversally affects all the markets it is related to. Thus it can be said that the tourist destination is made up of all these organizations that are intertwined (Pais, 2013).

As per Pais (2013), a tourist destination is a system of networks that influences each other in order to have a rational and well sustained growth. The empowerment of the brand image of a tourist destination depends thus on the level of stakeholder involvement.

**The role of internet and marketing**

Presently the competition among destinations is getting fiercer. One of the main requisites of a tourist destination managing entity is to define strategies and implement proper marketing policies. Many authors have demonstrated the importance of the internet regarding the information search by tourists. The internet requires constant updates of information and travel plans and offers and thus any tourist destination that wishes to satisfy the needs of its modern clients should depend on the new technology (Roque, Fernandes & Raposo, 2017).

Tourism marketing is characterized by an offer made up of several tourist products and offers about the geographical territory. The supply is constituted by the transport facilities, lodging, complementary services and natural, historical, artistic, gastronomic and cultural resources. The demand is composed by national and international tourists (Gouvêa & Yamauchi, 1999).

One of the main differences between tourism marketing and the marketing of other service sectors is that the tourism sector must have a combination of services and goods, where the role of services is more prominent. One of the peculiarities of the destinations marketing is that the service does not match the consumer’s needs, but the consumer seeks the service as he feels is the most adequate for him (Gouvêa & Yamauchi, 1999).
Tourism marketing must have a basic strategy if it is to succeed. And that is to know well its real and potential clients, so that it is able to develop products and concepts that are able to satisfy the needs and desires. The marketing activity should go beyond the promotional activities that are limited to demand generation, and must be used in a responsible way so that the results are a reflection of well planned actions (Gândara, Souza & Lacay, 2011).

The internet became a key element in tourist destination communication, given its vast reach to potential visitors all over the globe. The online consumer has also become more demanding and tries to collect as much information as possible before deciding on the destination to visit. So the web has thus become one of the most powerful tools in the promotion of tourism, as it enables a set of multiple actions such as: making online reservations, requesting specific information about a destination or service, etc. It also allows for the exchange of experiences between tourists, which may be crucial at times to decide the credibility of a tourist destination, as well its choice, or even its elimination from the options.

As per Sousa (2014), the internet is seen as the greatest search tool, influencing consumers´ preferences at the time of acquiring a product or service. So it is an essential means of communication for the promotion of tourism and tourist destinations; it has the efficiency to motivate people to travel, to know the world and even to induce them to select a particular destination.

In today’s competitive environment in tourist destinations, the information relayed to tourists should be unique to help in the decision making process. It is the duty of the promoting entities of a tourist destination to provide quality information that may indeed influence the decision of the tourists and that are true and of easy comprehension (Sousa, 2014).

Further, as per Sousa (2014), internet offers the following advantages for promoting a destination:

- Ability to reach a very large number of consumers all over the world, fast and at a low cost.
- Betterment in communications and relations.
- Reduction in production and distribution costs of materials such as banners and pamphlets.
- Disclosure of more complete information.
- Capacity to make reservations in a faster and more efficient manner.
- Acquisition of information more efficiently.

The challenges to tourism are to accompany the technological advances. These provide greater opportunities and improved productivity, development of human resources and construction/reconstruction of a new image. It is a must to identify fast the needs and desires of tourists and the preferences that cause changes in the demand, and firstly, the destinations must offer services that are highly competitive, capable of catering to the needs and desires of clients while at the same time inculcating an authentic and unforgettable experience (Nino & Gouvêa, 2006).

A good option to keep a destination competitive is to take into consideration the new products, new destinations, new marketing techniques and new consumers. The tourism market is in constant change, and it is necessary to pay attention to some tendencies such as:

- Growth of the demand and supply specialization level.
- Growing demand for the well-being and more active vacations.
- Search for complementarities in all travel patterns (for example, sun and sea tourism with a combination of nature based activities).
- Growth of tailor-made trips, given the consumer knowledge levels and the facility to buy several services and prepare an individually suited package.
- Growing demand for the authentic while shunning the artificial, forces destinations to develop new innovative products where the consumer can experience a real experience based on the local culture, such as its gastronomy, etc.
- The search for the unique and the exclusive, known as the new luxury.
- The essence of the combination of opposite products, such as a safari in Africa with the best lodging offer.
- Knowledge acquisition: Just like the growing search for the unique experience, there is also the demand for an experience that can motivate tourists to increase their knowledge.
Summarizing, the tourist is no longer searching for a tourism product, but for an all inclusive experience, which is empowered by internet and marketing promoting the brand image of the destination (Carvão, 2010).

**Brand image empowerment**

The empowerment of a successful destination implies partnerships between the private and public sectors, interested in a strategic plan with common objectives and the role that tourism stakeholders, internet and marketing have, as seen, in developing a brand image that exudes success. To reinforce this idea, the tourism development of a region implies also the development of its physical and human resources. If the destination management follows this process, it will create local synergies, based on policies, actions and measures of regional to international scale (Martins, Fernandes & Mendes, 2014).

So, corporate governance is essential to analyze the functioning, efficiency and sustainability of organizations, operating under the law, to ensure that the measures are being well applied, to cater to the public and private interests (Machado, 2015).

The grading of human resources is essential. In fact, in an effective model of tourist destinations, the professional training of tourist operators and awareness of the local resident population, to create a culture of hospitality are two fundamental variables (Pollice & Lulio, 2011). So the need to give importance to training via partnerships with educational institutions should be created. The tourism sector still employs non qualified human resources that results in weak tourism management, even though it is a sector that should have its own management techniques. Consequently the mentality of the sector has to be the valorization of better service quality and management excellence (Vieira, 2015).

In an analysis, the main question should be, what is the tourist attractiveness configuration that the territory has to offer (depending on its tourism resource), and not what type of tourist attractiveness configuration should be built. The tourism evaluation carries a strong territorial component, and the analysis should be aimed at this factor, and not at the ambitions of the residents or private organizations, that are solely relevant during the destination image creation (Pollice & Lulio, 2011).

Thus there are three inherent components to a tourist destination:

- The tourist motivation that lead to the destination selection.
- The effects and impact (positive and negative) that the demand has on the tourist.
- The way the destination is going to manage the demand and supply.

This way, to verify the tourism potential of a region it is necessary to check the evaluation model used, that should also establish the priority value of the investments, evaluate till which level of sustainability of growth (or its absence) increases or decreases the potential, compare tourist offers with those of the competition and evaluate the attraction capacity of the location after a positive happening (for example, after the recovery of a damaged area) or a negative happening (for example a natural calamity) (Cunha, 2008).

In short, a tourist destination attracts new visitors while innovating, in terms of quality, and packaging the offer as per the target public, corresponding to the initial expectations of the tourist and creating the fidelity changes. This way, the territory brand image is created, promoting its singularity, in order to compete in the market (Pinto, 2013).

**Tourist destination brand image**

The marketing strategy has to identify what is appealing and of greater potential in the destination and the conditions to create related activities with the characteristics of the location. Basically, the marketing applied to tourist destinations functions like any other plan of marketing, as it has to analyze the product and its market, and create strategies that depict an attractive image of the destination, so that it is efficiently promoted and brings in positive results in the long run. This way, the concept of branding and brand image also apply to tourist destinations. The destination brand is what differentiates it and the brand image is built to transmit the identity of the location to the target audience. The development is done as a result of the analysis made to the market for the
destination development, focusing on its products, in order to create actions that influence the public demand for said products and to attract a segmented search and demand to the destination (Pimentel, Pinho & Vieira, 2006).

Based on the mental image of the destination, the individual tourist will be influenced on his decision on whether to repeat or not his visit and/or recommendation to others. The image associated to the destination is in tune with the local characteristics, attractions, residents and their lifestyle or any specific attraction (for example, an event). A branded tourist destination is a must for the visitor to recognize and remember it. So the branding identifies and differentiates the destination, by using techniques that project its attractiveness, exposing its unique identity that can be recognized, or in other words, the creation of a unique and strong image in the minds of people that will represent the destination identity and its face value versus that of the competitors (Paulo, 2013).

The visualization of tourist destination images in the most varied backgrounds has been the target of great influence in the decision making process while selecting a tourist destination. As per example, the images transmitted in the social networks cover a vast number of people who search it for more information about a certain destination. These networks can affect the credibility, based on the online recommendations and criticisms that may play a more important role in decision making than that of the institutional information on the destination. That is why it is fundamental to take into consideration while creating the brand image of the destination, which type of image is being depicted, its election and its message (Pinto, 2016).

In a tourist destination context or in the case of consumer products, the image makes the brand, contributing for its creation and for its market success, even if the brand itself is greater than the depicted image, or when the brand covers two types of images: the projected one and the perceived one. Nevertheless, visitors and potential visitors can understand the meanings in the depicted image differently from what was intended to be transmitted due to several factors including for example, the information shared by independent sources like the internet or social networks, among others. This way, the differences between the projected image and the perceived image could be a key success variable for the destination marketing activities (Neves, 2012).

It should be noted that while creating the image, it can have a positive or negative impact, as it depends on the tourist’s perception after his visit. He may consider it to be up to his expectations or not, so the tourist destination must always strive to satisfy its visitors, to avoid the transmission of a negative message to potential new visitors (Pimentel, Pinho & Vieira, 2006).

It is important to refer that now-a-days the use of destination branding should transmit confidence in terms of the visitors experience regarding quality, during the offer search process, so that repeat visitors remember the destination and reduce their searching time and are at ease while making their decisions (Paulo, 2013).

The consumer’s perspective then becomes an efficiency measurement method and the positive perception of the destination will assume an important role in the visitors’ behavior. As a result of this type of evaluation, the destination marketing managers should adequate their offer to the needs of the tourist based on the new tendencies and develop communication, promotion and efficient positioning strategies (Neves, 2012).

Conclusion

The stakeholders, internet and tourism marketing play a crucial role in the empowerment of the brand image of a tourist destination and thus the strategic planning should compulsorily include them. The good brand image of a tourist destination is fundamental for its consistency, as it is the determinant in the selection process for the location. So any strategic planning of a tourist destination should consider the development and sustainability of the brand image.

Bibliography


