

## **TOURISM BRANDING AND ITS RELEVANCE IN TODAY'S MARKETING SCENARIO**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Being one among the rapidly growing industries that fosters economic development of a country, tourism considerably increases the countries social and cultural status and acts as an elevated platform for earning foreign exchange. Tourism is usually described as a highly decentralized industry consisting of enterprises different in sizes, location, functions, types of organizations, range of services provided and methods used to market and sell them. Tourism marketing faces a great challenge because the customer purchases a series of services, but is left with very little concrete value at the completion of his trip. A key challenge is to convince potential customers that the item they are purchasing provides good value for the price, and that the services will be as described and expected. Tourism Branding has become a viable metaphor not only for building destination brands but also providing a unique identity for tourism places. It is about combining all things associated with the 'place', one of the essential p's of marketing. This paper aims to understand and explain the role played by brand personality in selection of a tourism place. The concepts of tourism branding were being analyzed by reviewing literature on brand personality, place, product/brand and destination branding. The present study reveals that brand personality has great relevance to destination personality and has positive impact on perceived destination image and also on the behavioral intentions of the tourists. This paper reveals certain steps essential for creating a successful branding strategy that may result in earning maximum returns. Though the importance of destination personality has been acknowledged, very less empirical research has identified its multifold dimensions. This analysis would further help the researchers in marketing to probe into the relation between brand personality and destination branding on a major level in order to build a better tourism destination.

**KEYWORDS:** Brand, Brand Personality, Tourism Branding, Destination Personality, Destination Branding

### **INTRODUCTION**

Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Lalam in his Book, "INDIA-2020-A Vision for a New Millennium" has quoted that in the year 2020, the driving force for economic growth and employment will increasingly come from the service sectors like tourism, construction, retailing, education, health and entertainment. These sectors will expand more rapidly than ever." Tourism and Travel is one such sector which is expected to contribute Rs 85000 crores to the GDP. Tourism denotes temporary short-term movements of people to destinations outside the places they normally live and work (Mathew Arthur). The officially accepted definition by World Tourism Organization is "Tourism comprises of activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purpose" (Tourism: Principles, Practices, Philosophies-Charles R. Goeldner and J.R. Brent Ritchie) The success of a Tourism destination is often measured in terms of growth in the number of visitors and their expenditures (Lew Alnan). Tourism is a rapidly growing phenomenon and has become one of the largest industries that has huge potential to expand. The impact of tourism on any economy is highly varied. On one hand, it plays an important and definitely positive role in the socio-economic and political development in destination countries by offering new employment opportunities, earning

foreign exchange and improving bi-lateral trade relations and the like. (Dinan & Sargeant, 2000). Tourism Industry always has created strong economic value by earning foreign exchange, providing good number of jobs, and also boosting related businesses in the country.

India has been distinct in offering varied niches to its tourists and to large extent shares a competitive edge when compared to its competitors. This emerging sector offers an array of travel services benchmarking India at a global level with its products like adventure, wildlife, historical monuments, culture & heritage, nature, pilgrimage and so on. As times are changing and so are the demands and expectations of the travelers who are endlessly in search for experiences, adventures, lifestyles which should be invariably distinct, unique and innovative and eventually paved way for various concepts defining different paradigm in the arena of tourism. In today's increasingly competitive tourism market, destination branding can be an affective technique for building successful site images, marketing plans and programs. The historical roots of branding can be traced back to the late 19th century with the development of branded consumer products such as Gillette and Quaker Oats (Low and Fullerton 1994<sup>12</sup>), researchers have recently considered branding as a "burning topic" with many contemporary books discussing this concept (D. Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000; D. Aaker 1996; Bedbury and Fenichell 2002; Carpenter, Glazer, and Nakamoto 1994; Kania 2001; Kapferer 1997; Upshaw 1995). In the world of generic marketing literature, branding of goods and services is well documented, but the application of branding techniques to tourism destinations, is yet to be fully developed (Gnoth, 1998; Pritchard and Morgan, 1998). In 1998, tourism destination branding started to gain momentum at that year's Travel and Tourism Research Association's Annual Conference. Since then, tourism branding has been further explored in the aptly titled book, Destination Branding (Morgan, Pritchard, and Pride 2002). In this study, branding theories are being applied to tourism destinations, and they examine the relationship between destination image and destination personality. Maria, C.; Estevao, S. and Ferreira, J., Joao (2009) presented a figure of tourism cluster based on the existing studies on tourism. It can be accepted that tourism reveals itself as one of the activities with the greatest potential in the world. As a product, tourism has the highest growth potential that can be consumed locally and plays a prominent role in the local development strategy. This research aims to reveal various concepts of competitiveness of tourism for the development of the nation. The study is based on existing literatures which rely on secondary data that can be easily obtained. The theoretical aspects covered here can help in understanding the basic concepts and the competitiveness of tourism. It may help to identify gaps and the potential for competitive development, which will assist the competent entities in its management. Also the study reveals that very limited research has been devoted to tourism brands and brand constructs in promoting tourist attractions. Hence, aim of this research is to provide an approach to build an effective destination brand.

A figure of Tourism Cluster was presented by Maraia, C., Estevao, S and Ferreira, J., Joao(2009) based on the existing studies on tourism. As per the authors elaboration, we can conclude that there are no substantial differences between the cluster's definition in a general scope, and the cluster's concept when applied to the tourism industry. The tourism cluster in general is defined as a geographical concentration in a region of companies and institutions inter-related in the industry.



Source: Maria, C., Estevao, S. and Ferreira, J., Joao(2009)

**Figure 1: Representation of a Tourism Cluster**

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To understand the concept of tourism destination.
- To understand the meaning and definition of tourism branding.
- To analyze whether tourism destinations do possess brand personality and
- To understand the various underlying dimensions of destination personality

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

### Branding Defined

Place branding (also known as destination branding, place marketing or place promotion) is a relatively new umbrella term encompassing nation branding, region branding and city branding. Apart from this, the other 7p's of Tourism marketing are product, price, promotion, people, planning, programming and physical evidence. In simple terms, brand represents the association made between a buyer and a product (Schultz and Barnes 1999). Today's consumers have more product choice but less decision making time than ever before. Consequently, a brand that can foster and simplify purchase decisions, reduce purchase risk, create and deliver expectations is invaluable (Keller 2003). In the context of tourism, a geographic location is a destination brand. A destination brand may be defined as a 'name, symbol, logo, word or other graphic that not only identifies but also 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 destination experience' (Kerr 2006, 277).

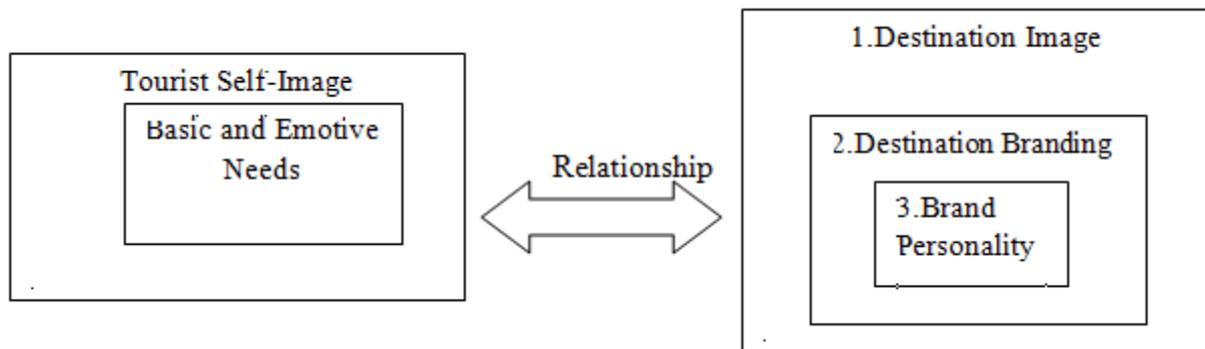
### Tourism Branding

Tourism basically entails a search for that which is extraordinary (Urry, 1990) compared to one's everyday life and environment. With the advent of growing global competition, destinations are becoming highly substitutable which results in a constant tussle among destination marketing organizations (DMOs) to attract travelers" (Pike and Ryan, 2004 in Ekinci, 2006). The political, economic and cultural existence of places outside the tourism context means that tourism destinations have a more comprehensive meaning potential than most other consumer products, and meanings which are closely tied up with the present and historical relations between the country of origin of the tourist and that of the

destination” (Therkelsen, 2003). A tourist destination may be viewed as an amalgam of individual products and experiences that combine to form the total experience of the area visited (Murphy in Ekinici, 2006). Researchers agree that in today’s competitive tourism market, destination branding is an effective tactic for building successful tourism images and programs (Morgan & Pritchard, 1999; Morgan, Pritchard, & Piggott, 2003). For the tourist, the product covers the whole set of the experiences “from the moment he leaves home until he returns” (Middleton, 2001:122). Ekinici & Hosany, (2006) specified a distinctive and emotionally attractive destination personality which is shown to have an influence on the perceived image of a place. This in turn, influences on tourists choice behavior. Ekinici (2003) propounded a framework, in which he cleared out the point that the destination image is built on three components: the overall image, the destination brand and, within it, brand personality (marked with numbers 1-3 in Figure 2).

## DESTINATION IMAGE AND DESTINATION BRANDING

A tourist destination can be viewed as an amalgam of individual products and experiences that combine to form the total experience of the area he/she visited (Murphy in Ekinici, 2006). Researchers do agree that in today’s competitive tourism market, destination branding is an effective tactic for building successful tourism images and programs. (Morgan & Pitchard & Piggott, S2003).



**Figure 2: Destination Image and Destination Branding**

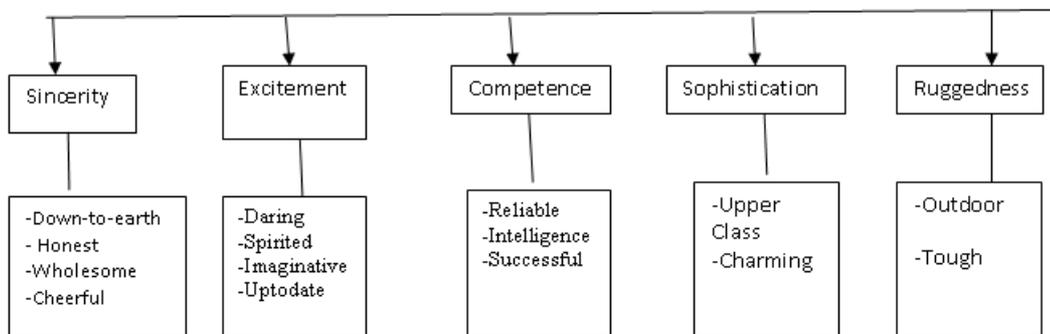
**Source:** From Ekinici, Y. (2003) in “Using Brand Personality to Differentiate Regional Tourism Destination” by Murphy, L., Moscardo, G., & Benckendorff, P., 2007,

Thus, it is very clear from the above figure that the destination image connected to the tourist’s self image. Accordingly, tourism destinations are intangible or abstract because travel experiences cannot be processed or evaluated before purchasing (Awaritefe, 2003). The aim of applying branding in tourism industry is to differentiate a tourism destination from others and creating a unique brand image of a certain place in the minds of target market. The aim of destination branding is to accentuate the singularity of a tourism brand and present a favorable image of the mentioned brand to a target market and so the marketing communications has become important for destinations to promote their brand identity and brand image to target audiences (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991).

### Brand Personality

Destination branding is about how consumers perceive the destination in their minds. Branding a destination is not just about creating a logo or a slogan. It is about capturing the distinct elements of the destination in the brand and communicating these elements through the brand’s components: identity, essence, personality, image, character and

culture. Faced with growing global competition where destinations are becoming highly substitutable, destinations are increasingly embracing branding initiatives such as the use of taglines and logos in order to attract visitors and expenditures to their respective destination (Blain, Levy and Ritchie, 2005 in Ekinci, 2006). But Brand personality influences consumer preferences, and although it’s considered a metaphor used for understanding customers’ perceptions about brands, there is selection of literature concerning destination personality and their image. For some authors brand image is a wider term which also includes its personality. Others consider them similar and reflecting the customers’ perception about brands (Ekinci, 2006) Aaker (1997) has developed a theoretical framework of the brand personality conducted by determining the number and the nature of dimensions of brand personality. This may help to understand the symbolic use of brands in consumer goods and behaviour context. The five personality dimensions are: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness (see Figure). Aaker (1997) found 15 facets for these five dimensions: sincerity and excitement each have four, competence has three and both sophistication and ruggedness have two. These facets act as representative traits that provide depth into every dimension.



Source: “Dimension of Brand Personality” by Aaker, J.L., 1997, Journal of Marketing Research (34)3, p.352

Figure 3: Brand Personality Framework

In the above description of the variables, the author it is not surprising that the tourists associate these traits to destinations as they are some of the most common themes that destination marketers use in order to characterize destinations in today’s travel media.

Figure 4: Destination Personality

Destination Brand Personality		
Sincerity	Excitement	Conviviality
-Reliable	-Exciting	-Friendly
-Sincere	-Daring	-Family-oriented
-Intelligent	-Original	-Charming
-Successful	-Spirited	
-Wholesome		

Source: Thesis titled “Tourism Destination Development in the context of Brand Personality and Advertising Message –A Case Study of Swedish Lapland” by MiiallonaLohela, 2008. This study, which sought to clarify destination branding from a theoretical as well as empirical perspective, is considered timely as the destination branding concept has become an increasingly important topic among destination management organizations. Both researchers and practitioners emphasize the importance of image creation and destination differentiation as integral elements in building a strong destination brand.

## DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Today Tourism Industry has gained a lot of attention and this sector is growing worldwide. To attract more and more tourists to a destination is the need of a tourism market. Hence various strategies are being adopted among which the concept of personality plays a dominant role in attracting the tourists. Although most of the theoretical and empirical studies have been conducted for the same but still most studies to date have been limited to the destinations on the basis of their perceived images only, differentiation based on personality traits has as yet been underexplored. In today's competitive environment, creating and managing an appropriate destination personality is of vital importance to the survival and success of tourist destinations. Therefore, here an attempt has been made to explore the consequences of the relationship between the tourists and the destinations personalities. The dimensions of Aaker (Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness) can be taken as a major source of measuring the dimensions of personality. It creates brand personality by defining the destination's personality in few human characteristics. There can be recognised a strong connection between the brand's core values and brand personality. However, the potential contribution of this study is in the theoretical advancement in the field of tourism research by understanding the concept of correlation between the tourist's personality and destination personality, and investigating the impact of such congruency on tourist's behavior. The model clearly specifies that if a positive relation is built between the personalities of the two then it strongly and positively affects the consumers' attitude towards the destination preference & the tourist's involvement.

## CONCLUSIONS

Tourism has emerged as a major industry in India, acting as a wealth distributor and employment creator, at least from independence. As India grows and expands its base in travel and tourism, it will generate many more jobs and the sector will become a major catalyst for India's growth as a preferred tourist destination.

The study here will help the destination managers and marketers with the planning of strategic marketing programs, such as how to build a strong and distinct destination personality that is congruent with their targeted tourist markets by adopting proper promotional strategies. Also, the destination marketers should build a unique personality for their places. Thus, many other related areas can be explored as that of the congruency effect, the positioning of tourism destinations using the personality dimensions, etc which can enhance the tourism sector. Finally, the result of this study creates an understanding of what influences tourist's behaviour and the theoretical analysis, here, can aid in designing and implementing suitable marketing strategies for creating and enhancing tourist destination personality to attract particular markets, and designing and promoting tourism destinations.

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