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REVIEW ARTICLE

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM: AN APPROACH TOWARDS BUILDING DESTINATION IMAGE

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ABSTRACT

Responsible tourism finds its trace back in the early seventy's where it was contemplated as a solution to negative consequences of tourism. Destinations located in the lap of nature provide tourists a perfect escape from bustling cities and towns. It offers them a good break from mundane chaos of daily life. On the destinations' front, tourism flourishes when visitors flock in their pristine surroundings. However, researchers, locals and environmentalists tend to gauge the impact of tourism in the sensitive areas. It is essential that the hedonic activities in the attraction region do not impact negatively due to the presence of tourists and usage of the destination facilities. The paper draws on responsible tourism to further understanding of the concept and related implications on destination image formation. The study can be further developed to associate with the tools to effective marketing of a destination and may have implications in destination planning.

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INTRODUCTION

Any individual travelling to, intending to visit or who has taken the trip can develop image towards the destination. The image of a destination is the summation of the psychological perception he holds about that the destination. Lawson and Baud Bovy (1977) define the concept of destination image as the expression of all objective knowledge, prejudices, imagination and emotional thoughts of an individual or group about a particular location. Other authors define the image as the sum of all beliefs, ideas and impressions that people associate with a destination (Crompton, 1979; Kotler, Haider and Rein, 1994). The terminologies in tourism studies include concepts like sustainable tourism and ecotourism but perplex readers as multiple view points and definitions exist with numerous different contexts. A responsible tourism is often contemplated to have an ethical treatment of tourists of the destination may it be the environment, local culture or the local economy, the attitude of the tourist is expected to be congenial and conscious. The values consumers give to their destination experience also plays a significant role in the creation of destination image consequently impacting their choice of holidays. In marketing paradigm brands are responsible for creation of an image; however the tourist may have a pre-existing image of a destination.

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Literature Review

Profound literature is available related to the sustainable tourism and marketing. However destination image and responsible tourism is apparently in its infancy. Attempt to highlight a destination as a responsible destination may result in presumptions in the minds of the tourists. If tourists consider themselves ethical in dealing with sensitive destinations that call for behavioural limitations are not repelled, in fact attracted to such places; a regular tourist on the other hand driven by hedonic motivation wishing to extract value for the money spent for buying the package may avoid such places. New guidelines for Tourism Marketing admit that the development of the image of a tourist destination is based on the consumer's rationality and emotionality, and as the result of the combination of two main components or dimensions (Moutinho, 1987, Gartner, 1993; Baloglu and Brinberg, 1997; Walmsley and Young, 1998; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a, 1999b; Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990; Lin, Duarte, Kerstetter and Hou, 2007)- Perceptual and cognitive: there is a primacy of the importance and value given to each attribute of tourist destinations. In other words, the destination image is evaluated by the attributes of its resources and attractions (Stabler, 1995) which motivate tourists to visit that destination (Alhemoud and Armstrong, 1996, Schneider and Sönmez, 1999; Gallarza, Saura and Garcia, 2002; Beerli and Martín, 2004; Govers and Go, 2005). Heritage and cultural tourism is growing faster in popularity than most other tourism segments, and certainly faster than the global tourism growth rate, according to the

United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNTWO) (TKZN, 2008). Heritage and cultural tourism products attract tourists who visit destinations to enrich their cultural perspectives of the host community and its environment (TKZN, 2008). Tourists demonstrate a range of priorities, including a desire to show respect for local communities, to share the economic benefits of tourism directly with local people, and to mitigate the environmental impact of their holidays (see Fennell, 2008; Weeden, 2008). Responsible tourists also demonstrate trade-off behaviour for reasons of convenience, price and quality (Budeanu, 2007), all of which are evident in ethical consumer decision-making (Chatzidakis, Hibbert, & Smith, 2007; Memery, Megicks, & Williams, 2001; Szmigin, Carrigan, & McEachern, 2009). With the increasing number of terms in tourism it is important to realise the concept of responsible tourism, and also what it does for the destination and various stakeholders. According to the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism's National Responsible Tourism Guidelines (DEAT, 2002), the economic benefits of tourism should be directed towards communities. Relevant responsible tourism guidelines indicate that:

- Locals should have the opportunity to take part in decision-making, be employed,
- Trained and empowered, and become owners of tourism products;
- Local goods and services should be procured;
- Local entrepreneurship and small business development should be promoted;
- Local cultures should be respected and protected;
- Natural, cultural and heritage resources should be preserved; and
- Developments should be sensitive to the environment.

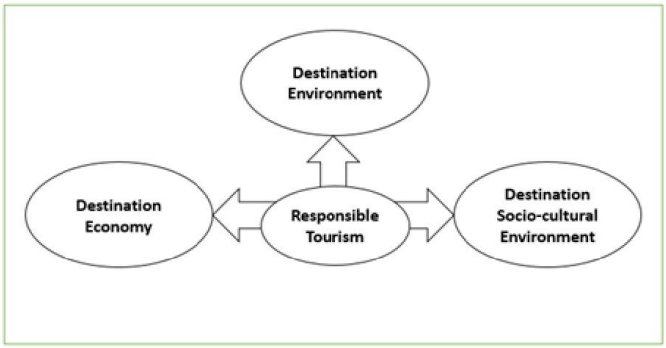
Frey and George perceived new concepts in recent tourism literature, driven by swelling international pressure to address issues of global warming, social inequality and waning natural resources, are pro-poor tourism and responsible tourism, and they observe that as the tourism industry matures there would be an increase in demand for unique, authentic and meaningful holidays (Frey & George, 2008:113) "Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large" (AMA, 2007). Marketing is perceived to be an approach that opposes the sustainability of a place, because of its core reason for coming in being is increasing the tourist arrival at a destination. Marketing concepts are driven towards converting tourism products as commodities (Buhalis, 2000).

Responsible Tourism

The concept of sustainable tourism was in emerging form almost three decades back and responsible tourism was then an integral element of sustainable tourism (Krippendorf, 1987). Becken (2007) examined tourist responsibility with regard to sustainability from the point of carbon offsetting and individual responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions. The results indicated that tourists were segmented into five groups (green tourists, skeptics, resisters, uninformed willing and undecided), reflecting different levels of awareness and willingness to accept responsibility, as tourists, for the environment (Becken, 2007). A large number of countries depend on tourism for their basic survival. These countries have a limited capabilities of other dependable sectors or have limited resources. They often possess the natural heritage that distinguish them from other places which often act as tourist generating areas for them. These destinations have an onus of sustaining themselves for repeat business, making the exploitation of touristic resources in the most appropriate ways. While the core product is nature gifted attractions, which has the potential to grab tourist's attention and it is their unique selling proposition for marketing, their usage should be in most acceptable limits.

Responsible tourism and destination image

The destination image building is oriented towards the promotion of these destinations with highlighted offerings. The tourists can recall the destination with the images it creates about it before, during and after travelling. The image usually follows branding, so it is vital to have the best offerings of the destinations to the prospective tourists. Word of mouth is considered as an important factor in influencing the decisions of the tourists. Destinations are substitutable and market competition has become increasingly intense. With this thought, marketing the destinations, which to some extent control the behaviour of the tourist's may be counterproductive. Responsible tourism practices are often linked with tourism policing, or constraining the tourist's behaviour. Convincing a tourist who understands his role at the destination is comparatively easier, than other tourist who is ready to splurge and expects the return to his money spent on the destination in the way he feels most suitable. Marketing wishes to tap every possible prospect to be converted in to a tourist to a destination may commit a mistake by sending the latter type of the tourist to a tourist destination that restricts his behaviour, although for a novel reason.



(Adapted from weeden 2011)

Fig. 1. Responsible Tourism Framework

A framework for marketing for a destination with the ethics being a priority may be narrowed down to the tourists that consider themselves to be ethical, and sensitive towards the people, culture, economy and environment of the destination. Firstly the objectives of the type of image that it intends to leave on prospective and experienced tourists have to be made clear. Secondly the segmentation of the market is necessary for determining the tourist clusters that fit the objective. Thirdly,

the holistic marketing and experience provision at the destination should be worked out. Here an individual entity would not be successful in delivering the needed representation of the destination. A common resonance in the marketing efforts, stakeholders approach, destination facilities should have a common agenda i.e. to make tourists feel at ease and relish the tourist offerings, however remaining in the decided environmental, cultural and societal peripheries.

Conclusion

The attempt of all the destinations remains to be sustaining and profitable by provision of unique experience to the tourists in the highly competitive market. The image of the place is very crucial at decisions of a tourist to return to a destination or to take up the trip in the first place. Responsible tourism is an evolving concept of tourism that aims at behavioural orientation of the tourists. It is viewed in various contexts and often mixed with the concepts of ecotourism and sustainable tourism. Thin lines divide these concepts and have key role to play in the creation of destination image. In contemporary marketing ideas the branding precedes image, so the tourists would have to be cautious of the places they intend to visit, which may need to constrain their behaviour at a destination. A framework for creation of a positive destination image would start from the objective of the destination marketing organizations while they send out the attributes of a destination to prospective visitors. Segmentation of clusters of ethical tourists followed by their pleasant stay at the destination may help in the creation of positive destination image of the place. This is a new concept in tourism which runs parallel to sustainable tourism, as the intentions are same- to retain the destinations in their real form and offer a pristine experience to the future tourists, meanwhile contributing to the local settings in a fair and well deserved fashion. Further research may add value to the existing knowledge and models that could be designed based on the field work may contribute towards better practices on the similar concept.

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