

Destination Branding: Internal Stakeholders' Perceptions of Alexandria as a Tourist Destination

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Introduction

In the extremely competitive global tourism market environment, it is crucial to develop a clearly different identity of a tourism destination based on reality in order to convince the potential visitors. Alexandria, as a tourist destination, is not only the ancient mysterious capital of Egypt under Ptolemy I till the end of the Roman period, but also the present Egyptian cultural and intellectual capital. However, in terms of the city's competitive position, the aim of this study is to place branding initiatives and to reveal internal stakeholders' perceptions of the Alexandria as a tourist destination.

Literature Review

Branding, as a concept, has recently expanded into the tourism industry and apparently became a topic of inspection in the late 1990s (Pike, 2002; Anholt, 2003; Morgan et al., 2004; Tasci and Kozak, 2006). Among several definitions of the term, Kerr (2006: 277) defined destination branding as a '*Name, symbol, logo, word or other graphic that both identifies and 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*'.

Thus, branding is considered the good name of a product, an organization or a place; a short-cut to an informed decision; and most importantly, a promise of value (Vallaster and de Chernatony, 2006). Destination branding also helps realize the vision for places, identifies target markets, describes the planned offer and experience, determines and organizes delivery of the offer, communicates the offer to consumers, and guides the future development of the offer.

Methodology

Tourism scholars observed the absence of qualitative research in the field of branding. In most cases, studies on destination branding are based on structured methods such as Likert scales or semantic differential scales. In this paper, qualitative approach was employed. Collage technique, an unstructured qualitative association tool; was used to reveal the effects of internal branding on Alexandria's tourism destination stakeholders.

After introducing a general framework of brand and destination branding in the field of tourism research, the empirical study included two phases; the first one identified the main representatives of stakeholders in Alexandria tourism destination. In the second stage, the collage technique was used to obtain stakeholders' perceptions of the tourism destination brand in Alexandria.

Results

Findings expose that different internal stakeholders trace different perceptions of tourism places and show the importance of using the collage as a technique to measure stakeholders' identities of selected tourism destinations. The paper also reveals the significance of employing different association methods (word or picture) in recognizing stakeholders' knowledge and opinions of destinations as a primary step in analyzing stakeholders' brand identity perception.

Conclusion and Implications

The paper identified the best brand of Alexandria from the internal stakeholders' viewpoint. It is one of the first papers on building a brand of Alexandria as a tourist destination. It is also considered a model of how to use collage technique in evaluating the perception and building the brand using picture and word associations.

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