Reflections on the theme issue outcomes

What marketing strategy for destinations with a negative image?

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to profile the *WHATT* theme issue "What marketing strategy for destinations with a negative image?" with reference to the experiences of the theme editor and writing team.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper uses structured questions to enable the theme editors to reflect on the rationale for the theme issue question, the starting point, the selection of the contributors and material and the editorial process.

Findings – This paper provides insights and practical suggestions in response to the theme issue question from different academic and professional backgrounds in fields as diverse as marketing, tourism, economics and heritage management.

Practical implications – The theme issue outcomes provide lines of enquiry for others to explore and reinforce the value of WHATT's approach to collaborative working and writing.

Originality/value – The collaborative work reported in this theme issue offers a unified but contrarian response to the theme's strategic question. Taken together, the papers provide a range of options for destination marketing organizations in response to the issues highlighted.

Keywords Tourism, Marketing Strategy, Destination image, Post disaster, Post colonial, Post conflict

Paper type Viewpoint

What marketing strategy for destinations with a negative image? Theme editors Hugues Séraphin and Vanessa G.B Gowreesunkar share their reflections on the significance and outcomes of the theme issue with Managing Editor Richard Teare.

Overview

Academic research in the field of tourism is very well developed (Ryan, 2005) and this reflects the growing importance of the industry. Indeed, the latest World Tourism Organization (WTO, 2017b [Online]) report indicates that:

> International tourist arrivals worldwide grew by 6 per cent in January-April of 2017 compared to the same period last year, with business confidence reaching its highest levels in a decade [. . .] Destinations that were affected by negative events during 2016 are showing clear signs of recovery in a very short period of time, and this is very welcoming news for all, but particularly for those whose livelihoods depend on tourism in these destinations.

That said, despite the growing interest of tourists in emerging destinations, academic research on these destinations remains quite limited. Notwithstanding, this field of research is growing and, hence, the reason for this theme issue which focuses on the impacts of image on the performance of the destination (Alvarez and Campo, 2011), the impact of political conflicts on a destination's negative image (Alvarez and Campo, 2014), strategy to repair destination image during crisis (Avraham, 2015) and the importance of educating tourists at the pre-visit stage (Séraphin *et al.*, 2017), among other important issues. Developing understanding as to how destinations with a negative image could be improved is extremely important, as:

> Tourism can make a strong contribution to the economies of Least Developed Countries where the sector is a major exporter. Tourism represents 7 per cent of all international trade and is of increasing relevance to the trade community. Tourism is part of services trade, accounting for 30 per cent of the world's trade in services. This is particularly true for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), where it represents 7 per cent of total exports of goods and services (WTO, 2017a).

This is the backdrop to the theme issue that is crafted around the strategic question:

Q1. What marketing strategy for destinations with a negative image?

A list of the articles in the theme issue can be found in the Appendix.

Why in your view, is your theme issue strategic question important?
Tourism is a strong contributor to the economies of developed countries where the sector is a major exporter and an important part of their international trade. In view of this, tourism is of increasing relevance to their trade communities. In least developed countries, tourism does not play this role yet or not fully. Dupont (2009) explains that tourism in emerging destinations does not really play a significant role because the development of the industry is effective only when poverty has been greatly reduced. In essence, Dupont (2009) is saying that it is the reduction of poverty that triggers the development of tourism and not the other way around.

> This scenario runs contrary to the idealized purpose of tourism: bringing prosperity to communities, advancing citizens' wellbeing, and bringing communities and cultures closer to each other through greater understanding and contact (Dioko, 2017, p. 370).

Given the difficulties associated with poverty alleviation, the strategic question What marketing strategy for destinations with a negative image? focuses on this question with specific reference to destinations with a negative image. To date, destinations in this category are considered to be post-colonial, post-conflict and post-disaster destinations. That said, even developed countries and leading tourism destinations could face negative image problems. For instance, France, now has a recent history blighted by terrorism, "terrorism has become a permanent threat to the safety of French citizens and tourists visiting the country" (Séraphin, 2017, p. 3). Given that political instability can be defined as "a situation in which conditions and mechanisms of governance and rule are challenged by elements operating from outside of the moral operations of the political system" (Hall and O'Sullivan, 1996, cited in Korstanje and Clayton, 2012, p. 106) and because "terrorism has been identified as a dimension of political instability along with international and civil wars, coups, riots, social unrest, and strikes" (Hall and O'Sullivan, 1996, cited in Korstanje and Clayton, 2012, p. 106), it could be argued that France has become a politically unstable tourist destination (Séraphin, 2017).

For industry practitioners, the question of destination image is very important and remains a source of concern, as there is no simple remedy to the problem, especially as one size does not fit all. As a result, this theme issue explores the challenges faced by a variety of destinations and proposes strategies to resolve issues and challenges related to poor destination image. The purpose of this issue is to inspire practitioners and to encourage them to work with destinations struggling with poor image problems, so that these destinations do not enter a terminal decline stage but, rather, are rejuvenated to reposition themselves with the assistance of a new, more positive image.

Thinking about your theme issue plan and approach, what worked well?
The *WHATT* format and guidelines encourage conceptual development that draws equally from prior published work and industry information and perspectives, and according to the authors, this is why the journal is both refreshing and unique. Further, the *WHATT* format enabled us to incorporate novel data sources and pursue ideas that would not normally receive attention if conventional scholarly thinking, language and approaches were the only guide. In shaping their articles, the writing team members were able to interact with different stakeholders involved in the tourism industry of their country or selected case study destination. Some of the contributors are not from the tourism world but have a passionate concern for their country and the problems associated with negative destination image. Involvement in this collaborative research and writing project enabled them to undertake research in their country and develop SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed) solutions that can contribute to improve the performance of their respective destinations. In so doing, this theme issue was much more than a scholarly activity – it became an adventure.

How did you engage with different stakeholder groups?
When we started the project, we sought to involve contributors in an open-minded way so as to encourage them to express their viewpoints by drawing on their work and life experiences. Our practitioner participants drew on the issues that confront them, and the collaborative process enabled critical reflection on their own working practice and experience. As for the academics, their input was mostly based on secondary analysis, although some of them engaged in the collection of new data to address gaps in the literature. Taken together, the theme issue drew on a range of approaches, methodologies and processes.

What were the highlights from stakeholder group interactions?
In this theme issue, the writing was organized around three different approaches and methodologies: First, secondary data were drawn from literature reviews. Second, interviews, either face-to-face or electronically, were conducted. Third, the personal experience of contributors added significant value to the body of articles – the tale of a life experience has a witness value and thus it is trustworthy (De Ascaniis and Grecco-Morasso, 2011). Richard George conducted a literature review to examine the effect of a destination positioning itself as a responsible tourist destination to improve its image. Monica Maria Coroş, Oana Adriana Gică, Anca C. Yallop and Ovidiu I. Moisescu adopted a similar approach to investigate Romania. Noureddine Selmi and Raphaël Dornier also embraced a similar approach for Tunisia, as did Nichole Hugo and Hannah Miller for Jamaica. Carole Favre's paper draws on three years' first-hand experience with micro and small tourism entrepreneurs in Haiti, Brazil, Lesotho, South Africa, Timor-Leste, Indonesia, Ethiopia and India. Her observations led to the conclusion that most post-colonial, post-conflict or post-

disaster destinations do not understand or accept that tourism development goes hand-in-hand with developing entrepreneurs and their businesses. Her paper challenges the conventional worldview that tourism growth is about increasing arrival numbers and focusing on infrastructure development. This represents an original solution focusing on vision and on the empowerment of women that questions existing national development frameworks. Rita R. Carballo, Carmelo J. León and Magdalena M. Carballo collected primary data via internet-based interviews. Stacy Wall, Susanna Curtin and Ann Hemingway used semi-structured interviews conducted with local members of public health and tourism teams, in a town in the South of England.

Thinking about your peer review process: What went well and why? What didn't go well and why? What would you do differently and why?
It took quite some effort to identify reviewers with the background needed to evaluate the articles in accordance with *WHATT's* format, which is different from but no less rigorous than the standards of academic publications. To facilitate the review process, contributors had to accept a dual responsibility for peer reviewing and because of the size, scope and experience of the writing team, this worked well – with relatively little external input. That said, the main difficulty was timekeeping – reviewers took longer to review the papers than expected and when feedback was provided, authors took longer than anticipated to finalize their work. On reflection, these are not unique issues, as they apply to all forms of scholarly collaboration and writing.

What are the most significant outcomes of your theme issue in terms of the contributions to knowledge and/or professional practice?
This theme issue highlights several points: First, that there is not a particular or even predictable profile for destinations struggling with a negative image. The destinations used as case studies are located in various parts of the world with different backgrounds and characteristics and, yet, they face similar issues and challenges. Given that all the case studies adopt a positivist attitude, it becomes clear that solutions for destinations with a negative image do exist – the challenge is to identify the right solution! Second, it appears that the best solutions are often the most obvious ones and because of this, they are often discounted. For instance, investing in people (empowering local people) and more particularly in entrepreneurship is a typical example.

What are the implications for management action and applied research arising from your theme issue outcomes?
The collection of articles in this theme issue provides a diverse range of case studies, methodological approaches and possible responses to the strategic question. It can be synthesized into a number of guiding principles that could be presented as different options in terms of strategies for consideration and adoption.

Having served as *WHATT* theme editor, what did you enjoy about the experience?
We found editing a WHATT theme issue to be both enjoyable and challenging. Our highlight was that it afforded an opportunity to exchange insights and perspectives with other academics and practitioners – some of whom we did not know prior to this collaboration. The fact that we are all passionate about finding solutions to the strategic question meant that we bonded well and learnt from each other – it was a great human and academic adventure!

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Appendix: Theme issue contents

Introduction: What marketing strategy for destinations with a negative image?
Hugues Séraphin and Vanessa G.B. Gowreesunkar
This introductory article provides a broad overview of the significance of the theme issue and sheds lights on issues that post-colonial, post-conflict and post-disaster destinations are facing and, more importantly, provides strategies to overcome the issues.

Innovative and sustainable tourism strategies: a viable alternative for Romania's economic development
Monica Maria Coroş, Oana Adriana Gică, Anca C. Yallop and Ovidiu Moisescu
This article argues that rural tourism can significantly support the (re)development of post-conflict destinations and makes a significant contribution to the sustainable development of the Romanian tourism in general, and rural economies in particular, as shown in the case examined in the paper.

Conflict resolution and recovery in Jamaica: the impact of the Zika virus on destination image
Nichole Hugo and Hannah Miller

This article analyses Jamaica's response to negative destination image because of the Zika virus and provides recommendations for destinations impacted by negative global perception or being seen as a risky area to travel to after a publicized event, such as a natural disaster or disease outbreak.

Engaging with a healthy tourism "offer": strategies to improve place perceptions
Stacy Wall, Susanna Curtin and Ann Hemingway
This paper explores how healthy tourism can help to improve place perceptions via collaborative strategies to promote a well-being destination. It concludes that interventions to curb excessive alcohol consumption, regenerate areas and promote eudaimonia well-being can contribute to this.

The perception of risk by international travellers
Rita R. Carballo, Carmelo J. León and Magdalena M. Carballo
This paper investigates the perception of risk by international travellers and results point to the existence of five types of risk: health risk, risk of suffering from crime and delinquency, accident risk, environmental risk and risk from disasters.

Responsible tourism as a strategic marketing tool for improving the negative image of South Africa
Richard George
This article examines the link between responsible tourism management to counter the negative image of crime risk in South Africa and provides recommendations for destinations impacted by negative global perception or being seen as a risky area to travel to in the context of crime.

The Samll2Mighty Tourism Academy: growing business to grow women as a transformative strategy tool for emerging destinations
Carole Favre
This practitioner paper reflects on the mistakes that most post-colonial, post-conflict or post-disaster destinations make when planning to grow tourism, and to offer a practical and business-driven solution that would help secure a more stable future in spite of potential instabilities.

Perspectives on the destination image of Tunisia
Noureddine Selmi and Raphaël Dornier
This paper discusses the current state of tourism in Tunisia after the revolution and explores new ways to improve its image. The paper also considers the extent to which a crisis in destination image affords an opportunity to reconsider its tourism strategy and improve its competitive positioning.

Conclusion: What marketing strategy for destinations with a negative image?
Hugues Séraphin and Vanessa G.B. Gowreesunkar
The conclusion draws on each paper to propose strategies that could be used to re-position and re-establish tourism destinations struggling with negative image problems. It was observed that destinations in this category are mostly post-colonial, post-conflict or post-disaster destinations (or all three combined), and that their current share of international tourism is relatively small.

About the authors

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