

From a Desert to a Dreamland- the case of Successful Destination Marketing of Dubai and lessons for India

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Gone are the days when rich tourists set out to explore the world on their own and had little expectations. Initially curiosity drove people to travel around and discover for themselves the beauty and diversity of different locales. As distances began to shrink, faster modes of transportation evolved, information became easily available, the world became a global village. Businesses started expanding globally; options for entertainment, shopping and sightseeing also emerged and tourism as a sector evolved.

It's a crowded marketplace now— there are around 250 countries vying for the attention of holidaymakers. Anything that helps explain a country's appeal is useful and herein comes the importance of destination marketing.

DESTINATION the fundamental unit on which all the many complex dimensions of tourism are based is the basic unit of analysis in tourism .A focal point in the development and delivery of tourism products and the implementation of tourism policy is done through destination marketing.

The success of a destination, to a great extent, is reliant on its image. Knowledge and understanding the needs of the new tourist through branding and positioning of the destination would help in making a good image of the destination in the eyes of the tourist. Overall a synergy between all the stakeholders in creating the destination vision is required for successfully marketing a destination.

The paper proposes enhancing the understanding of the complex challenges inherent in the development of tourism destination.. There is an immense complexity involved in capturing the essence of a multi-attributed destination with a succinct and focused brand position, in a way that is both meaningful to the multiplicity of target audiences of interest to stakeholders and that which could effectively differentiate the destination from competing nations.

It has been proven that positive brand images have helped several economies boost their exports, attract tourism and visitors, residents and investment. Dubai is one such example where within 10 years this destination has managed to change from a desert to a destination. The subject of this article is destination branding and its role in the marketing of tourism as revealed by the example of Dubai. A case study approach, incorporating a review of information in the public domain and analysis of the destination marketing, is employed to assess the country's tourism strategies. The marketing strategies are considered within the context of prevailing images, tourist sites and the importance attached to destination images and brands in general are also evaluated. It has created a desire and an intrigue through its constant marketing and infrastructure and brand development success. It sold a myth and created a desire through its branding and marketing. Today, Dubai is one of the fastest growing destination brands among a select group including Barcelona, Auckland and Shanghai.The appeal of the practice in Dubai is demonstrated, and some lessons drawn from it for India to emulate.

To benefit from the tourism sector, India too has to switch over from a reactive mode to a proactive approach. India, endowed with natural beauty, culture, heritage, -is one of the most demanding and fascinating tourist destinations in Asia. However, for a country bursting with tourism opportunities, we have been slightly slow on the uptake, as far as promoting these destinations go. Some innovative practices and strategies in tourism marketing are required to build the brand India- a nation that can offer a stunning range of destinations and experiences.- making it a truly Incredible India

As tourism destinations become more substitutable due to increasing competition in global tourism markets, destination personality is seen as a viable metaphor for building destination brands and crafting a unique identity for tourism places. Dubai is one such example where within 10 years this destination has managed to change from a desert to a dreamland.

An Introduction to Dubai

Wedged between Europe and Asia, buttressed by Africa, Dubai, is the, second largest of the seven United Arab Emirates. A country where the dust of the desert is clearing to reveal the potential for one of the most significant international cities of the 21st century .A decade ago, Dubai had only oil reserves to look after its economy. Before the discovery of oil, in 1966, Dubai was a sleepy little fishing hamlet populated by Bedouin tribesmen, boat makers, and pearl divers. Pearls were then Dubai's primary product—by many accounts, they were the best and most beautiful pearls in the world.

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However, Dubai's oil is not limitless—the place has far smaller reserves than its fellow emirate Abu Dhabi, so the rulers of Dubai decided that real-estate investment and finance, mixed with a serious emphasis on resort tourism, would result in an economic boom—and they were right.

The Middle East as a whole attracts comparatively few visitors, and political events in the current century have generated new uncertainties and tensions which seem likely to further discourage tourists and investors. Additional barriers relate to poor accessibility, a perceived lack of conventional attractions and limited promotion. It lived under and sometimes still does an incorrect mystic of being a strict Muslim state and belonging to Saudi Arabia. Despite these apparently unfavorable circumstances, international tourism has been adopted by the Dubai authorities as a core element in a programme of economic diversification. They have invested heavily in expensive facilities, as well as undertaken extensive marketing, and the outcome has been strong growth in tourism. The long view of Dubai's tourism impresarios is global; already, more of Dubai's gross domestic product comes from tourism than from oil. As a destination tourism now represents 22% of the states GDP and is 3 times higher than that of oil.

Major Landmarks in Dubai

Tourism in Dubai came to be taken up more as a strategy and a challenge for the region. Dubai started taking on the world with the highest, tallest, biggest and grandest in every way. The sheer amount of material, money, and labor that is gathered here is both menacing and exciting. The scale and volume of construction is almost horrifying until one realizes that it will soon be full of life. This appealed not to a section of the people but to the whole humanity.

Some of the major highlights in the city would include

The most famous of all of Dubai's sub brands is – The Burj Al Arab Hotel and its mystical persona. A seven star luxury hotel, it is in the shape of a sail overlooking the mighty ocean and is both majestic and magnificent.

In Dubai, for a couple million dollars, you can own a house on the front of a palm tree. You can buy France, all of it, and then live there, alone if you like. In this small city in a tiny emirate on a spit of land that spikes out into the Persian Gulf, there are 10 supersized shopping malls and others still under construction, each larger and more grandiose than the next: one roughly duplicates the Taj Mahal and Beijing's Forbidden City; another has a black-diamond ski slope in it. One hotel looks like a boat, another like a sail. Soon to be built: the world's first underwater resort, the world's tallest building.-the Burj Dubai

In 10 years, there is to be a 100-square-mile development adjoining Dubai City called Dubai and that is to double the current size of the capital—which has already tripled in size from what it was 20 years ago. According to the investment literature, Dubai land is to include Aviation World, Astrolabe Resort, Space & Science World, Extreme Sports World, the Plantation Equestrian & Polo Club, Dubai Autodrome, Pet Land, Safari Park, Dubai Outlet City, Teen World, Virtual Games World, and—"tying [together] all Dubai land worlds"—the City of Arabia.

Construction of apartments, business hubs, business bays truly depicting what one advertisement says own the lifestyle of a lifetime

Dubai hosts over 50 major projects, all with sub projects that each dwarf almost anything we can conceive: a Manhattan-sized palm tree shaped peninsula visible from space, 300 man made islands in the shape of the Earth, the world's tallest tower, tallest residential tower, largest airport and a dozen cities within a city, each with tax free treatment, infrastructure and special benefits for international corporations. The desert magnet has attracted Microsoft, Cisco, Sun, Reuters, Virgin Airways, Donald Trump and Martha Stewart. Not just business brings people to Dubai; in a word the place is fun. Supreme restaurants, golf courses, hotels, malls and nightclubs pepper the beachfront skyline.

Several incentives sub brands were also created which proved to be highly successful such as:

The Dubai Shopping Festival, which began in 1996, is unique. It is a case study on how a private sector and government can get together to launch a mega brand. The Dubai Shopping Festival is as big as Coca Cola. It is the biggest shopping extravaganza on earth.

Initially the event was staged in March but when it was found that the sales were not high it came to be held in January, which is a very pleasant time of the year. It is a global success and offers value for money. As far as its role in selling Dubai as a destination is concerned DSF is very important. You must also understand that there are other events that are staged around the same time which work as alternative magnets.

People may talk of Ascot when it comes to horseracing but the Dubai World Cup, which incidentally is a horseracing event, offers the worlds biggest prize money. Then there is the Dubai Tennis Open, the Dubai PGA Golf Tournament in which superstars like Tiger Woods participate, the Dubai Desert Challenge. Then there are events like exhibitions, meetings conferences offered with global levels of comfort. All these contribute to increased traffic volumes. All these events became synonymous with the Dubai Master Brand. It has achieved all of this due to its constant brand positioning, creativity and daring and its flying shop window. It has created a desire and an intrigue and through its constant marketing and infrastructure and brand development success. It sold a myth and created a desire through its branding and marketing Today, Dubai is one of the fastest growing destination brands among a select group including Barcelona, Auckland and Shanghai

As was quoted in a recent article

‘Excitement’ is the underlying brand with a personality factor and spirit coupled with being daring and competitive

As a result of and spearheaded Brand Dubai we see a huge growth in tourism and tourism development in excess of US\$ 400 million within the region

All of this could not have been achieved without the initial vision, brand creation, marketing and working together that basically turned a ‘desert in to a desire’

A brand that created a mythical story - a fairy tale in a desert- ‘a word of mouth want me’

A brand fairy tale that created a US\$148 billion worth of revenue activity from very little.

Marketing Strategy in Tourism

The experience of Dubai thus serves to illustrate factors that are critical to destination development, raising two pertinent questions:

1. What are the best models of tourism marketing that focus on total customer needs, wants and experiences, and which recognize the essential nature of fun, high quality and diversity of choices at the destination?
2. Is it necessary for a city/ country to have a marketing strategy for attracting tourism?

If the city aims to host tourists in a way that leads to economic growth while balancing the needs of the citizens, then a structured and coordinated approach –a marketing strategy – is the optimal approach to achieving these goals.

Destination marketing is structured around five primary reference points

Tourist: defined in terms of the total needs and total experience desired by a potential visitor. The traveler is understood as someone who is seeking values such as leisure, relaxation, fun , personal enrichment.

Destination-an interconnected and complementary set of attractions, events, services and products which together create a total experience and value proposition to visitors, Within the picture of total experience , there is usually a balance of the unique and the complementary – that is to say , interesting choices that together create a fun, convenient and personally valuable visit. A coordinated and consistent offering is not realized by accident, but instead through careful management

Tourism Services Suppliers- Destination marketing is primarily accomplished by a large group of independent firms and agencies that work together to serve their independent interests. Suppliers include both private sector firms (e.g. hotel), and public sector agencies (e.g., a public transportation department)this inspires the need for a specialized public-private coordinator to not only coordinate strategy but also undertake the expense of demonstrating the benefits of coordination. It is this essential and necessary expense that is most forgotten when it is assumed that private firms and agencies will coordinate tourist policies.

The citizen: the ultimate authority and beneficiary with regard to development of his home city or country. The first mandate of destination marketing is to satisfy the long term needs and wants of its natural constituents: the people who sustain the city and give it life. Citizens are asked to host visitors and to harmonize their city’s qualities with the needs and expectations of prospective visitors. What are tourism’s rewards to the citizens? Does it go beyond pure economics?

The public private interest coordinator: an organization that has the responsibility to coordinate and facilitate the interests and actions of all the concerned parties in destination marketing. In other words , its job is to increase the potential benefit s available to all the parties.

Some of the practices in destination marketing built on the above 5 reference points in detail by Brand Dubai:

- Developing a powerful and unique value proposition to urge tourists to select the city over numerous alternatives. Dubai has been looked up as a city of excitement and surprises
- Branding the value proposition in a communications program that is consistent. The DTCM for ex in creating share of mind as well as share of heart throughout the entire world about DSF.
- Visitor profiling to understand the tourist consumer's preferences, and purchasing behavior
- Generating cost and time savings through visitor activity packages that include admission to several attractions over a period of several days.
- Providing for the education of tourism partners(citizens, institutions, airlines, hotels, etc.and the facilitation of coordination
- Perennially laboring to improve the diversity of destination's offerings
- Creating compelling reasons to visit in the off-season

Brand Essence for a Destination

Vision and brand are a fundamental part of commercial activity, but does a city need a vision and a brand for tourism development? The answer is yes because destinations like companies must communicate to a broad market of consumers what they are, why they offer what they do, and the consistency and quality of their offerings. This is accomplished through the brand and through the vision. Ultimately, a company's vision is the most visible part of that company's marketing strategy and the same is true of cities Destination brand essence is a term used frequently in destination marketing to indicate the synergy of vision and branding in strategic marketing.

Incredible India Brand

Evidence indicates that, despite its undisputed natural beauty, pilgrim places, world-class hotel and resorts India obtains much less from the visitor industry compared to other smaller nations. It tried positioning of the country as a destination, through the 'Incredible India' brand. For, though there has always been the potential for great tourism opportunities in India, the country's positioning in the global tourist market was not very attractive to the foreign traveler.

How to brand the destination in existing and emerging markets is the responsibility of the tourism bodies promoting those destinations. This has brought in the concept of Destination Branding. The challenges of branding a destination for a country like India is a big task, given the diversity within the nation, as well as the diversity in the target markets. Tourists travelling to the US or Europe are quite aware of what to expect. But for first time visitors to India, there are always concerns about what they might encounter. A comprehensive Destination Branding, thus, goes a long way in shaping perceptions of potential travelers.

The brand personality was named "Incredible India." Essentially, 'Incredible India' is a positioning and branding strategy that differentiates India in the global market place. It was developed so that all tourism offices, tour operators and organizations promoting India as a destination could market it in a unified and consistent manner. 'Incredible India' has been built on a solid research foundation that resulted in a set of descriptors for the personality and values of India and an "essence" that captures and underlying spirit of the country. Therefore, 'Incredible India' captured its unique spirituality, the colours of its landscapes and the distinctive character of its people.

The positioning of India was that while others claimed breathtaking locales, the mysticism of the east, the draw of the civilization, the call of the wild, India was all that and much more.

It is a journey of mind and soul.

It is a journey of five senses.

It is a journey of self discovery.

It is a journey of self-fulfillment.

All it needs is a synergy of vision and branding to develop a more comprehensive marketing strategy agreeable to the leaders, tourists, citizens, suppliers and public-private partnership to make it an India that is truly incredible in experience.

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