

Destination events and campaign planning for Repositioning: Case of Rajasthan, India

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Cite as:

Jain Tinu, Kour Gurpreet (2020), Destination events and campaign planning for Repositioning: Case of Rajasthan, India. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 49th, (64295)

Paper from the 49th Annual EMAC Conference, Budapest, May 26-29, 2020.



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Abstract:

The tourism industry in India is growing while the state of Rajasthan which is known for its royal legacy of the Maharana's (Land of Kings) had seen a de-growth of three percent in 2014 and stagnating numbers for international tourist arrivals while the visits of domestic tourists kept increasing. This paper outlines the repositioning strategy adopted by Rajasthan from destination-specific to theme-specific, predominantly of festivals as events. Using a case study approach, this study analysed the elaborative campaigns created for revamping the image, thus enhancing tourism. Semi-structured interviews were conducted for an in-depth understanding of the elements of destination communication that contribute to repositioning and the challenges faced by State Tourism Organizations. The findings show a new identity can be formulated by redefining brand elements, promotional campaign and events specific to the destination highlighting the involvement of various stakeholders.

Keywords : Repositioning, Advertising campaign, destination events, destination elements, Rajasthan (India) tourism, Destination branding

Track : Tourism Marketing

1. Introduction of Paper

Destination branding is becoming an area of growing interest and the importance of branding in tourism has been widely accepted (Peirce & Ritchie, 2007). A destination, regarded as organizational unit of the tourism industry (Presenza et al., 2005) is considered to be the most intricate structure in terms of its management and coordination. Symbolic brand elements like logo, tagline and slogan partly give to the destination brand its meaning (Kladou et al. 2017) and form the core of brand positioning (Blain, Levy and Ritchie, 2005). Visual identity derived from the logo (Kohli, Suri & Thakor, 2002) and slogans (Kohli, Lance & Suri, 2007) are significant symbolic elements. The cultural understandings of brands (e.g. Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013), as well as more informed analyses of the cultural and local nature of destination brands (e.g. Campelo et al., 2014), plays an essential role beyond symbolic elements. Buhalis (2000) posited that the evolutionary development of destinations at the later stage should focus on alternative marketing strategies that support the image alteration, redesign or re-positioning of the tourism product.

Recent literature on repositioning has described the way destinations reposition strategically to attract visitors to places like Thailand (Madichie & Mbah, 2016), Zimbabwe (Ndlovu, 2009), Egypt (Avraham, 2016), Canada (CTRI, 1996), Serbia (Popescu & Maric 2005), Spain (Gilmore, 2011), Malta (Foxell & Trafford, 2009), Oldham (Kadembo, 2009) and many more. In this sense, the Indian state of Rajasthan presents an interesting case of repositioning via promotional campaigns and events. Accordingly, this paper contributes to the literature on destination repositioning and event tourism by further exploring the case mentioned above. The purpose of this paper is to examine the marketing efforts adopted by tourism marketers to restore tourism and prevent a drastic decline in the number of tourists over the coming years. The state tourism authority Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation Ltd. (RTDC) pursued three major strategies in repositioning the state. First, they explored the reasons for becoming unattractive to young domestic travellers. Key issues identified were later gauged by major change on overall strategy and targeted interventions. Secondly, RTDC launch tourism campaign for the first time in the last 20 years to reposition wide tourism areas. Third, authorities organised events with special emphasis on festivals that bring a collaborative perspective at historic centers, thus increasing the value of event tourism.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Destination Branding elements

The destination branding approach suggests the importance of symbolic brand elements like logo and slogan as communication identity (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998) and argues that consistent element mix helps to identify and differentiate the destination (Hem & Iversen, 2004; Qu, Kim & Im, 2011, p. 466). A logo is considered to be the ‘gateway to the brand’ that triggers association at a velocity that no other form can achieve. Logos are tangible artefacts that are introduced, managed and protected by destination brand styles and manuals (Morgan & Pritchard, 2004). They serve as a visual cue predominantly when it succeeds to convey the meaning to its audiences (Govers, 2013). Logos are considered to be ‘one of the main vehicles for communicating an image, cutting through the clutter to gain attention, and speeding recognition of the product or company’ (Henderson & Cote, 1998, p. 15). A change in the logo creates a new image that a destination wants to portray to its targeted audiences as they are responsible for creating value through brand differentiation (Kohli, Suri & Thakor, 2002).

Slogans are ‘short phrases that communicate descriptive or persuasive information about a brand’ (Supphellen & Nygarardsvik, 2002) and act as “hooks” in apprehending the meaning of a brand (Dahlén & Rosengren, 2005). A slogan is used to create or update the image of a destination (Morgan & Pritchard, 1998) as it can be seen in the case of Spain. Spain followed the tourism demand trends and changed its slogan from “everything under the sun” to “passion for life”. Kohli, Thomas, & Suri (2013) identified slogans as a branding tools that can be used to build successful destination brands in peoples’ memories, serving as strategic tools for retention (Donaire & Gali, 2012). To sum up, logos and slogans are associated with the most desirable aspect of the destination (Letho et al., 2014) and can provide a new identity to the destination by transferring core values and meaning to the targeted audiences.

2.2 Repositioning destinations and Events

Repositioning becomes essential as destinations look to rejuvenate themselves emphasizing attributes and traits which provide a contemporary image, thereby attracting tourists amid the vast and resilient competition (Pechlaner 1999). Authors, researchers and practitioners have time and again introduced marketers to the concept of repositioning and also have effectively used the promotional campaigns in repositioning a destination (Botha et. al., 1999; Ibrahim & Gill 2005). Events as a tourism product are strategically used in building the brand (Getz, 2008) and should be included in the integrated marketing campaigns (Jago,

Chalip, Brown, Mules & Ali, 2003). Extant literature on the topic includes studies on event tourism with tourism planning perspective through event portfolio (Jamal & Getz, 1995), sociological perspective grounded in performance (Cohen & Cohen, 2012), community development perspective (Ziakas & Costa, 2011), destination perspective (Getz & Page, 2016), collaborative perspective (Mariani & Giorgio, 2017) and tourism repositioning (Prezenza & Sheehan, 2013). Moreover, a recent study by Giovanardi et al. (2014) suggested that an implicit relation exists between an event, place and tourism experience.

Festivals as a tourist asset are categorized as part of event tourism which is keenly conditioned by economic reasons (Getz, 2007). This process of festival development and their increasing influence on their surroundings is referred to as “festivalization” (Cudny et al. 2012). Moreover, the staging of events in a destination is significant as it offers to a destination social and cultural functions (Getz, 2008), social cohesion (Fredline & Faulkner, 2000) as well as their role in local and regional development (Wood, 2005; O’Sullivan, Pickernell & Senyard, 2009). It further brings pleasantness and excitement for travellers to revisit (Kaplanidou & Kyriaki, 2007) that can be seen as a fortification strategy (Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis, 1986) for increased attractiveness and competitiveness (Apostolakis, 2003; Arzeni, 2009).

3. Methodology

The present research has adopted a case study methodology to examine dimensions that are unique to Rajasthan’s tourism campaign. The research covers a period from 2013 to 2017, when the entire exercise of repositioning was designed and executed by the state tourism organization. Although tourism numbers were fluctuating in the previous years as well, no specific actions were taken by DMOs to add new market segments. Yin (2003) made a very clear case for the application of a case study methodology for the situations that are specific to answer ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions. This research adopts the interpretive position and explores the question using an in-depth appreciation from a qualitative viewpoint as supported by Crossan’s (2003) work. The case study methods have been successfully utilised to offer greater clarity and deeper insights in the field of tourism research (Hudson and Ritchie, 2009, p. 222). Semi-structured interviews of eleven stakeholders as a tool for primary data collection were undertaken. The semi-structured qualitative questions asked during the interviews related to the key reasons to reposition Rajasthan, the phases involved in campaign development, the key initiatives, processes and resources involved communication strategy implementation and future action plans. Key participants were

profiled based on their position, experience and involvement in the marketing activities carried out between 2013 to 2017. These participants were reached via emails and eventually, eleven participants, with authoritative positions at the level of director, deputy director, joint director, senior vice president and creative executive were interviewed face to face . Data were analysed using qualitative content analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994), an approach for the subjective interpretation of textual data through a systematic process (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This method draws valid references from the study through coding of data, which helps in reducing data to form meaningful segments. Further, broader themes and categories were derived by the researchers interpreting, theorizing, or making sense of the data (Mehmetoglu & Altinay, 2006). As a result, the themes developed through this categorization uncovered meaningful patterns (Sandelowski & Leeman, 2012) , which were used to describe significant components of the campaigns.

3. Findings

Key themes that emerged from this study for the planning and implementation of the campaign include communication creativity, destination development, stakeholders involvement and destination events . These themes can be consolidated as the key dimensions that helped in the repositioning of the state.

3.1 Communication Creativity

The new campaign launched to reposition Rajasthan was aimed to attract both the youth as well as the seasoned traveler. Rajasthan as a tourism destination was identified as a mystic place, strategically positioned to reframe it as a destination that denotes ‘royalty for everyone’. One of the respondents informed that,

‘This new campaign is more about youth. The diversity of the place, adventure, exploring new places with a different bend of mind is the motive. It is done through a bidding process for media agency. First of fall, we engaged Ogilvy as a creative agency to give a creative vision to this campaign. Simultaneously, we identified the media agency through a rigorous screening process. We decided finally on how to promote, where to promote and media based on existing inputs on media titles.’

3.2 Destination development

An assessment of the Rajasthan for the advertised product was carried out along with the current and potential market. The existing destination offerings were extended to accommodate young traveller choices and the same was communicated in the campaign as

well. One of the respondents briefed about the idea behind the campaign conceptualization and stated,

‘We considered areas which are unexplored places, not very people among the people and to encourage the tourist to explore the place on their own. It was not just a promotion, it was planned in a very systematic manner . It is not going from point A to point B or point C, but an appeal to go on their own, explore places that way they will probably love and they would chase the destination more. Rather than going to established places like Jaipur, Kota and other places as you can visit that anytime through travel agents and packaged tours. The idea was to let the visitor experience on his own, go to certain areas that are not explored as of now and enjoy the place’

3.3 Stakeholder Involvement

The new campaign with a new target market was not conceptualized in isolation. The travel trade fraternity and service providers worked in collaboration and were consistently intimated for the campaigns through various rounds of meetings. Although infrastructure was developing, the prime focus was on changing the attitude of the domestic travellers towards Rajasthan. Synergy among the stakeholders was ensured among various departments operating to promote tourism that included RTDC, Department of Archaeology & Museums (museum & monuments), ATMA (Amber development authority). Also, the campaign planning process of media selection and creative strategy was undertaken with the consent of all the stakeholders. Moreover, the involvement of local community for promoting cultural identity of the place through fairs and festivals created opportunities for both locals and travellers.

3.4 Destination events

The traditional festivals are celebrations of local community symbols, often based on the religion, history or geography of a specific place. Prentice and Andersen (2003,p.13) term such events as “place-specific.” place. In the case of Rajasthan, series of festivals and fairs are organised by DMOs approximately 25 fairs and festivals, are organised by DMOs to uphold its extensive assortment of aesthetics and goodwill. These festivals seek to merge rituals, religion and tradition with modernity, thus engaging customers in both heritage-based and contemporary festivals. At the same time, they intend to promote indigenous art and artisans, shifting the cultural landscape of the State from the Western outsider’s purview to a more anachronistic visual paradigm. Most of the festivals with cultural, spiritual or economic focus are specific to the location and traditions of the place. Details of festivals can be referred from

Month	Festival Name	Location	Focus
Jan	Camel festival	Bikaner	Spiritual/livestock

Jan -Feb	Desert festival;	Jaisalmer	Cultural
	Nagaur Fair	Nagaur	Livestock
	Baneshwar Fair	Dungarpur	Trade fair/Cultural
March-April	Gangaur Festival	Jaipur	Religious
	Mewar Festival	Udaipur	Cultural
	Elephant Festival	Jaipur	Cultural
	Urs Ajmer Sharif (as per lunar calender)	Ajmer	Spiritual
	BrijHoli	Bharatpur	Spiritual
June	Summer Festival	Mt. Abu	Cultural
July-August	Teej Festival	Jaipur	Cultural
	KajliTeej	Bundi	Cultural
October	Dussehra	Kota	Spiritual
	Marwar Festival	Jodhpur	Cultural
November	Bundi festival	Bundi	Cultural
	Pushkar fair	Ajmer	livestock
	MatysaUtsav	Alwar	Spiritual
December	Winter Festival	Mt.Abu	Cultural
	Kumbhalgarh festival	Rajasamand	Show/exhibitions

Table 1. Festivals in Rajasthan, Source: rajasthanvisit.com

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings reported in this study make a multi-fold contribution towards the strategic repositioning of destinations. First, a lesson that can be learned from Rajasthan is that an established destination brand needs to consistently capture the changing travel preferences and deliver accordingly. This may be of significant importance in understanding declining or rising tourist footfall, related to the perception of the target market segment. Second, this case brings into picture the relevance of visual identity while promoting a destination. A destination can be uplifted with a completely new identity by altering branding elements. Third, the study has enhanced the understanding of the role that events can play in positioning a destination. Event portfolio with local customs, community and culture can act as a catalyst for repositioning a destination. To extend the geographical scope of this study, future research with insights from the emerging state tourism brands can be considered from developing nations. Additional insights regarding the effectiveness of repositioning strategy and the process could be gained by comparative studies. Besides, future research can monitor the successive changes in the representation of destination brands according to the changing preferences of the tourist.

It is worth mentioning that the only state tourism authorities and advertising agencies were considered for data collection. The role of other stakeholders that can influence the success or failure of a campaign has not been studied. The results presented are inferred from a case study approach. Although the usage of the case study approach is well acknowledged in the field of sociology and economic literature, caution is advised in generalizing the findings. The limitations of the execution of this onerous study must also be noted. The sample was restricted to state tourism authorities and advertising agencies that are part of the tourism ecosystem and there is a likelihood of a certain amount of bias in their views. To conclude, interviews took place over only three months and there is a strong possibility that the key results can differ from year to year.

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