



Reviewing the role of tourism marketing in successful sustainable tourist destinations

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Abstract

Given that tourism is growing greenhouse gas emissions and making a negative contribution to environmental, social and economic changes at destinations, the positive potential role of tourism marketing on how it contributes towards sustainable tourist destination has become an important consideration. A literature review is not only a crucial effort for any academic research, but also the groundwork and stimulus for substantial useful research. This article aims to use the lens of tourism marketing to explore the attitudes, knowledge and behaviour of tourism marketer's towards sustainable destinations. Little effort has been taken to methodically examine the gigantic tourism marketing related literature so as to facilitate a better understanding of its role in sustainable tourism. To effectively review this aspect, a content analysis was undertaken using various keywords in four online electronic databases from 2012-2016. Based on 22450 article results, it was discovered that there was no any article that specifically titled "the role of tourism marketing in sustainable tourist destination". Instead, tourism marketing contributions for sustainable destination have been highlighted. The main contribution is thus to provide an overview for future researchers of the significant potential of tourism marketing in facilitating sustainable tourism at a destination level. Also, it has highlighted the important concepts that tourism marketing stakeholders should take into account when marketing tourist destination.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Tourist Destination Management, Tourism Marketing Organisation, Carrying capacity, Last chance tourist destination.

Introduction

As the tourism industry has a significant impact in the economy of different nations in the world, tourism marketing and tourist destination sustainability are some of the most important things in research for the sustainability of the industry (Hartwell et al., 2016:2-5). While these two concepts have a unique importance in the sustainable development of tourism, there is little research on the role of tourism marketing in contributing to sustainable tourist destinations (Sheehem et al., 2016; Albrecht, 2016; Lei, Kostopoulou & Huibin, 2014). However, the increasing rivalry in tourism marketing and a greater awareness that retaining effective strategies are critical to sustainable tourist destination development is changing views (Esparon et al., 2015:707).

Tourism marketing as a concept comprises of two terms, namely, tourism and marketing. Tourism can be defined as an essential social phenomenon which includes "the movement of people from and to and their temporary stay at places away from their usual residents" (Chang & Katrichis, 2016:792). Marketing can be described as a management process for "identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements and profitably" (Sharpley & Pearce, 2014:558). When tourism marketers promote tourist products, this increases consumption and being a source of depletion, pollution and species destruction together with climate change at the tourist destination, this is problematic (Sharpley & Pearce, 2014; Nickerson, Jorgenson & Boley, 2016). In that sense, tourism marketing is an essential element to tourism in general as



it lies in designing strategies and communications appropriate for target markets so that profits can be generated (Donohoe, 2012). Tourism marketers can thus be a source of threatening the sustainability of the tourist destination if they don't include the element of sustainability when they promote such destinations (Albrecht, 2016:2).

Thus, tourism destination marketers and managers have a significant role to facilitate sustainability actions and behaviours in tourist development at the destination in their marketing processes (Jamal & Camargo, 2014). However sustainability increases only when there is provision of quality tourism services and environments at the same time increasing the opportunities for residents to improve the quality of life at the tourist destination (Hartwell et al., 2016). Tourism theory recognizes the key importance of environmental quality for ensuring the competitiveness of most types of tourist destination and destination marketers also have to recognize that competitiveness is illusive when it comes to sustainability (Simon et al 2014; Artal-Tur & Melinkozak, 2016).

Tourist destination sustainability can relate to carrying capacity theory as the "idea of sustainability implies limit" (Jurado et al., 2012:1338), therefore it reflects on the objectives of tourism marketer's and managers and those who promote tourist destinations, to satisfy both tourists and residents, although in some cases competitiveness in tourism marketing can contribute to sustainability of the destinations (Esparon et al., 2015:9-11). Tourism destinations are central to the tourism industry and the sustainability of the destinations can help tourists to repeat visits to the same destination (Kozak & Kazol, 2016).

Nevertheless, the critical question is how tourism marketing plays a role for sustainability at the destination level (Higham & Moyle, 2016:163-166). If marketers market without taking into account the carrying capacity of the destination itself for simple the reason that it may be about to disappear (Mckellar & McNamara, 2016: 3) this is shortsighted.

Purpose of the review

Tourism is growing hazardous emissions and contribution to negative environmental changes at tourist destinations, and so the positive potential of marketing, specifically tourism marketing role, has increasingly become a focus for sustainable tourism and mobility research (Hall, 2016:351-352). This article aims to use the lens of the tourism marketing role to investigate its contribution towards sustainable tourist destinations.

In the case of tourism marketing, the essentially political nature of engaging in communication, promotion and marketing tourist destination on sustainability perspectives is highlighted (Jamal & Camargo, 2014). This has implications for the tourism marketing knowledge base on which a sustainable tourism marketing behaviour review draws; such as the value of political tourism marketing and tourism destination sustainability as well as the challenge that this provides for notions of tourism marketing which are "profit oriented" (Jamal & Camago, 2014:13).

The need for behaviour change in tourism marketing by tourism marketers, tourism marketing organisations, tourism researchers, as well as by governments, the industry and tourists is noted (Mckellar & McNamara, 2016:7; Tse & Qiu., 2016:14; Sharpley & Pearce,2014:557-558). These issues are critically evaluated and expanded upon to aid academic researchers in understanding and promoting the contribution of tourism marketing in sustainable tourism studies.

Methodology of the review

Building on Randolph's (2009:8-10) guidelines in writing literature reviews by using the phenomenological method of conducting a qualitative literature review, this literature review analysis used four databases including EBSCO, Taylor & Francis Online, Web of Science and Science Direct. These databases were selected after reading the introduction on each and what they contained and believed to be useful for further search. They all included different



articles of social sciences and physical science. The search focused on two areas; the role of tourism marketing and sustainable tourist destinations. This necessitated two layers of terms. The first set of terms narrowed the field to the last five years in order to get more current article results on the related review area. In some cases, it was narrowed and limited to one year (2016) as the preliminary result included too many articles.

The second set searched using the terms and keywords which included: tourism marketing and sustainable tourism, tourism marketing and tourist destination, tourism marketing organisation and sustainable tourist destination, marketing and tourist destination management, carrying capacity and tourism marketing, mass tourism and tourism marketing and tourism marketing and finally, last chance tourist destination.

Almost 34,353 articles were identified using the four databases and approximately 12000 duplications were removed. The remaining publications were further examined by using the following criteria:

- i. Empirical studies that examined the role of tourism marketing in sustainable tourist destinations, knowledge, attitudes and behaviour.
- ii. Peer-reviewed journal articles.
- iii. Articles written in English.
- iv. Publications dated between 2012-2016.

Articles that did not formally meet the four criteria were those of:

- Studies investigating the role of marketing in tourism in general without a suitable sustainability element.
- Theoretical papers, essays and editorials.
- Research exploring the role of marketing in other disciplines rather than in tourism

The researcher then looked for the search terms in the articles titles, abstracts, keywords and for the number of results returned from each database and the searched articles were scanned, read in full text and those which were found to meet the criteria were used in this review.

As the review was narrowed to the role of tourism marketing in sustainable tourist destinations, it sought to identify the review writings focusing on the role of tourism marketing specifically in five themes that were identified after reading the articles. The themes included: tourist destination sustainability, carrying capacity, mass tourism, last chance tourism and tourism marketing organisation, as they were revealed in the articles. To identify these themes, the following criteria were employed:

Attitudes: Tourism marketer's attitudes towards sustainable tourist destination.

Knowledge: Sustainable tourist destination knowledge among tourism marketers and tourism marketing organisations.

Behaviour: Tourism marketing behaviour, sustainability action and conservation behaviour of the tourist destination.

Later in the discussion the terms sustainable destination marketing and de-marketing were added as preliminary results showed that numerous articles addressed sustainable marketing knowledge, attitudes and behaviours, and were thus actually approaching the topic with strong interest in making tourist destinations sustainable.



Finally, the literature review focused on 37 articles that met all criteria as reviewed and discussed; preliminary proclivities emerged and areas of interest were known. Some challenges occurred especially when authors did not clearly explain and define the outcomes being measured, because of various methods and the use of terminologies. Sometimes it was found that such information on specific study outcomes was seldom unclear and sometimes difficult to classify.

Results of the Review

Tourism marketing and Sustainable tourist destination

Tourism is a significant component of the growing footprint (Truong & Hall, 2016:10), while tourism marketing is the application of marketing concept in travel and tourism industry (Ketter & McMillan, 2016:177) as it uses the four Ps, product, price, place and promotion in advertising tourist destination to consumers. However, tourism marketing to date, is perceived as the enemy of sustainability as it traditionally concentrates on increasing tourist numbers and treating tourism like a commodity (Pomeroy, Noble & Johnson, 2012:956). Tourism marketing is a cooperate activity as consumers rarely use just “one brand in consuming the overall tourism experiences” (Liu & Chou, 2016:303).

The literature shows that it is a very important functional area in a tourism business organisation and always uses a wide variety of communications strategies and techniques to promote areas and destinations (Avraham & McMillan, 2016:178). The purpose for tourism marketing is thus to sell the site to a potential customer base (Donohoe, 2012:130), and Tourism marketers themselves ensure that they satisfy the two criteria that customer needs are met and organisational goals are attained. The literature also argues that there is little academic research focusing on the tourism marketing role in facilitating the sustainability of the destination in general (Higham & Moyle, 2016:170). Tourist destination quality is the key to success in tourism development and the role of tourism marketing and management in improving the quality of tourist destination is important to be identified by academic researchers (Lei, Kostopoulou & Huibin, 2014:17).

Tourist destination is regarded as a well-defined “geographical entity under a brand name, mixing of all tourism products, services and environments as an integrated experience which can be understood and identified by consumers” (Hartwel et al., 2016:57). Nevertheless, not much academic research has been conducted yet in finding out the role of tourism marketing in contributing towards successful and sustainable tourist destinations (Eagle, Hamann & Low, 2016:325-327). Following are some the results of the review.

Starting with Sharpley & Pearce, (2014:567-569), it is argued that there is no specific tourism marketing role specifically for sustainable tourism in English National park destination but sustainable tourism is rather promoted by other organisations. Marketing for them, is only socio-economic although it increases tourism to a destination. Similarly, Mossaz and Coghlan, (2016:8-9) in the role of travel agents in the marketing and sale of sustainable tourism, found that most tourism agents market or sell sustainable tourism in the destination as an effort to get customers and they do not really have any influence in conserving the environment of the destination. This suggests that tourism marketers do not real engage in the sustainability of the destination for future use.

A sustainable tourism destination is used as competitive tourism marketing strategy, as (Esparon et al., 2015:714-719) show. Sustainable tourism in some areas acts as a destination competitiveness tool in tourism marketing processes and not in a meaningful way in contributing to a successful tourist destination. Also, the relationship between destination marketing and sustainable destination management has been researched by academics. Lei, Kostopoulon and Huibin (2014:16), pointed out that there is a big relationship between these



aspects, and that marketing has a subsequently direct effect and impact on a tourist destination.

Jamal and Camargo (2014:24-26) showed that there is a problem in sustainable tourism justice at the destination as the wellbeing of disadvantaged population is not considered and the cultural commodification and inequalities among disadvantaged groups, prove that there is gap on the role of tourism marketing in efforts at successful destination sustainability. The literature argues that It is important for tourism marketers to consider the justice of the destination itself.

On the other hand, the literature shows that there is a critical question here namely, destination tourism marketers promote places and planners plan their local spaces but how often do the two meet to ensure sustainable destination development is achieved? (McCamley & Gilmore, 2016:14-15).

The literature also points out that most academic research talks about sustainable marketing and not sustainable tourist destinations, thus, Donohoe (2012:130-132), found sustainable marketing emphasises the importance of preservation and conservation for marketing planning and strategies but does not show the role of tourism marketing itself in successful sustainability of heritage destinations.

With this in mind, it was interesting to review how tourism marketing explains the sustainability of a destination in their marketing strategies. It is widely accepted that destination policy settings remain focused on quantitative growth in tourist numbers rather than qualitative sustainable tourist destination (Hall, 2016:365-368; Brennan, & Binney, 2013:269). As a result, this positivity or negativity affects a tourism marketer's perceptions of destination sustainability in their daily promotion of a destination.

The role of tourism marketing in carrying capacity and mass tourism for sustainable tourist destinations

Carrying capacity and sustainable tourist destinations

To encourage more sustainable consumer and business behaviours with respect to the environments, tourism marketing is expected to have a system wide effect (Truong & Hall, 2016:4-8), therefore the literature argues that it is important for tourism marketers not only to promote larger number of tourist's arrivals but also the quality of tourist experience, including social and environment carrying capacity for sustainable development of a destination (Tse & Qiu, 2016:15-17; Simon et al., 2014). Given the fact that carrying capacity is significant in marketing any tourist destination for its sustainability the three types of carrying capacity dimensions have a unique importance in tourism marketing and promotion. Subsequently, the three carrying capacity dimensions have been reviewed in relation to the role of tourism marketing in successful tourist destinations.

To start with physical carrying capacity, here the destinations ability to handle tourists crossing border control points and provide accommodation, attractions and transportation is appreciated (Hartwell et al., 2016:57), and is considered as an essential element for successful sustainable tourism destinations as found by Hartwell et al., (2016). They also found that physical carrying capacity must be undertaken as the best way for tourism marketers to consider sustainability. Then, social carrying capacity is important. Jurudo et al., (2012:1338) showed that tourism marketers should consider the crowdedness felt by tourists in interacting with the local communities, however, Jurudo, Damian and Morales, (2013:15-16) identified the significance of this in supporting sustainable tourist destinations.

Moreover, environmental carrying capacity, brings us to the destination's ability to protect the natural environment given the potential pollution created by tourists, hence Hartwell et., 2016:57; Higham & Moyle., 2016:63, and Jamal & Camargo, 2014:27, have all argued that the



importance of environmental carrying capacity for tourism marketers when advertising the destination, leads to tourist satisfaction, harmony in the community and sustainability of the environment.

Moving on, Tse and Qui., (2016:13) found that the high market of tourists in mainland China created problems at the destination including social problems. Thus, there is a need for marketers to limit the number of visitors without exception. Tourism impacts at the destination can be a key factor in measures of carrying capacity by tourism marketers, however, Hartwell et al., (2016:35) identified that the social factors such as overcrowding and unsociable behaviours by tourists creates problems at the destination; since tourism marketing does not take into account as Gössling et al., (2016:528) state that “destination attractiveness affect tourists timing of visitation levels of demand, willingness to pay and desired of stay” are important aspects. Likewise, Polo-Pena, Jamilena and Molina (2012:517-520) noted that sustainability of the destination attracts politicians and the business community and it is also then used as marketing device for marketing the destination.

Whereas Sanchez and Fernandez (2016:11-13) argue that in the improvement of the sustainability of the destination, tourists must be given relevant information to inform their decision-making by all tourism marketers for any specific destination.

Mass tourism and sustainable tourist destinations

Building on Jurrado et al., (2012:1342-1344) and Jared Bowers (2016:761-762), it is noted that tourism marketing development is a driving force that is radically transforming society, the economy and the environment, since these forces provide pressure that affects the tourist destinations sustainability. That is why Lai and Hitchcock, (2016:13-14) and also Silva and Correia, (2016:12) argue that mass tourism affects the resident’s attitudes towards supporting destination sustainability. It is then very important to know how tourism marketers consider massive tourist arrivals when marketing a tourist destination, and if they have carefully considered their promotion.

However, Sanchez and Fernandez (2016:9-10) found that when the number of tourists increase, this puts pressure on the local facilities and it can generate annoyance and antipathy among local residents towards tourists. The discourse of sustainability is in several ways structured around perceptions of wellbeing, concerning both the environment and the people, as Haltman and Säwe, (2016:327-328) argue that the sustainability in tourist destination works as the selling point to most tourism marketers although they don’t talk about mass tourism when they are marketing the destination. Conversely, marketization of sustainable tourism on the destination market is a business as usual issue without consideration of the greater number of tourists and their effects on the environment or the destination in general (Polo-Pena, Jamilena & Molina, 2012:504).

The role of tourism marketing in Last Chance destinations and Tourism Marketing Organisation in successful sustainable tourist destinations

Last chance tourism and sustainable tourist destinations

Tourism marketing for conservation and sustainable tourist destination is perceived as pandering to a neo-liberal agenda that marketing managers utilize to achieve their goals (Albrecht, 2016:19), but the question of the role of tourism marketing in Last Chance tourism is questionable. Mckeller & McNamara, (2016:17-18) show that Last Chance tourist destinations such as the Great Barrier Reef in Queensland, Australia, are places that tourism marketers use as an opportunity for tourist to travel to experience before it is gone, and tourists are then motivated by tourist destination which are ‘fast-disappearing’. Fernandez, Caldito and Rivero, (2015:49) recognized that “the concept of tourism sustainability is still not clearly



understood by the international tourism marketers or it may be understood but not valued enough”.

The controversy is that sustainable tourist destinations are preferred over those which are less sustainable by tourists; but how tourism marketers use their efforts in supporting and promoting sustainable destination for the long-term survival of their business is worth noting. Eventually Kozak & Kazok, (2016:205-206) pointed out that the primary goal in tourism marketing and promoting sustainable destination would be to project an image aligned towards sustainability values to potential tourists so that the destination may become desirable for them. They also showed that Last Chance tourist destinations are different as tourism marketers use the opportunity to generate profits based on the notion that a destination is disappearing.

The literature (Mckeller & McNamara, 2016:17 and Lai & Hitchcock, 2016:13) shows that effective tourism marketing and communication programs about sustainable tourism are less in Last Chance tourism, however Last Chance tourist destinations are found to be essential for the economic success of tourism marketing agents.

Tourism Marketing Organisation and sustainable tourist destination

Sheeham et al., (2016:550-551), revealed that a Tourism Marketing Organisation is an important tool which focuses on marketing the destination but they have limited willingness to utilize the collective knowledge assets of the destination sustainability which is developed by researchers and government to ensure the sustained viability and success of the destination in the global marketplace. Subsequently, Donohoe (2012:128) showed that Tourism Marketing Organisation and management have vital roles to play with the support and involvement of stakeholders, partners and the local community on the practices of a sustainable destination tourism paradigm, although the limited attitudes among them towards sustainable practices act as a troubling obstacle.

In the same way, Brennan and Binney, (2013:276-277) noted that the use of social marketing by Tourism Marketer's Organisation affects their role in tourism marketing for sustainability as it can lead to unconsciously pushing a community towards becoming an unsustainable future tourist destination. Again, Hall (2016) also argues that social marketing as a part of Tourism Marketing Organization aims at developing material wellbeing while the increased use of resources as a result of these changes affects the sustainability of the destination.

Furthermore, Hamann and Low (2016:328-330) and Sharpley and Pearce (2014:561) revealed that there is a need to develop improved evaluation criteria for Tourism Marketer's Organisations in using social marketing programs that incorporate a consideration of sustainability. In that sense, Liu and Chou (2016:307-308) claim that, the tourist destination has a positive effect on the country's economic development hence being important for Tourism Marketer's Organisation to know that destination image is formed from the travel environment including its natural resources and will eventually directly or indirectly affect tourist goals and destination development.

Discussion

Tourism marketing is a potentially useful consumer-oriented approach for the tourism industry to promote tourist destinations (Sharpley & Pearce, 2014; Chhabra, 2015:317). Sustainable tourism marketing is an issue that is now at the forefront of the sustainable tourism agenda (Tse & Qiu, 2016:12) but the whole area of tourism marketing on how to promote sustainable tourist destination seems to still be a 'blank' space for sustainable tourism researchers (Donohe, 2012:136). The literature noted that “It is important for tourism marketing to concern with meeting customers' needs and organisational objectives by doing good socially and



environmentally” (Sharpley & Pearce, 2014:570). This statement is reflected by the review of the literature presented in this article; which indicates that in very few studies do tourism scholars provide details of the actual successful sustainable tourist destination outcomes that result due to effective tourism marketing roles and/or interventions. The situation may also reflect the notion that sustainable tourism researchers rarely work closely with the tourism industry’s commercial information that is provided. Alternatively, it might reflect the lack of accurate record-keeping of relevant data over a period of time by tourism businesses (Su et al., 2013).

This literature review examined a subset of marketing by looking at tourism marketing. Tourism businesses can organize their own tourism marketing programmes, but collaboration with tourist destinations appears to be a common trend that reflects the broader tourism marketing field. However, important gaps remain in how they engage in promoting and achieving sustainable tourist destination (Cvelbar, Griin & Dolnicer, 2016:9-10).

The identified concepts of carrying capacity, mass tourism, last chance tourist destination in relation with tourism marketing role is regarded as less a minor part of tourism marketing even though they fulfil successful sustainable tourism destination criteria. This literature review therefore supports previous studies (Sharpley & Pearce, 2014:572) which indicates that the tourism marketing role is not necessarily effective in promoting sustainability of tourist destination in tourism settings and this is an issue that is significant for future research on the role of tourism marketing in sustainable tourism studies.

The literature review shows that tourism marketing is often positioned by Tourism Marketing Organisation as a potential for profit-oriented motives only, and not for sustainability of the destination which is marketed (Kozak & Kazok, 2016). However, such results are not completely surprising given that tourism marketing is an extension of the application of commercial marketing management principles. Furthermore, the literature has revealed that to many Tourism Marketers the concept of a sustainable destination is promoted by other organizations (Ketter & McMillan, 2016:20). Given such concerns from society and consumers over sustainability issues at destination, as well as competition pressures, a greater number of tourism business should as a matter of urgency incorporate tourism marketing as a component of their promotion strategies to increase the number of tourists (Truong & Hall, 2016:13).

By implementing or supporting the tourism marketing role in sustainable tourist destinations, tourism business should potentially contribute and enhance their employees sense of belonging and feeling of making a useful contribution in achieving and promoting successful sustainable destinations as a part from their organisational objectives and ethos (Lai & Hitchlock, 2016). Further research in tourism marketing role settings and beyond is needed into how tourism marketer’s outcomes can be evaluated more meticulously and put to good use.

In contrast, de-marketing can be used as a policy option and management tool for demand control among tourism marketers although it has negative impacts on profits (Tse & Qiu, 2016:17). This helps to ensure the quality experience of tourists while maintaining quality living in the local community. Tourism destination marketing should look for sustainability of the destination itself and the private sector should be more involved in sustainable tourism marketing of the destination and not be so hyper-profit oriented (Tse & Qiu, 2016:16).

Consequently, Tourism marketing and sustainable tourism destinations can’t be separated for the future sustainable development of tourism industry to be realised (Jamal & Camargo, 2014:27). The sales decisions of intermediaries in the sustainable tourism supply chain influence the progress of sustainability-oriented practices in this sector; yet the question of how tourism marketing organizations build these conservation outcomes into their decision-making processes when selling tours remained an answered question (Mossaz & Coghnam, 2016:10).



Conclusion

This literature review has sought to contribute to the existing literature on the role of tourism marketing that underpins the development of successful sustainable tourist destinations. It is a review that specifically looked at the role of tourism marketing in successful sustainable tourist destinations. The review has identified some of the underlying the challenges facing tourism marketing and the sale of sustainable tourism destinations and highlighted some areas where future research could indeed focus its attention on, in order to support the ongoing development of conservation tourism at destination levels. Importantly, there is a strong requirement for appropriate training and advice for tourism marketing staff in sustainable tourist destinations, including effective both policy formulation and optimal implementation. Training can help to lift misunderstanding about sustainable tourist destinations and the wide uncertainty of the role of marketing, as well as serve to introduce innovative practices (Donohoe, 2016).

Finally, there is a key need for tourism marketers to share experiences so as to coordinate their work and disseminate their results on working with sustainable tourist destinations (Sharpley & Pearce, 2014). The issues identified are critical and this review is only a first step and therefore offers significant potential future review paths for similar studies.

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