A Study of Stakeholder's Perception Regarding Destination Branding Strategies of Maharashtra State, India

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Abstract

The paper aims to study the perceptions of tourism stakeholders of Maharashtra regarding effectiveness of branding and marketing strategies. It is the state which is receiving maximum number of foreign tourists in India. For this study, a survey of 178 tourism stakeholders was conducted. A structured questionnaire was used for rating the branding strategies of the destination. Data was analysed with the help of important performance analysis method and paired sample t-test was applied. Results of the study showed that, though the Maharashtra Tourism is successful in projecting a simple, appealing, believable and distinct image with help of 'Unlimited Maharashtra' brand, there is need of innovative advertising tactics for effective branding of the Maharashtra Tourism to attract more international tourists.

Keywords: Destination Branding, Maharashtra Tourism, Perception, Branding Strategies

1. Introduction

According to the Department of Tourism & Culture Affairs Government of Maharashtra, (2016) Maharashtra is the third biggest state in India, both in population and area. The state capital

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city is Mumbai which is one of the biggest and most dynamic urban areas on the globe and is also the commercial and amusement capital of the nation. Maharashtra is the only state which offers various kinds of places for its tourists. The state receives maximum tourist arrivals. Reported by the Ministry of Tourism Government of India, (2018)**,** it stands 5th in number of Domestic Tourists visits with 11,91,91,539 tourist and contributed 7.2% share in the year 2017. The state is also leading in foreign tourist arrivals with 50, 78,514 tourists with a share of 18.9%.

 Maharashtra tourism development corporation (MTDC), founded in the year of 1975, is a state tourism organization responsible for developing the policies for the development and promotion of tourism.

Maharashtra tourism has successfully developed the tag line "Maharashtra Unlimited" in the year of 2002. This brand image of Maharashtra was based upon the global corporate image of Maharashtra (especially Mumbai). By launching this campaign, MTDC was trying to position the vastness of the Maharashtra and benchmarked their destinations with overseas destinations (Venkatraman, 2002) and the campaign also won an award at Asia Pacific advertising festival in 2002 (Varghese, 2002). The campaign promoted the regional strengths of different regions like wildlife in Vidarbha, heritage in Aurangabad, religious tours in North Maharashtra, metro experience in Mumbai and Pune, Sahyadri and coastlines. It also promoted the lesser known tourist places like fishing villages (Mandwa, Ganapatipule, Malwan, Tarkarli), historic cave sites (Ajanta & Ellora, Karla, Pitalkhora), a crater formed by the impact of a falling meteor (Lonar), forts (Sinhagad, Murud-Janjira, Daulatabad, Panhala) (George, 2004; Venkatraman, 2002).

MTDC has focused on marketing campaign in six regions, specifically, the US and Canada in North America; the English, French, Italian, and German speaking countries of Europe; Japan in the Far East; Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Thailand in South-East Asia; Australia and NZ; besides Dubai, Qatar and Bahrain in West Asia (George, 2004).

Though the campaign successfully promoted the tourist destination to different target market, some of the researchers critically analysed the campaign highlighting that MTDC has disappointing branding strategies, there was lack of involvement of stakeholders and the state is lagging behind in competitive market. It also has less recall value and lack of awareness about brand campaign (Billimoria, 2015b; Satghare & Sawant, 2018b).

2. Literature review

The American Marketing Association (AMA) has defined a brand as a "name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of other sellers''. According to the (Campelo, Aitken, Thyne, & Gnoth, 2013) brand must represent something unique and different of a destination. It could be a facts , emotions and experience of a tourist about the destinations (Keller, 1993). A strong destination brand needs positive image building which makes destination distinctive and memorable (Akoijam & Meitei, 2017).

Presently many countries are adopting brand strategies and have a successful destination brand. The top ranked destination brands are New Zealand, India, Spain & Australia (Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2011). Blanco-gomez (2013) has analysed different ways of branding and marketing techniques as well as some advertising campaigns used by Spain all over the years. A case study by Bose and Muthukumar, (2011) has discussed a success story of brand New Zealand, i.e. '100% Pure New Zealand.' For this global campaign effective marketing strategies including segmenting, promoting and targeting (STP) was used.

Strong branding has turned into a critical factor that impacts consumer's view of a brand. This emerges from understanding and dealing with the brand effectively to create concrete techniques that impact customers while taking their decisions. So the earlier researchers (Morgan, Pritchard, & Piggott, 2003) have investigated the significance of destination branding plans and the role of stakeholders in those techniques through a in depth analysis of Calella in the Costa de Barcelona Maresme, Spain. Pérez (2012) has

found that there was very little public participation or exposure in local policy making and administrative planning. This emphasised that constructive destination image is a need for a powerful place brand and stakeholders' contribution is foremost for the effective progress of place branding policies. Further Quinlan, (2008) has explained that high level of destination stakeholder unity is necessary for success in creating and managing destination experiences. He likewise highlighted that the aggressive quality of a destination product offering can rise just because of conscious and integrated endeavours with respect to all destination associates. Antonsen (2010) has suggested that there is a need to involve stakeholders in the planning process for implementing internal marketing activities which was followed by Brazil in the form of participatory management strategy.

The term stakeholders in tourism industry includes national governments, civic governments having a particular capability in the tourism industry matters, the tourism industry institutions and the travel industry ventures, including their affiliations, organizations involved in financing the tourism industry endeavors, the tourism industry staff, the travel industry experts and the travel industry advisors, worker's guilds of the tourism industry representatives, the tourism industry teaching and coaching centers, explorers, including business vacationers, and guests to the travel industry destinations, places and attractions, native populaces and host societies at the tourism industry destinations through their agents, other juridical and regular people (United Nations World Tourism Organisation, 2005).

Yusof and Ismail (2014) stated that branding is intricate & fund requiring process. It is difficult to brand tourism products. There is a need of involvement of internal stakeholders in branding process to determine the success of destination branding strategy. Yusof and Ismail (2015) studied stakeholders' participation, mainly local community in tourism growth and development and present differences in understanding destination identity from the stakeholders' perspectives for the branding strategy. Researchers concluded that the branding process is intricate and it demands ample amount of funds. Branding a destination is difficult because of the disintegrated nature of tourism destinations which caters to

the intangible products and services. More efforts are required for involving internal stakeholders for the destination branding process to determine the success of destination branding strategy. In the same tune Vasudevan, (2008) highlights the need of accepting the inner participants' expectations and doubts, anxieties and desires when building up a destination brand.

A doctoral thesis of Pérez (2012) has explored the relevance of destination branding strategies and identified the role of stakeholders through an in-depth analysis of Calella in the Costa de Barcelona Maresme, Spain. The results underlined that, a positive destination image is a need for efficient destination brand and stakeholder participation imperative for the effective growth of destination branding policies. Besides, there was little public association or depiction in local policy making and plan progress. A study by Quinlan (2008) highlighted that extraordinary amount of destination stakeholder solidarity is a key imperative for accomplishment in the construction and the super vision of destination involvement. It additionally stressed that the aggressive quality of a destination product involvement can augment just because of intentional and collective actions of all the destination stakeholders.

Satghare & Sawant, (2018a) studied tourism policies of Kerala, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Gujarat prominent states of India by using content analysis. They concluded that, effective marketing helps in brand creation and online branding is an evolving sector in the field of branding. Hence they suggested that Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) should inculcate the online branding strategies for effective branding of the destination.

Satghare and Sawant (2018b) have performed the SWOT analysis of marketing strategies applied by Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) for promotion of Maharashtra tourism. For this study Data Triangulation Method has used for Situation Analysis. Researchers have concluded that, 'Unlimited Maharashtra' is a well-positioned brand but MTDC has disappointing branding strategies. MTDC was not performing up to the mark with respect to marketing vision and brand positioning. The reasons behind could be the insufficient financial

resources, poorly designed official website of MTDC, flaws in social media marketing strategies and limited participation of stakeholders in online marketing.

Apart from the vast tourism potential of Maharashtra and keen initiatives taken by the DMOs, the state is lagging in competitive marketplace. According to Jaykumar Rawal, Ministry of Tourism, Government of Maharashtra has declared the year 2017 as "visit Maharashtra campaign" to attract maximum tourist and suggested the need of rebranding of the state. Billimoria, (2015b) has given the threat that neighboring states are giving tough competition in the same range on the base of aggressive and promotion strategy which are more noticeable and bring into notice that advertisement and promotional strategies used by the stakeholders (destination marketing organisations) of state has less recall values and hardly any advertisement campaign remembered by the tourist.

After the extensive review of literature it is found that there is a lacunae in understanding destination branding strategies of Maharashtra Tourism, which leads to less visibility of state in competitive marketplace. Tourism stakeholders play an important role in the brand promotion and brand building process but there is lack of studies on role of tourism stakeholder's destination branding of Maharashtra. This research has tried to fulfill this gap by evaluating the branding strategies of Maharashtra tourism through the stakeholder's perception. During the pilot survey, the researcher has interacted with some of the Maharashtra tourism stakeholders and came to know that stakeholders are not much satisfied with the Maharashtra brand building strategies. Thus, the researcher felt an urgent need to evaluate the brand building strategies of Maharashtra tourism.

3. Objectives of the study

To study the perception of different stakeholders towards branding strategies of Maharashtra Tourism.

3.1. Hypothesis

H_0-There is no significant difference between the mean importance and mean performance of destination branding strategies perceived by the stakeholders of Maharashtra Tourism.

The researcher has used both primary and secondary source of data collection. A structured questionnaire was used to collect information from the various stakeholders of Maharashtra Tourism. Importance-performance scale for branding strategies was developed by the researcher based on extensive review of literature. Reliability of the scale was 73% (Value of Cronbach's Alpha= .731).

3.2. Sampling

For selecting the Maharashtra tourism stakeholder's data, seven sample destinations (Table no.1) were selected where Maharashtra tourism has its regional offices by using purposive sampling. Four important tourism stakeholders, Travel Agents and Tour Operators, 4 and 5 Star Hotels, Indian Airline Companies and Tourist Guides were selected from each sample destinations.

Table 1: Stakeholders Sampling Design

Sample Destinations	Travel Agents and Tour Operators	4- and 5- Star Hotels	Indian Airline companies	Tourist Guides	Total
Aurangabad	01	01	02	40	44
Nasik	01	00	01	-	02
Pune	06	04	05	05	20
Nagpur	03	01	02	-	06
Mumbai	32	15	06	53	106
Ratnagiri	-	-	-	-	-
Amravati	-	-	-	-	-
Total	43	21	16	98	**178**

For analysing and processing the data, SPSS (Software Package for Social Sciences) was used. Paired sample t-test was used for testing the hypothesis.

3.3 Findings of the Study

3.3.1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Table 2: Frequency Table of Demographic Profile of the Respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	89	75.42
	Female	29	24.57
Age Group	21-30	40	33.9
	31-40	50	42.4
	41-50	14	11.9
	51-60	14	11.9

3.3.2 Awareness of the stakeholders

To understand the awareness about destination branding concept amongst the stakeholders the dichotomous questions were asked as shown in the table no.3.

Table 3: Awareness of the stakeholders

Question	Yes	Percent	No	Percent
Are you aware about the concept of destination branding?	100	84.7	18	15.3
Do you think, branding the destination is important to attract the tourist	98	83.1	20	16.7

Table 3 reflects that 84.7% respondents responded positively for the question are you aware about the concept of destination branding and 15.3% responded negatively. 83.1% stakeholders think that, branding the destination is important to attract the tourists and only 16.7% are not agreeing with it.

3.3.3 Importance-Performance Analysis

After extensive literature survey researcher has identified 13 important branding strategies. Importance and performance of these strategies were rated by the Tourism Stakeholders of Maharashtra. For analysis Importance Performance Analysis (IPA) was used.

Table 4: Importance and Performance means

Brand strategies	Mean Importance	Mean performance	Mean Diffrence
There should be Collaboration between the government and stakeholders at the destination	4.22	3.12	1.1
The brand should support the vision of sustainable destination development.	3.86	3.27	0.59
The brand should project a simple appealing, believable and distinct image.	3.82	3.87	-0.05
There should be an Umbrella concept to cover the states separate branding activities	3.95	3.43	0.52
Maharashtra brand should focus on definite target markets.	3.92	3.53	0.39
The brand should Identify and define destination attributes as a basis for branding activities.	3.72	3.32	0.4
The brand should have Catchy slogans images and symbols	4.27	3.24	1.03
Brand should be used as a marketing tool at special events.	3.83	3.50	0.33
It is essential that stakeholders understand and embrace Maharashtra tourism brand strategy as the umbrella.	3.75	3.05	0.7
Current and prospective visitor perceptions should be considered in brand strategy formulation.	3.64	3.24	0.4
Competitive destination branding strategies should be evaluated when developing a destination brands strategy	3.87	3.30	0.57
The brand status and competitive positioning of the destination should be monitored, evaluated and benchmarked regularly	4.36	3.08	1.28
A concerted effort should be made to communicate the brand to citizens and local communities so that they can, in turn, be ambassadors for the destination	4.12	2.82	1.3

Findings of the study revealed that the highest mean importance is for the variable 'brand status and competitive positioning of the destination should be monitored, evaluated and benchmarked regularly' with 4.36; its mean performance is 3.08 and the mean difference also is very high with 1.28 which indicates that there is a vast difference between the importance perceived and performance. Maharashtra Tourism needs to focus on this aspect. The strategy 'the brand should have a catchy slogan, images and/or symbols' has mean importance of 4.27, mean performance is 3.24 and mean difference is 1.03. It reveals that, tourism stakeholders considers that innovative advertising tactics are required for effective branding of Maharashtra Tourism to attract the international tourists.

'There should be collaboration between the Government and stakeholders at the destination' has mean importance of 4.22, mean performance 3.12 and mean difference 1.1. The possible reason for this difference could be that the stakeholders of Maharashtra are not aware of the benefits of collaborative branding. Therefore, they are less interested in collaboration, as a result of this; they are not much concerned about the promotion of destination brand image. For the variable, 'a concerted effort should be made to communicate the destination's brand to citizens and Local communities so that they can, in turn, be ambassadors for the destination' mean importance is 4.12, mean performance is 2.82 and the mean difference is 1.28, which highlights that, the distinctiveness of a destination brand generated by the joint vision of a local community can be of a great help for effective promotion of the destination but the higher value of mean difference indicates that, Maharashtra Tourism needs to work more on this strategy.

For the strategy 'there should be an umbrella concept to cover the states separate branding activities' mean importance is 3.95, mean performance is 3.43 and the mean difference is 0.52. It highlights that, stakeholders considers it is important to use a destination marketing practice including the use of a single brand tag for the sale of two or more associated tourism products. For the variable 'the Maharashtra brand should focus on definite target markets' has mean importance 3.92 and mean performance 3.53 and mean difference 0.39. It indicates that, respondents think that, there is

need of focusing on the desired target market as performance is low.

For the strategy 'competitive destination branding strategies should be evaluated when developing a destination brands strategy' has mean importance of 3.87 and mean performance of 3.3 and mean difference of 0.57. It directs that, Maharashtra Tourism falling short in assessing the competitive branding strategies and there is need of strategic thinking in present branding strategies for giving it competitive edge.

The variable 'the brand should support the vision of sustainable destination development' has mean importance of 3.86, mean performance of 3.27 and mean difference of 0.59. The high mean difference shows that, the performance for this strategy is low which is essential for making a destination better for the tourists and locals as well.

'The brand should be used as a marketing tool at special events' strategy has mean importance 3.83, mean performance 3.50 and mean difference 0.33. 'The brand should project a simple, appealing, believable and distinct image' is the only variable which has the higher mean performance 3.87 than mean importance 3.82 and mean difference has a negative value -0.05. It indicates that, Maharashtra Tourism is successful in projecting a simple, appealing, believable and distinct image with help of 'Unlimited Maharashtra' brand.

For the 'it is essential that stakeholders understand and embrace Maharashtra tourism brand strategy as the umbrella for their respective marketing initiatives' mean importance is 3.75 mean performance is 3.05 and mean difference is 0.7, it directs that, stakeholders are not showing interest in implementing the Maharashtra Tourism brand as a umbrella for their tourism product marketing.

The brand should be the representation of all characters of a destination. For the variable 'the brand should identify and define the destination's attributes as a basis for branding activities' mean importance is 3.72 mean performance is 3.32 and mean difference is 0.4. It directs that, value of importance for this strategy is high but the performance is low.

For the strategy 'current and prospective visitor perceptions should be considered in brand strategy formulation' mean importance is 3.72, mean performance is 3.32 and mean difference is 0.4. Though the stakeholders rated this high but till the date, there isn't any research conducted by Maharashtra Tourism on this aspect.

Hence it can be concluded that according to the stakeholder's perceptions, the Maharashtra tourism brand "Maharashtra Unlimited" is marginally successful. Besides this, Maharashtra tourism brand runs the media campaigns like "Mahahai Maharashtra" which won the best media campaign award. Furthermore, with the aim of what Maharashtra offers in terms of art, culture and cuisine, and showcase the variety in terms of different places to visits they run the campaign "Explore Incredible Maharashtra" in association with India Tourism. These campaigns acted as a driving force for influencing the stakeholder's perceptions positively and helped in creating a brand umbrella for Maharashtra Tourism.

Hypothesis Testing

Table No. 5: Paired Samples Test

Pair No.	Strategy	Mean	SD	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed
Pair 1	There should be Collaboration between the government and stakeholders at the destination	1.09322	1.44995	8.190	117	.000
Pair 2	The brand should support the vision of sustainable destination development.	.58475	1.49258	4.256	117	.000
Pair 3	The brand should project a simple appealing, believable and distinct image.	-.05085	1.31946	-.419	117	.676
Pair 4	There should be an Umbrella concept to cover the states separate	.52542	1.60508	3.556	117	.001

	branding activities					
Pair 5	Maharashtra brand should focus on definite target markets.	.38983	1.34631	3.145	117	.002
Pair 6	The brand should Identify and define destination attributes as a basis for branding activities.	.40678	1.22814	3.598	117	.000
Pair 7	The brand should have Catchy slogans images and symbols	1.02542	1.34902	8.257	117	.000
Pair 8	Brand should be used as a marketing tool at special events.	.33051	1.65924	2.164	117	.033
Pair 9	It is essential that stakeholders understand and embrace Maharashtra tourism brand strategy as the umbrella.	.70339	1.54869	4.934	117	.000
Pair 10	Current and prospective visitor perceptions should be considered in brand strategy formulation.	.39831	1.51990	2.847	117	.005
Pair 11	Competitive destination branding strategies should be evaluated when developing a destination brands strategy	.56780	1.32999	4.638	117	.000
Pair 12	The brand status and competitive positioning of the destination should be monitored, evaluated and benchmarked regularly	1.27966	1.03681	13.407	117	.000
Pair 13	A concerted effort should be made to communicate the brand to citizens and local	1.30508	1.04193	13.606	117	.000

communities so that they can, in turn, be ambassadors for the destination					

H0 stated that there is no significant difference between the mean importance and performance of destination branding strategies perceived by the stakeholders of Maharashtra Tourism.

Table 5 showed that the level of significance is less than 0.05 for t value of all the branding strategies except the pair no. 3. Hence the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis that 'there is a significant difference between the mean importance and performance of destination branding strategies perceived by the stakeholders of Maharashtra Tourism' was accepted.

For pair no.3 strategy, 'the brand should project a simple, appealing, believable and distinct image', the level of significance is greater than 0.05 for t value hence the null hypothesis that 'there is no significant difference between the mean importance and performance of destination branding strategies perceived by the stakeholders of Maharashtra Tourism' is accepted.

4. Conclusion

It has found that all the branding strategies are important but the performance of the strategies was low. This indicates that the Maharashtra government is not implementing the branding strategies effectively. Stakeholders believe that there is no cooperation between the administration and the stakeholders for promoting the destination. Moreover, it has also found that Maharashtra tourism is lacking in considering the current and prospective visitor perceptions while framing the brand strategy for the destination.

According to the stakeholder'sperspective, intensive efforts have not been taken by the government to inform the brand to people and native populations with the goal that they can be messengers for the destination.

A wide gap between importance and performance was observed for the important strategy—'it is fundamental that stakeholders understand and embrace Maharashtra the tourism brand strategy as the umbrella'. Less awareness of stakeholders related to branding leads to denial of using Maharashtra tourism brand as an umbrella strategy for their individual promotion.

Based on the findings and personal observations of the researcher, suggestions are given for Tourism Stakeholders, MTDC and Government of Maharashtra. Stakeholders must work in collaboration with mutual understanding and unity among the various tourism stakeholders for promotion of clear identity and brand image of the destination. They should recognise the significance of branding policies and believe in the Maharashtra tourism brand, its value and communication. Though Maharashtra Tourism is successful in projecting a simple, appealing, believable and distinct image with help of 'Unlimited Maharashtra' brand, there is need of innovative advertising tactics for effective branding of Maharashtra Tourism to attract more international tourists. MTDC should observe, assess and benchmark brand status of 'Maharashtra Unlimited' and competitiveness of the destination on periodic basis. It should also evaluate the competitive branding strategies and need to focus on framing effective branding strategies.

To build the positive brand image of the state, MTDC must involve the local population so they can become the ambassador of the destination. Also, the strategies like co-branding and umbrella branding should be explored for further development. For implementing the effective branding strategies, MTDC should establish a dedicated marketing research department for better understanding and studying the dynamics of tourism branding of the competitors. Maharashtra tourism is always trying to convert transits tourist into actual tourist for this purpose they must think upon the image rebuilding, identifying new target markets and try to establish point of differences. Evaluation and benchmarking of the positioning strategies with the competitive states like Kerala tourism brand, Gujarat tourism and Goa tourism.

The government of Maharashtra should focus on overall State Branding more aggressively with the help of brand like 'Magnetic

Maharashtra' used for attracting more investors to the state and try to collaborate this brand with 'Maharashtra Unlimited' brand.

5. Limitation of the Study and Further Scope

The scope of the study was limited to the important tourist destinations of Maharashtra like Mumbai, Aurangabad, Nagpur, Pune and Ratnagiri. A broader study can be conducted including more tourist destinations from Maharashtra. Further research can be conducted on the comparison of Maharashtra Tourism brand 'Unlimited Maharashtra' with competitive states like Kerala, Gujarat and Goa.

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