MARKETING AS A TOOL FOR TOURISM SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Maryna Tkeshelashvili
Warsaw School of Economics, Warsaw, Poland

Abstract

Tourism is a rapidly growing phenomenon and has become one of the largest industries in the world. The impact of tourism is extremely varied. The attitudinal behaviour and approaches of tourists and service providers have undergone significant changes during the closing decades of the twentieth century and beginning of the third millennium from the viewpoint of tourism marketing. Tourism has emerged as a globally popular human activity with considerable social, cultural, political and economic consequences. Mass tourism bringing with it diversity and conflicting perceptions and expectations has dramatically expanded the scope and nature of tourism. This has subsequently raised several critical issues related to marketing. These issues invite tourism planners and practitioners as well as academicians and researchers to systematically consider emerging issues and propose a more viable approach to marketing tourism products and services. One such major issue is the need to keep the concept of sustainability in clear focus consideration. Tourism and hospitality marketing can play a more responsible part in tourism sustainability that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. The proposed research focuses on how tourism marketing activities can contribute to the development of sustainable tourism.

Key words: marketing, tourism, sustainable development.

Introduction

Tourism is one of the largest and steadily growing economic sectors world-wide, as well as being a sector in which developing nations have a considerable stake.

International tourism, with its emphasis on the exploitation of “free” resources (sea, mountains, friendly people), became an attractive option for many countries. Tourism, unlike other development options such as manufacturing, mining, forestry etc., was widely perceived to be a clean and renewable industry. Because it drew upon “free” natural, historical, social and cultural resources it was thought to be less capital intensive in its requirements for development. Tourism was seen to have potential to be a major driving force for economic development in many countries [1]. By the early 1970s it became apparent that the “smokeless industry” of tourism was not as benign as first thought.

Early critiques of tourism as a development tool focused primarily on the negative socio-cultural impacts [2], but as international tourism continued to grow exponentially, it became apparent that negative impacts affected the environment and economies as well. The initial response to those negative impacts involved a series of initiatives undertaken by public sector bodies to attempt to manage tourism through visitor management techniques. These initiatives were designed to ameliorate the worst of the impacts in the short-term. Overall, these were small-scale, localized initiatives that did not attempt to change the nature of tourism as a whole [3]. They were however, the precursors of consideration of sustainable tourism development.

Since the Earth Summit, the concept of sustainable development came under increasing attention from both tourism theorists and practitioners. Its basic premise has received widespread acceptance as a desirable outcome of tourism development.

These issues invite tourism planners and practitioners as well as academicians and researchers to systematically consider emerging issues and propose a more viable approach to marketing tourism products and services. In this case, marketing can play a more responsible role in tourism sustainability. “Marketing is a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with others” [4]. It is concerned with determining consumer needs and preferences, creating appropriate products to consumers and advertising their benefits, is a sustainable manner. The knowledge, ethics and attitudes of stakeholders can have a major effect on the achievement of sustainable tourism objectives within individual business and within the boarder tourism destination.

For tourism development to have sustainable outcomes, business operations must be sustain-
Sustainable development for business means “adopting business strategies and activities that meet the needs of the enterprise and its stakeholders today while protecting, sustaining and enhancing the human and natural resources that will be needed in the future” [5].

1. Tourism Sustainable Development: Definition

There are different ways of understanding the meaning of sustainable tourism. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), “sustainable tourism development meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. Sustainable tourism is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems” [6].

In other words, sustainable tourism development is ecologically sustainable, economically viable as well as ethically and socially equitable.

Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary. Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them [7].

2. Marketing Sustainable Tourism

“In marketing terms, sustainability is primarily an issue of product quality. There is no clear evidence in the developed world that more than a small minority of visitors understands concepts of sustainability and environmental good practice and draw on them when choosing products. There is even less evidence that the great majority of visitors are willing to pay premium prices for the products of tourism businesses operating to high environmental standards. But there is convincing evidence that customers turn away from what they consider to be overcrowded, polluted destinations which have allowed their environmental quality to become eroded through over development. This is especially true where health risks, as from air and water pollution, are perceived as problems. There is also convincing evidence that customers become more experienced in travel, more demanding, and searching for a combination of quality and good value for money which they are increasingly able to recognize” [8].

In recent years one of the key problems has been the narrow perspective of marketing adopted by the travel and tourism sector. Many organizations continue to equate marketing with promotion and to concentrate solely on the expansion of overall visitor numbers [9]. As Wheeler [10] puts it, authorities and companies have had an unbalanced view of marketing, only using promotional techniques and viewing price as supplementary to the target of attracting additional numbers. This in turn has caused visible effects on the environment. Overzealous marketing by tourism organizations can result in attracting of potentially harmful numbers of visitors, who by their very presence alone can erode coastal paths, displace local wildlife and generate additional levels of both noise and vehicular pollution [9]. Promoters and developers are less inclined towards promoting tourism as a social activity but tend to consider it as a source of quick financial advantage. Rapid growths in some destinations seem to accelerate the declining stage without holding on to introduction, growth and maturity stages. In the 1990s Kotler refined and broadened the remit of marketing, especially in terms of sustainability, stating that “the organization’s task is to determine the needs, wants and interests of target markets and to deliver the desired satisfaction more effectively and efficiently than competitors in a way that preserves or enhances the customers’ and the society’s well-being” [4].

Sustainable marketing should contribute to finding feasible trade-offs between business and environmental concerns. Sustainable marketing is, among other things, an appeal to lengthen corporate time horizons and to value continuity over profit [11].

Implementation of the marketing concept in tourism can be achieved through the use of a variety of marketing tools and techniques.

The overriding goal of tourism marketing within the context of sustainable tourism development is to achieve an appropriate balance between supply and demand.

This involves:
Managing tourism demand (the type and number of tourists targeted and their associated activities and timing of visits, duration of stay); and

- Managing tourism supply (the provision of quality tourism products, services, experiences and infrastructure within the resource capacity of the tourist destination) [5].

The appropriate management of these variables should lead to the maximization of tourism development benefits for the relevant stakeholders including tourism industry operators, government organizations, tourists and the host community while minimizing the negative impacts on the socio-cultural and natural environments in which tourism operates. What constitutes an appropriate balance will vary from one destination to another and will be dependent on the goals of the local community and the unique characteristics of individual destinations.

Several stages can be underlined: 1) The first stage is analysis of the market, resources, competitors and the business environment. 2) The second stage is to decide on the strategic choices of how to segment markets, to determine the markets to be targeted, and to plan an appropriate product positioning. 3) The latter part is to determine the marketing mix, which in its most basic sense means how the product will be offered to tourists, the price that will be charged, how the product will be communicated, and how it will be distributed. It is through examining the requirements of these promotions and distribution channels that projects and firms face the reality check of what the market wants.

Successful market segmentation and targeting involve the appropriate matching of tourist needs with the experience being offered, and, in the case of sustainable tourism, the need for this match is particularly important [12]. Tourism organizations need to give greater consideration to segmenting their market with a view to concentrating on those categories of visitor that are not only economically attractive, but are also likely to be susceptible to messages aimed at encouraging them to adopt sustainable behaviours [9]. The targeting of inappropriate tourists not only jeopardizes business objectives because the needs of inappropriate tourists will not be met, but also may cause environmental damage or act insensitively towards a local culture [12]. The Republic of Cyprus’ demarketing strategy has had remarkable success. The market segment decisions made 25 years ago to concentrate on certain sub-groups (older high and middle income groups) to the exclusion of other groups normally associated with mass tourism. This is how Cyprus intended to position itself in the eyes of the tourist population; this vision was a product of an audit of natural resources, aspects of tourist interest, the need for minimal disruption to the indigenous population, levels of per capita spending and a recognition of limited space for a tourist industry [13]. It is necessary to be aware of the profiles of tourists attracted to a destination. This information is needed so that the marketing strategy can target those groups of tourists most likely to be interested in visiting the destination. Thereafter that profile can be projected into the future (using environmental scanning techniques); and balance the long-run requirements of sustaining the asset base (the quality of the environment at destinations) with short-run needs to satisfy customers (the potential range of products and services available) and generate profits.

3. Marketing Mix – Product, Price, Place and Promotion

The marketing management practices of tourism organizations can influence progress towards the attainment of sustainable tourism objectives in a number of ways. The traditional 4Ps of product, price, place and promotion, also known as the "marketing mix", are the tools marketers use to target their chosen markets. Marketing is a powerful influence on tourist behaviour through the products and services produced and distributed, the pricing strategies employed, and the images and messages conveyed through advertising and promotion. The marketing mix is often manipulated and manipulated by management so as to target the greatest number of visitors and associated spending, with little regard given to the wider socio-cultural and environmental impacts on the host community [5].

While the continued growth of tourism is inevitable as international tourist numbers continue to increase, a better alternative for all nations where the lifestyle, culture and natural environment are felt to be under threat may be focus on quality rather than quantity. This could be achieved by providing high-quality tourism facilities and experiences aimed at attracting high spending tourists [14].
3.1. Product

Tourism products and services are often designed only after considering the needs and wants of the visitors and the key competences of the business, with little consideration being given to the overall goals, values and wishes of the host community. In many cases this has resulted in tourism business inevitably destroying the very resources that attracted tourists in the first place [5].

The product dimension to achieve more sustainable tourism involves:

a) developing products which are more sustainable in nature:
   - conservation holidays;
   - vacation packages using public transport rather than private cars;
   - small-scale rural community-based tourism initiatives;

b) moving away from offering products which are intrinsically not sustainable:
   - hunting trips;
   - holidays on which tourists consume too many local resources which may be in short supply, such as water, wood etc. [15].

The concept of a “sustainable tourism product” is understood broadly as meaning those that use resources in an environmentally responsible, socially fair and economically viable way, so that users of the product can meet their current needs without compromising future generations from being able to use the same resources. Measuring sustainability is a complex issue and the criteria vary according to the product type and local conditions. Deciding what is ultimately sustainable for a particular community is a balance between local circumstances and expectations and best practice in technology and environmental management.

3.2. Price

Pricing structures have often been based on maximizing visitor numbers to an area and associated revenue without factoring in the cost of protecting and maintaining a high-quality environment and without consideration of the carrying capacity of the destination. This practice can result in overcrowding place pressure on the natural and cultural resources in the host community and in some cases can result in resentment from the local residents who begin to experience more of the negative social and cultural impacts of tourism [5].

In general, the public sector has little influence on prices (except in cases of public ownership and through taxes, fees and the like) but is a most influential tool in the hands of the commercial sector to influence demand. Price is inversely related to demand [16]. For sustainable tourism development, the price paid by the tourist should cover the full cost of their holiday. The cost must also be high enough to:

- ensure a satisfactory experience for the tourist;
- provide a satisfactory level of profit for the tourism industry;
- generate an appropriate level of benefits for the host community;
- cover costs involved in putting right any damage caused by the tourist to the environment;
- pay for the resources consumed by the tourist;
- allow employees to be paid a reasonable salary [3];
- automatically discourage large numbers of visitors [13];
- present an image of exclusivity; a positive factor in image building [13].

The principles of sustainability also mean ensuring that the tourists feel they have received value for money, rather than leaving them with the idea that they have been exploited [15].

3.3. Place

Place includes the location of the business and the distribution channels used by the business to get the product to the customer. An emphasis on securing the most attractive location for the business often means tourism operators seek out pristine fragile environments with obvious appeal to tourists such as beachfront and alpine locations. However, it is these sites that are often more susceptible to negative environmental impacts that come with tourism development such as the destruction of flora and fauna [5].

Therefore,

- encourage trends towards direct selling, leaving out the marketing intermediaries, as this often results in a better price for the consumer [3].
- where an agent is used, action should be taken to ensure that the way they sell a product is ethical and does not raise unrealistic expectations in the minds of tourists [3].
3.4. Promotion

The promotion of many traditional tourism products has resulted in the degradation of the cultural and physical environment at the destination and the economic sustainability of the destination as it loses its appeal to tourists. Tourism advertising and promotion are often aimed at conveying a certain type of image to relevant target segments so as to maximize visitor numbers rather than portraying an accurate image of a destination. This promotion is a key influence in establishing consumer perceptions of a destination and indicating acceptable types of behaviours. Portraying unsustainable activities in advertisements, such as luxury tourism in national parks, may lead to such behaviours becoming the norm by visitors once at the destination.

Promotional techniques (the specific presentation of objects, stories and themes, and all the forms of display provided for visitors) can be a vital element in creating more sustainable forms of tourism. Sustainable promotion should reflect the manner in which a tourist site is promoted and advertised, and such promotion must accurately reflect the unique characteristics of the area in order not to cause disappointment and frustration among tourists. It is important that the industry, in its brochures and advertisements, does not create expectations that the product cannot live up to. Tourism organizations and destinations can also use literature and advertisements to raise tourist awareness of key issues relating to sustainability. They can undertake “green marketing” and communication of information explaining and interpreting the nature of the attraction/resource and its significance, for example, by promoting “soft” tourism that minimizes adverse environmental and cultural impacts (e.g. nature tourism) as well as informing tourists of the impacts of their presence [15].

3.5. People

Tourism marketers often include a fifth “P” in their marketing mix: “People”. Tourism and hospitality is a people industry and involves relationships among a range of stakeholders, including the tourism operators, the tourists, the public sector and the host community. Traditionally there has been a lack of cooperation and partnerships among tourism organizations and a lack of liaison and cooperation with local communities to ensure that their goals and the goals of individual tourism, which suggests that all tourism stakeholders including the local community, should be actively involved in working towards sustainable tourism [5].

Conclusions

In today’s world is difficult to imagine any destination in all forms to be a “model destination”. Even de-marketing efforts cannot prevent people to travel as they need all kinds of assistance from tourism service providers to make their trip not only hassle free, but also a lifelong experience.

In today’s rapidly changing business environment, it is imperative, that business remain alert to emerging market trends and change their business practices accordingly, if they are to remain competitive. As tourists are becoming more educated and increasingly sophisticated in their consumption patterns and as they demand better quality tourism products and experiences, travel and tourism firms need to respond with more creative marketing approaches based on better quality products and more informative and trustworthy advertising messages.

Those firms that are proactive in responding to this demand for quality tourism products will be more competitive than those firms that are reactive and only respond to environmental concerns when faced with regulatory pressure. Destination marketing organizations and individual travel and tourism firms can capitalize on this new wave of sophisticated travellers by formulating marketing strategies that are in accordance with the sustainable tourism goals of the destination in which they operate.

Along with this, the continuous educational programs are to be provided, more sensitive environmentally aware attitudes and the adoption of long-term perspectives towards tourism resources exploitation implemented.

Reference

7. UNWTO. [http://sdt.unwto.org/en/content/about-us-5].