

Destination Branding Incongruity from Stakeholder Perspective: Theoretical Framework and Empirical Evidence

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Introduction

This study conceptualizes a theoretical framework attempting to understand the destination branding incongruity through destination identity, perceived destination image and destination tourism products, from the perspective of destination stakeholders. Moreover, empirical evidence based on the Pee Dee region in South Carolina, USA is provided to show the occurrence of destination branding incongruity. This study will contribute to both destination branding theory and incongruity theory.

Literature Review

Extant literature reveals the risks of a traditional destination branding strategy concentrating only on tourists but neglecting other stakeholders, such as local people and entrepreneurs (García, Gómez and Molina, 2012). Pinto and Kastenholz (2012) and Ashton (2014) assert that the involvement of stakeholders is crucial for the success of destination branding development, as they are involved in almost every important area and in every stage of a brand management strategy through collaboration with others. Finally, congruence among stakeholders, namely stakeholders-based brand equity, is important to achieve destination brand's success (García, Gómez and Molina 2012).

Empirical Evidence

A survey was administered to local businesses, visitors, and Pee Dee residents. Intercept surveys explored the perceptions towards the Pee Dee as a tourism destination. Survey questions were based on previous research and explored perceptions of destination personality, destination attributes and overall image. A total of 278 usable surveys were collected with respondents made up of 126 residents, 117 visitors, and 35 local businesses. By analyzing the data, we found the following three findings. First, destination stakeholders did not reach a consensus on the range of the Pee Dee region. Second, destination stakeholders did not entirely agree on the core values (destination identity) of Pee Dee region. Third, the overall image of the Pee Dee for visitors was the highest compared with the other two stakeholder groups.

Discussion and Future Research

The study suggests practical implications, first, internal stakeholder relationship management is very important as it relates to the success of tourism destination brand building. Second, it is reasonable to involve local residents and business owners in tourism development and also reap tourism related benefits.