

NEW BRANDING STRATEGIES FOR GASTRO TOURISM IN EMERGING MARKETS*

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to investigate the new branding strategies pursued by emerging countries in order to increase their gastro tourism potentials vis-à-vis orthodox branding strategies of developed countries, which have been dominating the global tourism markets. The main methodology of this study will be literature review based on previous investigations on the field of gastro tourism and their critical evaluation. The study will start with a general introduction regarding to literature on gastronomy-related tourism activities and placement of gastronomy in tourism development. Then, branding strategies in tourism and destination marketing will be investigated in detail with respect to the successful branding examples in the emerging countries. Furthermore, the study will suggest a model whereby the effectiveness of branding strategies will be measured based on some social and economic variables. Finally, the paper will conclude that accurate branding strategies characterized by underlining unique aspects of a particular destination through effective use of social media provide an opportunity for emerging countries to catch up with destinations in developed countries.

Keywords: Gastro Tourism, Destination Branding, Emerging Markets

1 Introduction

Parallel to the changes in production methods and global economic system, the industrialization process led to rapid urbanization and the growing portion of service sector in overall economic structure ensured the increase in urban household income and its allocation to leisure and entertainment activities, which reflected in the development of gastro-tourism sector especially in the emerging countries (Zhang et al., 2013). By definition, gastro tourism refers to an “intentional pursuit of appealing, authentic, memorable food and beverage related experiences of all kinds” with an international, regional or even local travel to the destinations where local foods and beverages are the main motivating factor for tourism activities (Williams et al., 2014:4). In the previous literature, the terms Culinary Tourism, Food Tourism, Gastronomic Tourism and Gastro Tourism are generally used interchangeably, despite their conceptual differences (Williams et al., 2014). Considering its etymological roots, the word gastronomy is derived from the Greek words ‘gastros’ (stomach) and ‘nomos’ (knowledge), and indicating the food knowledge in its actual sense, yet the dictionaries define gastronomy as the art and science of good eating (Zahari et al., 2009). Nevertheless, limiting gastronomic experience to the meal will be insufficient, since other factors such as the place the meal is eaten, the surroundings, the service of food, music being played while eating and so forth, have significant impact on the food experience (Hegarty, 2009; Povey, 2011:234).

The concept of gastro tourism includes a variety of food and culinary activities such as factory visits, eating or drinking in restaurants, cafes, bars, farmer markets, wine-tasting experiences, vineyard and orchard tours, taste workshops and so forth, in

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order to enhance the experiences of visitors in a tourism destination (Povey, 2011:233-234). However, the products of gastronomy are not only related to food and beverages but rather they have strong associations with all food-related activities including culture and heritage (Zahari et al., 2009). According to Quan and Wang (2004), gastro tourism accounts for three benefits for a particular tourism destination. First, gastro tourism enhances the development of rural areas and improves the agriculture-based economy. Moreover, destinations can boost their capacity of tourism with additional activities such as food festivals, trails and celebrations based on their gastronomic resources. Finally, gastro tourism is seen as an instrument for the development of pride and self-value of community living in a particular gastro tourism destination, along with enhancing the local life (Quan & Wang, 2004). In addition to the effectiveness of good food promotion on the success of popular holiday destinations through influencing the decisions of tourists (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004), the food itself can be the main motivations for tourists to travel to particular destinations, and gastro tourism differ from “tourism with gastronomy” in this sense.

Developed countries such as France and Italy have long been using their culinary powers for the promotion of their tourism destinations (Skryl et al., 2018); however, the use of this power is rather limited in the emerging countries. The reason why the gastronomic resources are less likely to become gastro tourism products in emerging countries is not because of the absence of a sophisticated food culture in these regions, but rather the immaturity of destination branding strategies for gastro tourism, which cause tourism destinations in emerging markets to lag behind their counterparts in developed countries. By definition, destination branding refers to the strategic use of branding techniques for places to highlight their distinctive features and enhance their social and economic development as well as strengthening the identity and sense of pride among their residents (Campelo et al., 2014). In the context of tourism, destination branding has a multi-dimensional nature (Choo & Petrick, 2016) which includes the efficient use of several marketing factors to create positive value in various tourism branches. Considering the intention of this paper, the key marketing factors for the gastro tourism can be listed as bringing the chefs on the stage for interpreting the value of destination; the development of credible, high-quality tools for promotion, such as food guides; organization of gastro tourism-related events, such as food festivals; the use of media, internet and social networks; and the establishment of co-operation among governmental bodies and all stakeholders at local level (World Tourism Organization, 2017:16). Figure 1 summarizes the main marketing factors for destination branding in gastro tourism.

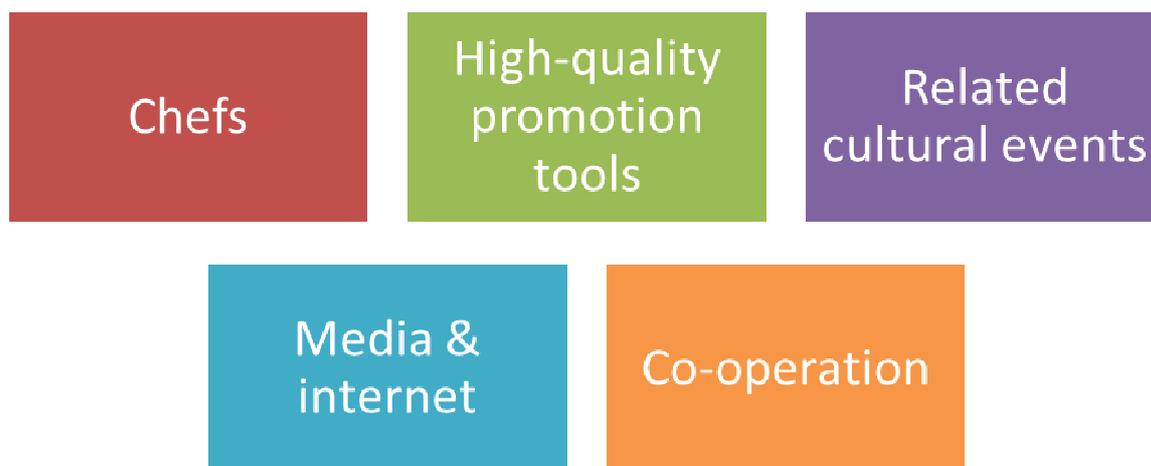


Figure 1 - Marketing Factors for Destination Branding in Gastro Tourism

In the next section, the marketing factors for the destination branding in gastro tourism will be discussed in detail, with a specific focus on emerging countries by linking the successful branding examples in the gastro tourism destinations with three major branding strategies, namely establishment of partnerships, promotion of unusual food and creating a strong link with cultural and heritage, as discussed by Povey (2011).

2 The Role of Destination Branding in Gastro Tourism

Branding efforts in emerging countries appear as an important tool for the development of gastro tourism, however the studies on the role of branding in gastro tourism is quite limited (Tsai & Wang, 2017). The branding literature began in the beginning of 1940s, yet the research regarding to tourism destination branding started to emerge in the late 1990s, and therefore there are still gaps for measuring the effectiveness of tourism destination branding given the increasing level of investment by destination marketing organizations (DMOs), the complex political structure of decision-making process in DMOs and the amount of time necessary to reposition a destination's image in the global market (Pike et al., 2010). In addition to this, the use of food as a part of marketing mix and branding efforts of destinations is considered as underdeveloped, and generally the role of food is limited to formation of national identity in the perceptions of tourists (Du Rand & Heath, 2006). Nevertheless, a bunch of studies with respect to the use of branding strategies in the development of gastro tourism especially in developing countries started to emerge.

Based on the difference between gastro tourism and “tourism with gastronomy”, the use of food in destination branding for a particular tourism destination differs from the branding strategies in food (gastronomy) tourism. To begin with the use of food in destination branding, gastronomic experiences are accepted to have a positive influence on destination image and destination loyalty

(Folgado-Fernandez et al., 2017). Considering the role of food-related cultural activities in the branding strategies of destinations, Axelsen and Swan (2010) claim that the food festivals can be a useful tool for the promotional strategies of regions in terms of building customer loyalty, creating awareness for regional brands, promoting attractiveness of a region and hence they encourage the repeated visits by the tourists. Empirical findings also showed that promotional strategies endorsed by local authorities including wine-related activities like grape-picking, wine making, wine taste, and the share of visual materials on social media channels significantly contributed to the development efforts of tourism market through a new branding strategy, as in the case of Chinese wine tourism (Zhang et al., 2013). Besides that, as a survey conducted by World Tourism Organization in 2012 revealed, majority of tourism professionals considers gastronomy as a distinctive and strategic element for destination image and destination branding (World Tourism Organization, 2017). Nonetheless, some scholars express that food has become an important part of destination marketing strategies parallel to the growing importance of food tourism (Tsai & Wang, 2017), hence indicating a reciprocal relationship between these two concepts.

On the other hand, branding has a considerable impact on tourism development, particularly for the gastro-tourism sector in emerging countries (Williams et al., 2014). In an earlier study, Telfer (2000) suggests that tourists may be convinced to spend more on local and authentic food with good marketing and smart use of images. Furthermore, Belenioti et al. (2017) highlight the indirect link between destination branding and the effectiveness of gastro tourism activities, such that destination branding has a positive influence on destination image and destination loyalty, which in turn help a gastro tourism destination to lure more tourists and enable repeated visits from previous visitors. The brand development in gastro tourism can be carried out through adaptation, invention or extension of the gastronomy experience (World Tourism Organization, 2017:137). The consumer profiling is also an important step for selecting the branding strategy to be applied in gastro tourism. For instance, the study conducted by Smith and Costello (2009) reveals that the tourists who engage in gastro tourism activity are tend to have at least bachelor's degree, and they participate into this activity often without children, and as in parties of two adults, as well as they are more likely to eat more in local restaurants and interested in cultural attractions more than any other tourist types.

Three major branding strategies can be maintained in order to enhance the gastro tourism in emerging countries. First of all, partnerships can be developed in order to establish gastronomic tourism as a niche, as well as a part of general tourism offer such as linking food or wine tourism in a destination (Povey, 2011). The partnership indicates a permanent co-operation among local governments, local stakeholders, the professionals in culinary sector and tourist management for the planning, development and improvement of quality for the products and services as a part of gastro tourism activities and accompanying integrated marketing efforts (World Tourism Organization, 2017:137) in addition to the role of local residents in the development of destination branding in tourism, which is considered as an

essential yet undervalued topic in the tourism research (Choo & Petrick, 2016). For example, the involvement of government to the development of gastro-cities in France is considered as a decisive factor for the efficiency of these tourism sites (World Tourism Organization, 2017:29). A similar contribution can be seen in the case of emerging countries, such as Bogotá in Colombia, where the municipal government tourism promotion institute, IDT, has engaged in projects in order to strengthen the products of farmers' market and associate them better with Colombian culinary culture (World Tourism Organization, 2017:61), which in turn lead to considerable development for the gastro tourism activities in Bogotá.

Secondly, unusual foods can be also an instrument for brand development in a particular gastro tourism destination (Povey, 2011). The origin of food can be used as a marketing tool in numerous ways, varying from organic food to locally produced food or ethnic cuisines, and so forth (Richards, 2015). Based on a recent study conducted by Tsai and Wang (2017) on the use of branding strategies for gastro tourism development in Taiwan, reshaping the food image of destination by the street vendors selling traditional food has significantly contributed to behavioral intentions of tourists toward gastro tourism. However the presence of exotic in destination branding should not trigger the insecurities of tourists. In other words, a destination needs to be exotic to lure tourists without offering any kind of threat; hence an image of 'safe-exotic' should be established (Okumus et al., 2007). The security problems regarding to food quality has been successfully overcome by Thailand government with "Thai Select" certificates which enabled customers to differentiate good quality Thai food in restaurants, where the quality of food under permanent control of governmental bodies (World Tourism Organization, 2017:50), indicating the partnership planned for the branding of certain destination can be also extended to ensure security for tourists while creating an authentic food culture.

Finally, the target of branding strategy can be development of themes which link the food to other activities regarding to culture, heritage and so forth (Povey, 2011). For instance, studies suggest that food plays a significant role in the process of heritage construction particularly in rural tourism promotion (Bessièrè, 2013). Empirical evidences from emerging countries also support this argument, as in the case of Guanajuato, a tourism destination in Mexico which successfully created a strong link between tangible and intangible heritage elements with tourism based on unique gastronomic values and related cultural activities (World Tourism Organization, 2017:170). Moreover, local food festivals are capable of contributing to the branding efforts of a particular destination through promoting the history, lifestyle and culture (Türkmenoğlu, 2017), as exemplified in the Thessaloniki Food Festival in Greece (Belenioti et al., 2017). What and how people eat is culturally constructed, for instance, in Western culture the placement of cutlery between food and individual body is generally accepted as a sign of civilization, or consumption of some food is determined according to religious views such as absence of pork meat in Jewish and Muslim culinary (Povey, 2011), therefore provision of the authentic can be encouraged or limited by cultural elements in gastro tourism related destination branding efforts.

3 The Model

Having discussed the prominent branding strategies in gastro tourism with real world examples in emerging countries, this section suggests a model representing the relationship between factors of destination branding on the effectiveness of gastro tourism. Based on the arguments, the model can be written as:

$$(1) GT = \beta_0 + \beta_1.LP + \beta_2.AF^d + \beta_3.CH + \varepsilon$$

such that:

$$(2) 0 \leq d \leq 1$$

where:

GT implies the impact of Gastro Tourism

LP implies Level of Partnership among the actors of a tourism destination (in total investments by local governments and local stakeholders)

AF implies Authenticity of Food used in gastro tourism branding

CH implies the number of Cultural and Heritage elements used in branding

d indicates a factor for security of food, varying from 0 to 1 where 0 denotes absolute insecurity and 1 denotes full reliability,

β_0 , β_1 , β_2 and β_3 imply coefficients, and

ε implies residual (i.e. the effect of other variables).

In general, the effect of gastro tourism can be measured by three main branding variables, namely the level of partnership among the actors of a tourism destination, authenticity of food with respect to food safety, and the contributions of local stakeholders in the value chain. In addition to these three aspects, there might be other variables which are capable of explaining the variance in the level of impact of gastro tourism that the suggested model cannot capture. For instance, possibility of social interaction with other people may contribute to the impact of gastro tourism, as studies suggest most of people enjoy sharing their meal on holiday and gastro tourism provides an opportunity for social interactions based on sharing (Povey, 2011:235). For that reason, a residual is also placed in the model, which demonstrates the variance which cannot be explained by the three main variables.

It should be noted that the model presented in this study is suitable for all kinds of numerical data since the target of the model is to measure the impact of gastro tourism in a quantitative form. The modeling of gastro tourism impact based on three main variables, the research enables the measurement through statistical analysis and mathematical structure for the investigation instead of relying on subjective methods which are likely to decrease the objectivity and reliability of the findings.

4 Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, as in all other economic sectors, gastro tourism is also under the domination of developed countries, and destination branding strategies appear as an important tool for emerging countries to compete with destinations in advanced economies. Throughout the real world examples in emerging countries, the paper intended to show how aforementioned branding strategies help the improvement of tourism sector and hence luring more tourists, increasing tourism revenues and enabling the further development at local, regional and national scale. The branding strategies need to harmonize the historical heritage which have long been existing in

a particular destination with innovative aspects in the form of building new partnerships or providing authenticity for the food, since gastronomic tradition is a process of continuous evolution characterized by the emergence of new cultures and traditions, therefore gastro tourism deals with the maintenance of authenticity in the future rather than limiting itself to retain the values of the past (World Tourism Organization, 2017:15).

Despite incontestable contribution of branding strategies for gastro tourism development, the branding strategies are not all that a destination requires. Especially for the context of emerging countries, gastro tourism products and services should not limit themselves to the branding, rather they need to extend their scope by telling a story to the customers with attractive elements, which will assure the customer experience last longer (World Trade Organization, 2017:32). This story may contain the historical elements visualized by cultural activities, represented by authentic food or include the help of other marketing strategies in destination branding such as use of social media, involvement of chefs and so forth, but it needs to be a coherent story targeted to increase tourist satisfaction through visual, aural and naturally, gustative entities to enhance the pleasure they get from participating in gastro tourism activities. In any case, planning and collaboration have significant influence on the branding efforts. The successful brands in gastro tourism are generally characterized by a collective effort which focuses on a single, coherent message created by the contribution of all parties, and the involvement of qualified professionals who guide the process (World Tourism Organization, 2017:136). All in all, the only resource that tourism destinations in emerging countries can use is their uniqueness in terms of culinary heritage with authentic food and accompanying cultural activities given the dominance of developed countries in tourism sector, therefore regions which are willing to make use of their potentials for gastronomy in tourism sector need to plan their future steps carefully and collaboratively relying on their unique heritage.

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