Destination Management and Destination Marketing: The Platform for Excellence in Tourism Destinations

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Abstract

Destination management and destination marketing are relatively new phenomena in tourism professional practice and in the tourism literature. They have now, however, become recognized as being integral to the success of a tourism destination. This article traces the history of the scholarly literature development and professional practice in destination management and destination marketing since around the 1980s. The two concepts are explained in detail, as are the roles of destination management organizations (DMOs).

A critical assessment of the current status of destination management and destination marketing in China is provided. Specific improvements in destination management and destination marketing practices are identified.

Keywords:

China; destination management; destination management organization (DMO); destination marketing; destination marketing planning process.
History of Literature Development and Practice

The following data from Google Scholar show that the topics of destination management and destination marketing started to enter the tourism literature in the 1980s; received more attention in the 1990s; and then became “mainstream” topics from 2000 to 2009 (Table 1). About 95% to 96% of the references to the two topics have occurred from 2000 onwards. Judging by the data for 2010-2012, the period from 2010 to 2019 will have significantly more entries than for 2000 to 2009. Destination branding, which is undoubtedly closely associated with destination marketing, began to be a topic of the tourism literature in the 1990s.

Table 1. Literature on Destination Management, Destination Marketing, and Destination Branding: 1970-2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Destination Management</th>
<th>Destination Marketing</th>
<th>Destination Branding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970-1979</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-1989</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-1999</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2009</td>
<td>3,470</td>
<td>4,310</td>
<td>1,210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2012*</td>
<td>2,540</td>
<td>3,260</td>
<td>1,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6,235</td>
<td>7,954</td>
<td>2,526</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*to November 24, 2012

Source: Google Scholar, author analysis (excluding citations and patents).

The pioneering book on destination marketing was published in 1988 by Richard Gartrell, Destination Marketing for Convention and Visitor Bureaus (Kendall/Hunt Publishing), and it was released under the auspices of the International Association of Convention & Visitor Bureaus (IACVB) (now Destination Marketing Association International). Later, Eric Laws published a book with the title of Tourist Destination Management: Issues, Analysis and Policies (Routledge) in 1995.

During the first decade of the new millennium, there was a surge in new books, academic articles and practice-oriented manuscripts on destination marketing and destination management. One of the most influential of the new books was Destination Branding (2004) by Nigel Morgan, Annette Pritchard, and Roger Pride. This new publication seemed to spur many academic researchers into doing research, writing articles, and arranging conferences around the topic of destination branding. It should be recognized that many tourism scholars beginning in the early 1970s were producing valuable research contributions on destination image and its measurement.
This research undoubtedly provided a valuable platform for what was to come later about destination branding and positioning.

Several related books from academic authors have been added in recent years. These have included two books by Stephen Pike; Destination Marketing Organisations: Bridging Theory and Practice (Elsevier Science, 2005) and Destination Marketing: An Integrated Communication Approach (Butterworth-Heinemann, 2008). Two other books were published in 2011; Destination Marketing and Management: Theories and Applications by Youcheng Wang and Abraham Pizam (CABI) and Managing and Marketing Tourist Destinations: Strategies to Gain a Competitive Edge by Metin Kozak and Seyhmus Baloglu (Taylor & Francis).

**What is Destination Management?**

Destination management is the coordination and integration of all of the elements of the destination mix in a particular geographic area based upon a defined tourism strategy and plan. The destination mix elements are the attractions and events, facilities (hotels, restaurants, etc.), transportation, infrastructure, and hospitality resources (Mill and Morrison, 2012). In addition, destination management encompasses the image-making, branding, and marketing and communications of all that the place has to offer to tourists.

Destination management organizations (DMOs) have the overall responsibility for the coordination and integration of the destination mix elements, and for destination marketing. Scattered throughout the world and spanning many different organizational sizes and types, DMOs have existed for at least the 100 years. Many DMOs are government departments, while others are quasi-governmental. DMO structures vary according to local practices and governmental systems.

The destination mix and the destination product are similar concepts. Every destination has four destination product components (Figure 1).

- **Physical products:** These include physical items such as attractions, facilities, transportation, and infrastructure. The attractions play the pivotal role in drawing tourists to the destination. There must be convenient transportation access to the destination and good infrastructure (e.g., electrical power, sewerage, telephone communications, etc.) to support safe and enjoyable travel within the destination. There must be adequate hotel and restaurants to cater to the needs of tourists.

- **People:** Local people provide the hospitality resources as the hosts and providers of personal services. Local cultures and lifestyles are also often very appealing to tourists. Community residents should be made aware of the benefits of tourism.
• **Packages:** All destinations have a set of packages and programs that can be purchased and used by tourists. Packages are assembled by travel agencies, tour operators and others, and combine many elements of the total travel experience. They are organized either by themes or route itineraries, and often are based upon industry partnerships. Packages can be purchased through traditional retail channels including at travel agencies, or be bought online.

• **Programs:** Events, festivals, and activities are arranged or programmed for tourists. Well-designed and well-promoted festivals and events draw tourists to destinations, so they share this role with attractions. Programs of activities are also prearranged for tourists with specific interests.

**Figure 1. The Destination Product and Destination Mix**

![The Destination Product and Destination Mix](image)

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Destination Consultancy Group (DCG), a US-based tourism consulting company, identifies the roles of the DMO in destination management as leadership and coordination; research and planning; product development; marketing and promotion; partnerships and team-building; and community relations (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Roles of the DMO in Destination Management**
• **Leadership and coordination:** The DMO has a leadership role in tourism within the destination; it sets the overall direction for tourism in the future. There are many others involved in tourism in the destination, so the DMO also acts as a coordinator of the efforts of everyone on the destination team.

• **Planning and research:** The DMO has a key role in preparing tourism policies, plans and strategies for the destination. It conducts research on existing and potential target markets to guide future marketing and product development decisions. The DMO tracks the programs of its main competitors and continually seeks out best practice case studies to improve product development and marketing.

• **Product development:** The DMO has the overall responsibility for the sustainable development of the tourism product including physical products, people, packages, and programs. It takes inventory of the current destination offerings and assists with continuous product quality improvements. Additionally, the DMO identifies new tourism product development opportunities and provides assistance in realizing these projects and programs.

• **Marketing and promotion:** The DMO develops the overall marketing strategy and prepares long-term and short-term marketing plans for tourism. It identifies the priority target markets and selects the most effective image or identity for the destination, culminating in the implementation of an effective branding approach. The DMO uses the integrated marketing communications method combining online and traditional promotions to inform and persuade tourists to come to the destination.
• **Partnership and team-building:** The DMO puts together an effective destination team and builds alliances to achieve the destination’s product development and marketing goals. Some of the partnerships are established within the destination, while others are with external parties including travel agencies, tour operators, transportation providers, MICE planners, and others.

• **Community relations:** The DMO acts as the main champion and advocate for tourism within the destination by raising the awareness and profile of tourism locally to support the achievement of its product development and marketing goals. Additionally, the DMO may consult with community residents when making important decisions that will affect their lifestyles and living standards.

**Tourism Sector Professional Interest in Destination Management and Destination Marketing**

There is a growing interest worldwide in the topics of destination marketing and management as more places are vying for a share of global tourism. This phenomenon is demonstrated through a number of different phenomena and one of these is the expansion of professional organizations with a focus on destination marketing and management.

There are now several industry groups dedicated to this professional field including Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI), located in Washington DC; European Cities Marketing (ECM), headquartered in Dijon, France; Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), with its head office in Bangkok; and several others including AACVB (Asian Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus); and WACVB (Western Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus located in California. Moreover, influential organizations including the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (Madrid, Spain) have set up special initiatives related to destination management or marketing, and are providing related technical publications, conferences and training. The newly-created World Tourism Cities Federation (WTCF) in Beijing is also likely to attach a high priority to urban destination marketing and management.

**What is Destination Marketing?**

Destination marketing is one of the most important DMO roles. So the planning of destination marketing takes on a high priority for a DMO and destination marketing planning must be done professionally and thoroughly. Marketing and promotions are expensive so making the right choices of which markets to target and how to communicate the most effectively are of paramount importance.

Destination marketing planning must not be haphazard, but requires a systematic, step-by-step approach. The destination marketing planning process is one template that can be used. Every
DMO needs to plan its destination marketing and it is very important to think of this planning as consisting of long-term (strategic) and short-term (tactical) time dimensions. For destination marketing, the strategic dimension is defined as three to five years into the future, while the tactical dimension is one to two years ahead (Figure 3). A core part of the destination marketing planning process is the creation of a time-ordered hierarchy of marketing goals and objectives (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Destination Marketing Planning Process Model**

- **Destination vision**: Every DMO’s destination marketing efforts should be driven by a set of explicitly articulated marketing goals. These goals should be established to achieve the destination vision, which is identified through a planning process known as visioning where the outcome is the definition of a “super long-term goal” for the destination.

  A more formal description of the destination vision statement is that it represents a concise, desired “word picture” of the destination at some point in the future. It is a verbal image of the destination that local people aspire for it to become. The vision provides a clear focus on what the destination will strive to be. This sets the overall direction for the tourism marketing and development of the destination in the upcoming years. The destination vision should be articulated in a vision statement. Ritchie (1993) suggests that the destination visioning process should be completed in three stages: (1) envisioning an image of the desired future destination state which; (2) when effectively communicated to those responsible; (3) serves to empower these people so they can enact the vision.

- **DMO Vision**: The destination vision statement creates a pathway for future marketing action. However, the prime responsibility and accountability for achieving the destination vision is
Given to the officially recognized DMO. The next step is for the DMO to define its own vision for the future that will set it on the right course to achieving the destination vision in cooperation with its internal and external stakeholders.

- **Destination Marketing Goals**: The destination marketing goals are like stepping-stones on the DMO’s path to realizing the destination and DMO visions. They are longer-term (three to five years) measurable results that the DMO wants to achieve for its destination marketing. It is best if the destination marketing goals are target-market and time-specific, and state an intended result in a quantified format, but not all marketing goals exactly fit these criteria.

- **Destination Marketing Objectives**: Destination marketing objectives are short-term (usually within one year) measurable results that the DMO wants to achieve. These objectives must be based on the marketing goals and be interim steps toward achieving these goals. As with the goals, marketing objectives should, if possible, be target-market and time-specific, and indicate a quantified result. It should be realized here that many DMOs have marketing objectives, but have not derived these through a visioning process and goal-setting. Marketing objectives are often set as part of the annual process of developing a marketing plan. While marketing objectives are essential foundations for a marketing plan, they are more effective when derived from a long-term visioning process and goal setting.

- **DMO Mission**: The DMO mission, articulated in its mission statement, describes its reason for being. It is a broad statement about the organization’s business and scope, services and products, markets served and overall philosophy. The mission statement is not a goal or objective, but rather it is a clear description of what the DMO does and who it serves. DMO mission statements are sometimes confused with vision statements and goals, but these are three quite different concepts. In fact, the DMO's mission statement should be derived from the destination and DMO vision statements and be consistent with the destination marketing goals.

**Review of Destination Management and Destination Marketing in China.**

Tourism planning is generally very well done in China and there is also a strong emphasis within Chinese DMOs on product development. The DMOs in China are also definitely playing a leadership role in tourism and appear to be able to coordinate tourism quite effectively. However, China’s tourism administrations and bureaus are not performing all of the roles of destination management to the same extent or with the same effectiveness as DMOs outside of China. This is especially true with research, marketing and promotion, and community relations; and significant improvements are needed in these three roles and their related tasks. It also needs to be said that the models for destination management and destination marketing were developed outside of China and do not reflect the cultural and governmental differences within China. Any models like these definitely have to be adapted to meet the unique conditions in China.
The following specific observations are made about the status of destination management and destination marketing in China:

- Many local DMOs do not yet appreciate or perform all of the roles of destination management and destination marketing.
- Local DMOs are struggling to secure sufficient funding and other resources to support the implementation of all the destination management roles.
- Most DMOs have not adopted Internet and other information communication technologies (ICTs) quickly and completely enough; so for-profit online providers are now occupying some of their “space.”
- Many local DMO leaders are not qualified for the positions that they hold; there is also a very high turnover in such positions.
- Universities are not helping solve the current challenges of destination management, as they have been reluctant to introduce a curricular specialization in the specific professional fields of destination management and destination marketing.
- There is a threat that the movements towards nation and city branding will eventually dwarf and eclipse destination branding, thus somewhat diminishing the value of destination marketing in China.

Figure 4 identifies the specific improvements that are required in destination management and destination marketing practices in China. The left column represents the current status of each item; the middle column is the intermediate stage of improvement; and the right column is the future desired status.

**Figure 4. Improvements Required in China’s Destination Management and Destination Marketing**
Leader-driven → DM Professional-Driven → Market-Driven

Events and Promotions → Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) → Digital Marketing-Led IMC

Guessing and Intuition → Basic Market and Marketing Research → Research-Based Destination Marketing

No DMO Performance Evaluation → Count Activities → Measure Activities, Performance, and Productivity

No Destination Marketing Plans → Promotion Schedules → Destination Marketing Plans

No English Websites or Printed Materials → Chinglish Communications → Perfect Usage

No Materials of Popular Overseas Social Network Sites → Operators Encouraged to Use Social Network Sites → DMOs Use Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc.

Loose and Non-Continuous Partnerships → Cooperative Marketing Programs → Strategic Marketing Alliances

Junkets* → Only Qualified Tourism Professionals → Complete Accountability for Program Activities

No Formal DMO Training Curricula → Periodic Training → Certification in Destination Marketing/Mgmt.

* A journey taken for pleasure at the public’s expense
Conclusions

Destination management and destination marketing have become “mainstream” topics in the tourism research literature since the year 2000. Today these two concepts are also integral to professional practice in tourism destinations; they now represent the platform for achieving excellence in tourism destinations. It is especially important that destination management organizations (DMOs) perform all of their roles with balanced intensity and that a systematic and research-based marketing planning process be followed.

Although destination marketing in Western countries has progressed rapidly in the past 25 years, DMOs in Mainland China are yet to implement state-of-the-art professional practices in both destination marketing and destination management. This article has identified 15 specific improvements that are required in China in these practices. Chinese scholars should play a role in advancing these professional practices in China by focusing more of their research on the topics of destination management and destination marketing.
References


