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Rubbish and reputation: How unsustainable waste management impacts tourism

Rohan Miller and Gwyneth Howell

Introduction

Tourism is recognised as having a two-way relationship with the environment (Halleux, 2017). On the positive side, many tourists are attracted to destinations to experience product attributes such as cultural heritage, flora and fauna, sea and sand. Implicitly, sustainability practices and maintaining the destination's environmental integrity are critical to this form of tourism (Ecorys, 2013). On the darker side, however, it is recognised that tourism places significant pressure on a destination's natural environment through pollution, ecosystem degradation and additional strain on natural resources (Weston et al., 2016). Thus, many tourist destinations have reputations that are intrinsically linked to their management of the environment and potentially negative product attributes that can impact on the environment (such as garbage, waste and sewage) (Inversini et al., 2009). In this context, Fombrun et al.'s (1999:72) definition that reputation is considered as "a perceptual representation of a company's [or destination's] past actions and future prospects that describes the firm's overall appeal to all of its key constituents when compared with other leading rivals" is applied in this chapter.

As it is common to identify how organisations and markets change over time (for example see, Knowles & Curtis 1999), this chapter proposes a Reputation Evolution model for application in tourism reputation management. Herein, it is suggested that a tourist destination's reputation is *created* over time, may *recede* over time due to local and international issues related to waste and environmental management, and that once the issue is satisfactorily addressed, then its reputation can be *revised* before the final stage that allows the *rebuilding* of a destination's reputation over time.

In this chapter we highlight Bali's current situation and draw on examples from two global tourism destinations, Boracay and Naples, to demonstrate the impact that waste problems have on the reputation of tourism destinations. Of particular concern is the practice for public waterways to be treated as cheap and convenient dumping grounds for trash and sewage. This has resulted in excess amounts of waste and sewerage being dumped into waterways and these bi-products are increasingly visible and impacting the environment. In 2010 approximately "275 million metric tons (MT) of plastic waste was generated in 192 coastal countries" and between 4.8 to 12.7 million MT entered the ocean (Jambeck et al., 2015:771). Furthermore, an estimated 2 million plus tons of sewage and other effluents drain into the world's salt and non-salt waters each day (United Nations, 2014). There are an estimated "16 shopping bags full of plastic for every metre of coastline (excluding Antarctica)" globally, and by 2025 there will be "enough plastic in the ocean (on our most conservative estimates) to cover 5% of the earth's entire surface in cling film each year" (Hardesty & Wilcox, 2015:2).

Most of the garbage in the oceans originates from land-based legal and illegal dumping, stormwater discharge, extreme natural events, littering and poor waste management practices (Stikel et al., 2012). Over time, much of this garbage seems to form into a toxic sludge of durable materials such as plastics, polystyrene, metal, glass and rubber (Avery-Gomm, et al., 2012; Ebbesmeyer, 2012) that takes many years to decompose. As well as visible waste such as plastic bottles, bags and straws, the sludge includes bacteria, toxic chemicals and microscopic particles from the break-down of solid matter (e.g. microplastics) (Lebreton et al., 2018). The little particles amidst the toxic sludge can be digested by marine life and increase the likelihood that the seafood that families and their future generations eat will contain microscopic pellets of trash and toxins.

Martin and Assenov (2008) posit that if the natural environment is not valued in economic terms, then there is little incentive for government and industry to manage the ocean's water quality and the elimination of rubbish dumping into the oceans. An indicator of the costs of coastal garbage dumping is provided by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's estimate that each resident on the US west coast contributes approximately \$13 each to combat and clean up ocean-trash (Stikel et al., 2012). That is, an estimated US\$520m is spent each year on the US west coast alone to combat rubbish and marine debris before it leaves US shores to pollute international waterways. There are major problems associated with garbage in major tourist destinations such as California and Hawaii, as well as the waters of South-East Asia and the Pacific, and in distant locations such as the Norwegian fiords. Quite simply, garbage is a major threat to the international coastal tourism industry.

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the need for established and emerging tourist destinations to proactively manage perceptions and practices associated with waste and sewerage in order to protect their destinations' reputations. Globally, we have reached a saturation point where the out-of-sight, out-of-mind garbage paradigm of dumping waste in our waterways merely pushes a problem elsewhere (although often the waste remains localised) and this is not sustainable given the current levels of waste and sewerage already in our waterways. We argue that the economic costs that poor waste management across the globe has on coastal tourism and coastal tourism's reputation cannot be ignored. Specifically, all tourism stakeholders need to recognise and actively manage for environmental sustainability.

The main context of this chapter is the tropical Island of Bali. The following section provides detailed background into the garbage-related issues that Bali is currently facing and the island's consequent reputational issues. The waste management practices of two global tourism destinations, Naples and Boracay, are scrutinised in this chapter to provide the reader with examples of effective and somewhat ineffective waste management practices and the consequences of these for the tourism industry. Lessons drawn from these examples are used to inform valuable recommendations for Bali and other 3S (Sand, Sea and Sun) destinations that risk the demise of their reputation as a result of garbage and pollution are then presented.