
15 Regional destination branding in a developing country context

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The objectives of this chapter are to:

- Identify existing and future tourist regions in Egypt;
- Investigate how Egypt can reposition itself through introducing new region brands in addition to, the current Egyptian national brand;
- Examine how a regional branding approach offers Egypt a more resilient and sustainable form of tourism;
- Critically evaluate the extent to which such an approach to branding can serve as a suitable vehicle for destination marketing resilience, regional economic development, and market diversification.

Keywords: Egypt, destinations, regional branding, tourism development, Middle East.

Introduction

Inbound tourism to any country is determined by many factors both internal and external to the destination. In developing countries, political considerations, natural disasters, acts of terrorism and civil unrest are more prevalent than in developed countries so represent important determinants of stability, perceived or real, for the attraction of visitors. If unaddressed, such factors can lead to severe consequences and negatively impact inbound tourism. In most cases, such factors harm the reputation of the national brand and under-

mine expectations of levels of safety and security, and negatively impact the perceptions by visitors of the destination(s). Such negative instances more often than not disrupt operations in the tourism industry and, in turn, lead to a decline in arrivals and, therefore, much-needed tourist receipts.

Egypt is one of many countries which has had to handle such negative forces in recent years and which has been forced to act quickly to mitigate serious damage to its tourism industry. Although Egypt has been subject to instances of terrorism that have negatively impacted tourism, the events of January 25, 2011 (the Egyptian Revolution which formed part of the Arab Spring set of uprisings), served as the catalyst for the country to disassociate itself from its negative experience of political turmoil and violence including terrorist attacks, public unrest, and imposed curfews. Unlike natural disasters, which tend to be more instant, political problems can continue to linger and have longer-term negative impacts on a destination's reputation (Amara, 2016). One such solution to this is the adoption of regional branding strategies in a country context as a means to more equally spread the benefits, and associated risks, with tourism and create a branding platform which is designed to be more resilient and responsive to future crises than single, national-destination branding strategies (Avraham and Ketter, 2008). This has been the approach adopted by Egypt, one of the developing world's most important destinations, with it contributing to the wider economic and social-cultural development of the country.

Aims and objectives/questions

The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to examine how applying the regional branding concept in Egypt, serves as a vehicle for diversifying the product and markets, and attracting more tourists. It aims to:

- ◆ Identify those tourist regions in Egypt;
- ◆ Examine how the regional branding offers Egypt a more resilient and sustainable form of tourism;
- ◆ Investigate how Egypt can reposition itself through introducing new regions brands in addition to, the current Egyptian national brand.

The chapter will review the theoretical approaches of brand building and examine the potential branding opportunities behind the adoption of a regional branding strategy in Egypt. Moreover, the chapter will question how such a strategy contributes to the wider development of tourism in Egypt and critically evaluate the extent to which such branding can effectively serve as a suitable vehicle for destination marketing resilience, regional economic development, and market diversification. Before that, the section that follows introduces a brief synthesis of the core literature in the domains of branding, destination branding, place and region branding.

Brands and brand theory

A brand is a name, sign, symbol, term, or a combination of these elements, with which the products or services of a company are endowed with a specific identity in order to differentiate them from those of the competition (American Marketing Association, 2018; Kotler and Keller, 2015). A brand contains all the values associated with it, which are intended to satisfy the needs and preferences of customers. The brand does not only identify and differentiate the product or service sold, but in some way increases the value of the offer (Kotler and Keller, 2015; Reynolds and Gutman, 1984; Simmons and Becker-Olsen, 2006; Xing and Chalip, 2006). Normally, a brand is made up of four fundamental elements: the name, the logo, the colors, and the symbol, which can also be associated with a pay-off, that is, a phrase that summarizes the universe of reference of the brand and its positioning, and defines its philosophy (John et al., 1998; Park et al., 1991).

A brand is not the only essential distinctive sign, but certainly the most important among the distinctive signs for the role it plays in the current tourism and hospitality industry and economy, characterized by the competing offer of similar products and services (Keller, 1993; Schmitt and Rogers, 2008). In fact, a brand distinguishes and provides information about the origin, identity, ownership, and quality of the product or service to which it refers (Inkpen and Beamish, 1997; Parkhe, 1993). This way, consumers can easily recognize and identify products and services from a specific production source, and subsequently select and choose the one deemed best in quality and/or price, among the many similar products or services proposed by the competitors. Therefore, for the consumers, the symbolic value of the brand takes on a guiding role in the purchasing process; while for the organizations, the brand is considered as an important 'cultural resource' to which people refer daily (Bloom et al., 2006; Demirçiftçi and Kizilirmak, 2016; Herr et al., 1996; Hillyer and Tikoo, 1995; Levin et al., 1996; Levin and Levin, 2000).

Among the numerous assets that are able to provide organizations with a strong position on the market, certainly one of the most important is the brand (namely, an intangible resource) whose value (brand equity) can be defined as the total intrinsic value of the brand in relation to the demand and the reference market. The concept of brand equity has proven to be an important source of strategic vision for marketing, capable of making a decisive contribution towards achieving competitive advantage (Aaker, 2009; Aaker, 1997; Hoeffler and Keller, 2002; Keller, 2012; King, 1991; Simmons and Becker-Olsen, 2006).

A brand is, therefore, a distinctive sign of the organization's products and services; it represents one of the main elements of the company's image, and