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Building Place Brands: “There’s Nothing Like Australia”

Abstract

One of the most valuable assets of a firm is its brand. The branding literature emphasizes the importance of building strong brands by making an emotional connection with the consumer. This case describes the brand-building activities of Tourism Australia. The teaching objectives of this case study are to:

1. To demonstrate the importance of branding to a tourist destination
2. To apply the concept of brand personality to a place and describe the Tourism Australia campaign in establishing Australia as an aspirational, dream-holiday destination in both eastern and western markets.
3. To demonstrate the importance of social media in building a brand.
4. To describe the key segments targeted by Tourism Australia, in particular the ‘global experience seekers’ segment that has emerged in China and elsewhere, and explain how the characteristics of potential customers relates to the development of a branding strategy

Tourism Australia targets the ‘global experience seekers,’ adults with an independent travel mindset, who want to explore and experience Australia’s local culture. China is now Australia’s fastest growing and most valuable overseas market and the current campaign, ‘There’s nothing like Australia,’ has been very successful in this market.

Branding and Brand Personality

One of the most valuable assets of a firm is its brand. The American Marketing Association defines a brand as “a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (Kotler and Keller, 2012). The branding literature emphasizes the importance of building strong brands by making an emotional connection with the consumer. Research has found that the modern consumer doesn’t simply buy products and services—instead they buy experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Emotional branding involves engaging the consumer on the level of emotions such as happiness, hope or pride, and it can inspire consumer passion and loyalty. Brand managers tend to focus on the intangible aspects of the brand that are not actually related to the actual physical product or service. Over time, there are many different kinds of information that may become linked to the brand and therefore become part of consumer memory. These types of information are as follows: awareness, attributes, benefits, images, thoughts, feelings, attitudes and experiences (Keller, 2003). For instance, a visitor could respond to Australia in various ways:

1. Awareness – category identification and needs satisfied by the brand. “Australia is a long haul destination”.
2. Attributes – features of the brand, such as product performance. “expensive”, “long haul”, “good value for money” “multi-cultural”, “unique indigenous culture”, “off the beaten track”, “friendly people”, “warm climate”.
3. Benefits – personal value that consumers attach to the brand. “I can get a diversity of experiences, bush, city and sea”.

4. Images – Images from the continent: the outback, Uluru, a beautiful beach, an environment that has blue skies.
5. Thoughts – personal cognitive responses to the brand – “I like the brand”.
6. Feelings – “It makes me proud to be Australia”. “Soundtrack is uplifting”.
7. Attitudes – Positive such as “It’s a good country to visit”, “aspirational and inspiring campaign” or negative, “It is unoriginal” or a “waste of money”, “what about the cyclones, the box jellyfish, the snakes”.
8. Experiences – “I had a wonderful holiday”, “The trip of a lifetime”.

Branding is highly relevant to tourist destinations. Tourism Australia is a well-known brand that has succeeded in creating emotional bonds with its consumers. A holiday has the potential to form part of the consumer’s hopes, dreams and memories and enrich their lives.

Brand personality is a useful way of describing the impact that brands have on consumers. Brands allow people to express their own self through the use of a brand (Belk, 1988). In many ways, brands are like people, with their own personality traits. Brand managers often seek to endow an inanimate object, like a product or a place, with personal traits or characteristics that we normally associate with human beings. A brand personality converts a commodity into something unique and enables a higher price to be charged for it (McDonald and Wilson, 2011). Thus two brands, like New Zealand and Australia, can be very similar in terms of their functions, but have different personalities. For instance, both places may perform about the same along functional dimensions such

as price, quality of accommodation, English-speaking population, geographical distance, accessibility to airports, yet each has a totally different personality. It is easy to ascribe traits such as feminine, masculine, chic or flashy to certain destinations. Brand personality makes one brand more desirable or appealing than another. According to Aaker (1997), the big five brand personality traits are as follows: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. Aaker argues that it is possible to describe every brand using one or more of these five traits. For instance sincerity encapsulates traits such as down to earth, honest, wholesome and cheerful. Words used to describe exciting brands can be daring, adventurous, imaginative and up to date. 'Competence' encapsulates reliable, intelligent and successful. Sophisticated brands (i.e., luxury brands) can be described as upper class, glamorous, sexy and charming. 'Ruggedness' covers terms such as outdoorsy, tough and masculine. Given that brand personality is important, the question of how to develop one arises.

According to Aaker (1988), a brand personality is created through marketing variables, such as packaging, advertising and imagery. Currently, branding activity has moved to the Web. Brands are exploiting social networks, video sharing sites, online communities and micro-blogging sites as places in which to build a brand presence and foster brand communities. Brand communities are defined as "thriving communities of consumers who have developed a devotion to certain brands and made those brands the basis of social interactions" (Stratton and Northcote, 2014, p.2). Some brands (such as Lego with its community site Lego Mindstorms) are skilled at capturing consumer feedback to inform new product development, advertising and sales promotions.

However, Fournier and Avery (2011) advise marketers to be careful when using new media since social networks were created for people and not brands. If marketers rush into social media, there is a risk that brands will appear inauthentic, intrusive and out of place. Careful planning is needed to ensure a successful brand presence online.

Place Branding

Nations can be conceived as brands and an increasing number of countries are developing their own brand management strategies. Place branding refers to the practice of applying appropriate marketing strategies in order to differentiate cities, regions and countries from the competition, with regard to economic, social, political and cultural aspects. Place branding is a more difficult and complex process than the branding of products and services since diverse factors have to be considered, such as geography, tourists attractions, natural resources, local products, residents' characteristics, institutions, and infrastructure (Kaplan, Yurt, Guneri and Kurtulus, 2010). For a country to be successful in attracting tourists, it has to deliver emotional appeal. Emotional appeals, are according to Anholt (2005, p.334) "...those instantaneous, emotional, deep-rooted good or bad feelings that we all have about places."

Australia has been established as an aspirational, dream-holiday destination in both eastern and western markets. In terms of brand personality, Australia connotes notions of ruggedness, the great outdoors, toughness and masculinity. The brand captures a dimension that is desired by tourists. Oprah Winfrey's visit to Australia in 2010 was said to have an advertising value of \$366 million in the U.S. market (Baker, 2011). 'Brand Australia' is exemplified in literature, with books such as Bill Bryson's 'Down

Under’ and of course by the film industry. The film ‘Crocodile Dundee’ did much to establish the Australian character, or a likeable stereotype of it, in the minds of foreign audiences. The release of the blockbuster ‘Australia,’ an epic tale of life in the outback, directed by Baz Luhrmann, and released in 2008, was expected to boost tourism; however, practical factors such as world recession, exchange rates, cost, time and distance acted as barriers to increased visitation figures. Wildlife documentaries, fronted by the former environmentalist, David Irwin, stimulated interest in Australia’s natural history as well as liking for its people who are seen as good-humoured and fair-minded. Soap operas like ‘Home and Away’ have made audiences around the world familiar with the details of Australian domestic life. ‘Brand Australia’ seems to be both myth and reality, a construction that sells products, films and the country itself.

In 2010, Tourism Australia launched a \$250 million dollar campaign, ‘There’s nothing like Australia’ (TNLA) which was created by DDB Sydney. The ad has been viewed 175,000 times on YouTube, with a further 240,000 views from Tourism Australia’s website, Australia.com (Tourism Australia, 2012). One of the most noteworthy features of the campaign was a consumer-generated communications strategy where Australians uploaded thousands of stories and photos to the website. This enabled international visitors to hear from the experts, Australians themselves, about the best places to visit. This tactic helped develop the personality of the brand, making sure it was authentic, down-to-earth, sincere and honest. Furthermore, it helped stimulate interactive, two-way dialogue between the general public and Tourism Australia. Other noteworthy features are as follows:

- Many of the images used in the campaign can be seen on the Tourism

Australia website: <http://www.tourism.australia.com/campaigns/theres-nothing-like-australia.aspx>. The brand slogan “there is nothing like Australia” uses images with various plays on this idea, such as an image of a couple on the Kangaroo Island Beach: [http://www.tourism.australia.com/images/TNLA-KI_lge\(1\).jpg](http://www.tourism.australia.com/images/TNLA-KI_lge(1).jpg). Other examples include ‘red carpets always lead to something special’ ‘discover a zoo without fences,’ and ‘where a trip to the opera is as magical as the performance’. The image for the latter includes a shot of the famous Sydney Opera house: See:

[http://www.tourism.australia.com/images/TNLA-Sydney_lge\(1\).jpg](http://www.tourism.australia.com/images/TNLA-Sydney_lge(1).jpg). The consistent use of the Kangaroo logo in print media campaigns, television advertisements and other platform helps build a brand. See:

<http://www.tourism.australia.com/campaigns/tnla/campaign-logo.aspx>

- A series of television and print advertisements featuring iconic Australian images such as the Sydney Opera House and Uluru along with attractive people enjoying life in picturesque locations.
- A piece of evocative music and soundtrack, ‘It’s like Love,’ written specifically for the television advertisements.
- The campaign was designed to be longstanding and flexible. After two successful years in the market, Tourism Australia decided to adapt the campaign in order to stay relevant for their target consumers in a highly competitive and fast-changing global tourism environment.

Attracting The Global Experience Seeker and Chinese tourists

Developing a brand personality for a place means that the marketer must have a deep insight into the target market. Identifying the needs, motives and characteristics of potential customers is intertwined with the development of a branding strategy.

Tourism Australia targets adults with an independent travel mindset, who want to explore and experience Australia's local culture. Tourism Australia has identified common segments across different cultures known as the 'global experience seekers.' Experience seekers are long haul travellers who are less affected by the traditional barriers to travel of distance, time and cost. Experience seekers are more informed, interested and curious about potential travel destinations. Travelling is a big part of their life. As experienced travellers, they want to make friends, develop personal relationships and engage in the lifestyle. As well as observing they also want to personally experience cultures and lifestyles different from their own look. They seek to challenge themselves physically, emotionally and/or mentally are drawn to destinations that are 'yet to be discovered' or are away from the standard tourist trail (Tourism Australia, n.d).

According to Nick Baker, Tourism Australia's Executive General Manager of Consumer Marketing, people travel to experience difference. As a destination, Australia is different and this rational argument is captured in the campaign tagline 'There's nothing like Australia.' Having made that statement, the next job for Tourism Australia was to prove it, so the latest phase of the campaign highlights examples of the some of the best experiences that Australia has to offer. It also challenges stereotypical views of the country with its focus on urban life—contemporary, sophisticated experiences; accommodation options; food and wine, as well as the wealth of natural assets (the

islands, bush, landscape, wildlife, marine life); the people and aboriginal culture and iconic sights such as the Great Barrier Reef, Uluru and Sydney Opera House. Promoting the best attributes of the product is a proven marketing principle. According to Tourism Australia, delivering the right messages to the right segments in the right channels will help grow Australian tourism from a \$70bn industry to a \$140bn industry by 2020 (Tourism Australia, n.d). From a brand point of view, Australia remains a highly desirable destination. It was ranked no. 8 as a country brand in 2014 by Future Brand (Future Brand, 2014). The key drivers of a 'country brand' include having a reputation for high quality products, a desire to visit or study in a country and perceptions of good infrastructure. It was ranked no 1 out of 50 as a country in which to take a holiday by the Anholt National Brand Index (Anholt, 2009). The TNLA campaign has the emotion, the rational arguments and the experiences that consumers cherish. The message that Australia is a must-see destination with some of the world's best tourism experiences is resonating very well with its target consumers.

There is a segment of Chinese tourists who can be labelled the 'global experience seekers'. Most observers of the Chinese consumer market have seen it evolve from a traditional culture toward a more Westernized consumer society (Wang and Lin, 2009). To Australian tourism policy makers, China is one of the world's most attractive markets due to its large, emerging middle class and their increased disposable income. Even though only a small fraction of China's population of 1.3 billion is willing and able to travel overseas, the segment is still large and attractive. There has been a shift toward hedonic consumption in China. Chinese consumers, especially young consumers, are

inclined to seek fun, enjoyment and instant gratification (Wang and Lin, 2009). Through overseas travel, they can satisfy their needs for both esteem and self-actualization. The concept of face, or *mianzi*, is of central importance in China. Face stands for prestige or reputation that is achieved in life through success and personal effort (Hsien, 1944). The concept is relevant to conspicuous consumption such as overseas travel. By traveling overseas and bringing home gifts, photographs and other tokens of the trip, the individual can impress others and achieve greater social status.

In 2012, Tourism Australia unveiled the second phase of ‘There’s Nothing Like Australia’ campaign in China. Experiences such as luxury travel, self-drive and golf have become popular niche segments in recent years. Many traditional travel agencies are developing a conference, meetings and events division in order to target business travellers in China. Marketers have to appreciate cultural differences when launching international campaigns. Chinese culture is much more “consensual” than individualistic in orientation. Chinese people, compared to Westerners, tend to perceive themselves as more connected to others, such as the family and the community (Wang and Lin, 2009). They tend to value spending time with family and friends and travel is an activity that allows consumers to spend time together. Furthermore, word-of-mouth, peer pressure and opinion leaders are important influential factors on purchasing decisions (Wang and Lin, 2009). Social media, media advocacy and word-of-mouth are the most powerful sources of information that influence Chinese travellers. They mostly use online sources to research a trip to Australia. This includes general Internet searches, travel advice websites, government tourism authorities and travel booking websites. After online sources, respondents would talk to family and friends who have previously visited

Australia (Tourism Australia, 2013).

Integrated marketing communications represents an important change in marketing communications today. Integrated marketing communications (IMC) ensures that all brand messages look and sound alike, what scholars call the “one voice and one look” approach. IMC is about synergy and it “results in maximum clarity and effectiveness” (Ouwensloot and Duncan, 2008, p.15). The media landscape has changed dramatically in recent years, and while Tourism Australia uses traditional media such as television, magazines and outdoor boards, digital media is playing an increasingly important role in its campaigns. Added to this responsibility of choosing media is the need to manage the creation and delivery of messages to potential customers. Channels utilised in China include: digital, print, out-of-home, public relations, social media (i.e., the Chinese microblogging website Weibo) and Tourism Australia’s International Media Hosting Program. This is where TV presenters of travel shows, journalists bloggers and celebrities are invited to visit Australia and share their experiences with their audiences (Tourism Australia, 2015a).

Tourism Australia built a dedicated consumer website in China (www.australia.cn), with links to key Chinese social media platforms, to provide translated information for Chinese consumers. A high proportion of those who saw the campaign claimed that it had an impact on their destination choice. Research showed that Tourism Australia’s *There’s nothing like Australia* brand campaign reached 89% of the target audience in target cities and 97% took action in researching or planning an Australian holiday (Tourism Australia, 2015a). Aviation links are critical to the development of most tourist destinations. Tourism Australia signed marketing

agreements with several airlines in China such as China Southern Airlines, China Eastern Airlines, Air China, China UnionPay and China Travel Service (Tourism Australia, 2013). China is now Australia's fastest growing and most valuable overseas market. In 2013, China was Australia's second largest inbound market for visitor arrivals and the largest market for total expenditure and visitor nights. Australia continues to out-perform many competing destinations for market share. The Chinese inbound tourism market has the potential to contribute up to AU\$9 billion annually to the Australian economy by 2020 (Tourism Australia, 2015a).

Conclusion

From a brand point of view, Australia remains a highly desirable destination. China is now Australia's fastest growing and most valuable overseas market (Tourism Australia, 2015c). The case study shows how Tourism Australia has managed to develop an emotional branding strategy and its integrated marketing communications campaign, 'There's Nothing like Australia,' is resonating very well with its target market of 'global experience seekers' in China.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the brand personality of Tourism Australia. How is a brand personality created?
2. Critique the current campaign - 'There's nothing like Australia'.
3. Outline the challenges associated with developing a place brand.

4. Describe the 'global experience seekers' and explain why this segment was targeted by Tourism Australia. How should Tourism Australia adapt its communications strategy to suit the needs of the target market in China?

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