

BRANDING OF TRAVEL AGENCY BUSINESS

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Abstract : Study is based on Branding of travel agency business and its products, the role played by Internet, Travel aggregators, Social media, Print media, Mobile applications, Content of website etc in promoting the brand. Travel and tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world hence lot of travel agencies have also established which created lot of competition and rivalry in every market hence it become mandate for individual to think out of the box in order to create brand value among the target audience. Present study can be utilized for implementation towards development of beginner till well established travel small medium entrepreneurs.

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2006), brand building and management are essential skills in the marketing of any product, service, organization, person, place or cause. A brand is not just the name put an offering; it is the driving force that shapes the marketing mix, and provides a platform for an organization's strategies and tactics.

In KEYWORDS: Branding, Travel agency business, Branding through different channels, Departments responsible for branding of organization, Steps required to lead the market

1. INTRODUCTION

'Branding' as a word originated in medieval England where it was referred to the practice of marking the products with a hot iron as a means of establishing proof of ownership.

Since travel has grown with rapid speed in last few years and travel agency is the single gateway where one can buy and enjoy all travel products under a single roof. Hence development of travel and tourism gave birth to lot of travel agencies in recent past which created lot of competition among rival companies. Some of them able to succeed while some of them are limited till SME business while some of them was unable to go with buyer behavior and their business was shuttered down. While we discuss about the most popular brand the names which comes first are Makemytrip.com and Yatra.com while lot of new companies like Goibibo.com, Viaworld.in have started giving competition to old brands. Hence it become mandate for every player to play as per consumer needs and move 1 step ahead of his rival.

In the tourism destination context, six benefits of branding were identified by Clarke (2000): (1) tourism is typically a high involvement activity, branding helps to reduce the choice; (2) branding helps in reducing the impact of intangibility; (3) branding conveys consistence across multiple outlets and through time; (4) branding can reduce the risk factors attached to decision making about a holiday; (5) branding facilitates precise segmentation; (6) branding helps to provide a focus for the integration of producer efforts, helping people to work towards the same outcome.

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2. MARKETING VS BRANDING

Usually researchers get confuse between marketing and branding. In marketing, companies usually speak about themselves, what they are, why they are better from others etc basically marketing is a push tactic. Its pushing out message in order to generate sales. Where Branding is completely different than marketing, it's a pull factor brand simply says "That is what I am. That is why I exist, buy me if you like me".

Marketing may insist you to buy but once you buy from supplier suppose a holiday package from Thomas cook and they make you feel like king during your entire trip then you will become their loyal customer for lifetime then it will be considered as your priority brand for life. (Tronviggroup.com)

That's the reason why management studies focus on serving customer rather than giving priority to just expanding customer base. Good customer service in itself is marketing for future bookings. If we keep customers happy then they will keep us in business for longer time.

Happy customers not just make repeat visits instead they also praise and recommend good product to their family and friends. It said that customer with good recommend to 1 while customer with bad experience will tell to 10. Hence multiple good reviews give birth to brand value.

For example Royal Enfield motorcycle company hardly spend money on marketing but still they sell much more units than their rival companies is just because of brand value which they had created in past.

Similarly inspite of knowing the fact that Thomas cook, Kuoni or SOTC group are much more expensive than other travel companies. Peoples still buy from them and these companies still manage to generate business in this competitive era is just because of their customer satisfaction strategy. Rather than expanding business and earning more money from more customers they prefer to charge more from small bunch of customers and in return assure them hustle free memorable trip.

3. HERE ARE THE FEW STEPS WHICH TRAVEL AGENT MUST FOLLOW WHILE PLANNING BRANDING STRATEGY

- **Focus on customer service** – Instead of cost cutting travel agent should insist on providing best memories which make customer remember his trip throughout his life. Few creative ideas like complimentary flower decoration for honeymoon couple, Assurance phone calls, Complimentary add on sight seeing points or any surprise add on or special event make him feel special. Just imagine you visit Taj mahal and there is a long queue at entrance gate but your travel agency representative arrange VIP entry for you without standing in long queues or Imagine you visit London for vacation and there is a Cricket event going on and your travel agent gives you a surprise complimentary ticket for VIP lounge. These few add on things makes travel agent exceptional than others which add brand value in customer's eye.

- **Blog** – Ask your customers to write a blog about your service or product so that he can share his experience in brief with others.
- **Social Media** – World wide tourists use social media during and before their trip hence it become mandate to stay active on social media. Create your company page and ask your customers to share their experience over there. Further you can act smart and you may opt for paid marketing to promote your page once you realize that your page have lot of good reviews.
- **Mobile applications** – Since your motive is to give ease to your loyal customers so you should focus on easy accessibility of your products. Most of consumers use smart phones in today's era hence Android or I-phone apps gives easy accessibility to your products and boost to your business.
- **Work on specialization** – Since lot of suppliers are already available in market for every product, Hence target a potential area and become specialize for that particular product instead of focusing on providing economical services.
- **Destination Branding** – Offer tourist destination details in your newsletter or on your website free of cost which helps you to gain confidence of travelers that you hold expert knowledge about destinations which makes you stand different from others in market.

The development of brand names, logos or symbols may push a competitive edge, although the destination management needs to plan carefully because branding decision are of a strategic and long-term nature (Caldwell & Freire, 2004; Okoroafo, 1989). Although branding is not a new concept, the study of branding is a relatively recent addition to the field of tourism research (Ricardo, 2009).

4. DEPARTMENTS RESPONSIBLE FOR BRANDING OF ORGANIZATION

Business Analyst

Analyzing business plays a crucial role in development or maintenance of organization's image like What are the reasons if brand name is declining in the market? What are the strategies adopted by rival brands? IVR structure of rival brand vs our IVR? Feedback of customer vs scope of improvement? Analyze growth/decline in charge back or Airline debit memo cases and find reasons to cope up with problem? Analyze customer satisfaction and first point resolution rating of organization.

Brand image can be analyzed by several ways like analyzing current and previous metrics of various reports. Working on projects using six sigma techniques which will help you to minimize loss (Product per million)

Search engine optimization (SEO)

This department closely works with search engines like Google, Yahoo, Bing etc. Their job is to up to date crawlers and keywords of website so that company's website may reach to right audience. For example you insert cheap flights on Google and xyz company comes on top but if they charge a lot makes no sense to you being a customer. Similarly SEO team has to insert keywords which takes them to right audience suppose you specialize in Goa packages so you should focus on such keywords like best seller for Goa packages so that customer can reach you and read blogs and reviews on your website which will help him to trust you as a brand.

Pay per click (PPC)

You might had notice that first 3 advertisements on Google are paid and Google sell them with bid for consumers in particular location which helps you to find customer base in heavy competitive market. These advertisements are usually listed before free advertisements hence there are more chances of conversion. You may use PPC service even if your crawlers or content of website is not relevant to customer's search. Or in other words I would say you are basically bribing search engine to list you on top.

Social Media Optimization

This division is basically responsible for all activities of on behalf of organization at Social media since this is the best and most cost effective method for Branding and Marketing in today's era. And employees of SMO team are responsible for maintenance of social pages, revert on queries, posting upcoming events, attracting more users to like page, offering out of the box information like destination information, best places to visit etc and overall reputation of organization at social media.

Content writing (Marketing team)

Attractive slogans attract more and more consumers like tag line of Make my trip.com 'Memories Unlimited' or their new tag line 'Dil Toh Roaming Hai' attracted lot new consumers equally the way you draft your products, your website content makes all difference. Use of powerful, attractive words allow you to stand out of the mob.

The most important key deliverable area for all the departments is to be up to date with current market trend. For example Royal Enfield motorcycles (Famous for cruiser motorcycles) not spend money on advertising and marketing but they was aware of change in consumer preferences which gave birth to different segment with launch of "Royal Enfield Himalayan" motorcycle. This example indicate that even if you are a well known brand you still have to keep analyzing current trends of market and do necessary amendments in your products / strategy in order to keep your brand name alive.

5. DIGITAL BRANDING

Due to less involvement of cost most of travel agents have continued their work online which created lot of chaos hence everyone won't able to demonstrate their name as popular brand for longer duration because of new technology and facilities adopted and offered by rival websites. Hence useful links, effective web contents, quality of your product, quick online customer service assistance through web chat, effective e-newsletters makes all difference.

Digital branding is a term for the branding of products or services using digital technologies, mainly on the Internet, but also including mobile phones, display advertising, televisions, radio and any other digital medium.

Digital Branding is the next wave of development online and offline. For the effective online (Internet) Branding strategy Rowley(2004) gave the online brand development strategy which bifurcated into stages like setting the context of brand, deciding of brand objectives and message: developing a brand design, creating the website and other communications using the brand, launching and promoting the brand, building the brand experience and finally reviewing, evolving and protecting the brand.

Technological progress and tourism have been going hand in hand for years (Poon,1993; Sheldon, 1997). Basically Digital branding is composed of new technologies like creative ideas in development of television or Radio advertisements in order to attract customers, Virtual tours on social media or company's website.

Gender	
Male	68
Female	32

Age (in years)	
18-27	36
28-37	26
38-47	22
48-57	10
58-67	4
67+	2

States of Origin	
New Delhi	60
Other Indian States	30
Outside India	10

Education levels	
Secondary & Higher Secondary school	37
Bachelor Graduate	43
Masters Graduate	20

Total household income (in INR)	
19,999 or less	28
20,000-39,999	33
40,000-59,999	17
60,000-79,999	14
80,000 or above	8

Branding strategies		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Average	Agree	Strongly Agree
		(In Percentages)				
Q1	Would you prefer to go with brand while planning a trip	2	9	30	48	11
Q2	Brand name doesn't matter as long as Travel agency is offering cheaper price as compare to others	10	16	49	16	9

Google it – You become brand by your reputation and nowadays brand value is decided by Google “You are what Google says you are” quite funny but true. Most of peoples first of all Google your name in order to see your reviews and results offered by Google attract or distract consumer. So one should focus on social media reviews, blogs, customers reviews/blogs on social media or travel aggregator websites like Tripadvisor, kayak etc since most of the results are fetch by Google.

Average position is not an option for you being a Brand, Its upto you how you makes difference between yourself and your rival brands. A survey indicates that a average American spend 4.7 hours in a day on their smart phones (<http://www.digitaltrends.com/mobile/informate-report-social-media-smartphone-use/>) and probably most of the time they spend is on non voice activities hence sticking with limited Digital media like television, radio, LED hoardings, Drone holding hoardings is not enough. You need to be everywhere you need to be active on Twitter, Facebook, Mobile applications, Whats app, You tube, phone calls etc.

You may shot a step by step documentary video containing latest events, your specialization, products and services offered by you and upload it on Youtube.

Since most of customers immediately gives you a call in case of query so make sure to answer every single call this is one of monster opportunity.

And most important is to make sure that you are consistently active since current trend may change and something might come new in market next week so keep uploading new videos, posts, updations in app / website and so on and make sure to be available 24*7 since travel is a dynamic business and your customer might need your assistance anytime.

If content is King then attention is god. Your brand needs to be everywhere in order to seek attention you need to become celebrity in digital media world. You might do radio shows, video shows, repeat digital activities and so on since we cannot stick with a single medium for communication. For example at the time of political elections politicians capture all television or radio channels for advertisements hence most of consumers avoid watching televisions or listening radio in those days.

6. USE AN EXISTING BRAND TO CREATE YOUR OWN BRAND

As we studied that it is not that easy to become or to maintain a brand image without moving along with market trend. So here we will discuss about other strategies that will help to boost business from very beginning. One can use name of existing brand's image using General sales agent, Preferred channel partner, Franchise services depending on the conditions of the provider.

Since you know that Thomas cook and Make my trip are big brands but both of them don't provide franchise to local agents to run their business under their name wherein Make my trip just provide their services to agents through B2B portal and offline activities (General sales agent) while Thomas cook provide both general sales agent and proffered channel partner services under general sales agent Thomas cook or make my trip allow travel agency to sell their products along with his products.

Wherein Franchise or preferred channel partner is completely different, under this service your agency will be acting as a Thomas cook outlet under customer's impression and your outlet will be marketed under Thomas cook company's name on their website, newsletter and all other advertisements means you will be working on behalf of an existing brand so you don't have to fight for branding or marketing since company will take care of branding and marketing expenses and planning but you will be bound to sell their products only since you are Thomas cook under customer's impression.

7. HYPOTHESES FRAMEWORK

Tactics given by Rowley (2004) was followed to achieve best results in branding of travel agency business.

H1 - Brand building strategies should be given more priority through new and creative ideas.

H2: Developing a business plan is the most important strategy for branding.

H3: Present trend followed by travel agencies to promote their brand is up to the mark.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Lot of confusion was roaming around while doing literature review hence we have conducted a survey in order to get best results about consumers preferences. A self generated questionnaire survey was conducted at Delhi Haat, Pitamura and Connaught place, New Delhi. 50 respondents was selected randomly. The questionnaire with Likert scale responses was developed to measure the study constructs. Subjects were asked to rate their agreement with each item on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = disagree to 5 = agree. To analyze the data.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Profile of respondents is mention in below mention table. It was found that gender consist 68% Male and 32% Female. Majority of age group was 18-27 years consist of 36% and majority of respondents are residents of New Delhi itself consist 60% followed by 30% from other Indian states and remaining 10% are from outside India. Educational level of 43% respondents was till Bachelor studies Graduate. Majority of respondents earn 20,000-39,999 INR per month. The focus area of research was on mindset of consumer while choosing travel agency.

Above mention table represent the response rate (in %) of the respondents against Question 1 and 2 respectively. For Question 1 48% respondents agree that they prefer brand name before buying products while for question 2 49% respondents gave average response when we ask them if price matter to them while choosing supplier for their travel needs. For question 1 30% respondents gave average response when they was asked about preference given to brand name whereas 16% respondents in question 2 gave agree response when we ask them about cost factor involved.

Hypothesis H1 and H2 are fully proved by analyzing the response rate of the respondents for the above mentioned Questions Q1 and Q2.

8. CONCLUSION

Travel agency is a gateway for consumer for all his travel needs hence travel agency in itself create multiple impression among different customer since all suppliers beat hotelier, airlines, cruise line might not offer same level of service to the customer hence it become very difficult for travel agency to maintain its brand image but introduction of several new travel agencies have created lot of competition in travel agency business hence it be mandatory job for travel agency to think out of the box since working in a mob is not an option flying high in the sky is motive hence pull factors to seek customer's attention might be used through social media, travel aggregators, customer satisfaction techniques, user friendly tools and so on. The convenience of service and 24*7 accessibility, quick resolution allow customers to repeatedly use your service and good service create good feedback and happy customers which create repeat business, cost reduction in marketing and most important a "BRAND". Business analyst, SEO, PPC, SMO, Marketing team of travel agency plays a crucial role in development / maintenance of brand name. Last but not the least, we cannot rely on limited sources in this modern era hence use of digital technology plays an crucial role in growth of "BRAND" name.

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This is to certify that the research paper submitted by us is original.

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