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Dealing with negative symbolism of destinations with difficult heritage: Analysis of Uganda's image

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Many countries in Africa are currently investing in tourism with the aim of increasing annual tourist flows but majority of them are negatively symbolised at source markets as countries with 'difficult heritage'. Previous research has indicated that tourism in Africa is perceived as riskier than any comparable region on Earth except the Middle East. It further indicates that negative country images might result in negatively biased destination perceptions and could negatively impact on their competitiveness. This study discusses negative place symbolism at source markets using the social identity theory adjusted, its effect on destination branding programmes and how destinations can deal with it. It utilises a theoretical literature review and empirical synthesis of symbolism with respect to Uganda as a country with difficult heritage and the branding challenges in light of its agenda to increase its international tourism and attract direct foreign investment in the sector.

Key words: Difficult heritage, symbolism, image, destination, negative.

INTRODUCTION

Previous studies have indicated that tourism in Africa is perceived as riskier than any comparable region on Earth except the Middle East (Carter, 1998; Lepp and Gibson, 2008; Lepp et al., 2011). Earlier reports indicate that this has led to a widely held perception of Africa as a place to avoid (Sonmez and Graefe, 1998a). Lepp et al. (2011) maintain that the perceived riskiness of Africa as a destination continent is associated with difficult heritage that is characterised by political and social instability, poor governance, wars, terrorism, crime, health and disease, unfriendly hosts, cultural and language barriers, primitive conditions, economic concerns such as currency

instability and persistent and unfounded rumours and myths such as "Africa is a single wild jungle". Lawson and Thyne (2001) found out that these risks create a commonly accepted, negative image which is applied to the entire African continent with no recognition of national or regional variability.

Lepp and Gibson (2008) and Lepp et al. (2011) argue that a widespread negative perception has deterred many types of tourists from travelling to Africa, and hence led to low tourism in its constituent countries. This study argues that there is a widely held negative perception of Africa and its constituent countries at tourist source markets

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due to destination negative stereotypes and biases. These stereotypes and biases are as a result of Africa's past and current difficult heritage and its prolongation coupled with slow action against it has resulted into negative symbolism. This study views negative symbolism of a destination at tourist source markets as an advanced form of bias that affected destinations have to deal with first if they are to achieve the desired destination competitive advantages.

Understanding symbolism

A more recent attempt in the area of symbolism is by Campbell (2002) who defined a symbol as an object that represents, stands for, or suggests an idea, visual image, belief, action, or material entity. Earlier attempts in the analysis of the function of symbols and their importance in communication theory led authors to define a symbol as a sign which denotes something rather than the symbol itself and maintain that you cannot talk about human relationships without saying something about meaning (Duncan, 1968). Duncan argues that even when meaning is called "pattern maintenance", it is usually studied through the interpretation of symbols, for it is only in symbols that meaning (as attention and intention) can be observed.

Behind the mask of the symbol, there lie interests (economic, political etc.) as the case may be which determine human relationship and this reduces symbols to epiphenomena which exists on the surface of a social system and there are arguments that this later determines human motivation (Duncan, 1968). Entities such as countries, places or even companies often use symbols with an intention of communicating what they represent and these symbols may carry meaning that may determine the behaviour of the interpreter. This means that a name of a country or its symbol may stand for something in some respect or capacity (Zeman, 1977) which according to Duncan (1968) may result in a motive. It has been argued in social psychological literature that members of a group exposed to similar patterns of social information may acquire collective perceptions of out-group people or foreign nations (Alexander et al., 1999; Rubin and Hewstone, 2004 and Stangor and Lange, 1993). Pearce and Stringer (1991) argue that tourism is essentially a social psychological phenomenon involving interactions between tourists and residents of tourist destinations who possibly share similar values and cultures (Pearce, 2005). This means that tourist' views about a place, a country or a destination and what it symbolises may also be a social psychological process subject to influence by social factors such as the meaning held by members of a social group or the racial or ethnic origins of potential tourists (Mackay and Ferenmairer, 2000; Prentice, 2006; Tasci and Gartner, 2007). There are arguments, that destination image of a country at

tourist source might be negatively biased if social groups hold an overall negative image of it (Nadeau et al., 2008; Chen et al., 2012).

This research also views place symbolism as a critical factor in destination image as research seems to suggest that there are broader conceptual implications of negative symbolism at source markets than those related to tourism as an activity and can adversely affect the nations appeal in many other economic areas.

Social identity theory and symbolism

Past research has confirmed that negative country images might result in negatively biased destination perceptions (Nadeau et al., 2008; Elliot et al., 2011; Chun-Chu et al., 2012) which over time may result in negative symbolism of a country. Recently, attempts have been made to explain when and why negative biases would form using social identity theory and there are anecdotes suggesting that national identities in a tourist country might be the source of biased images of a host country when the two countries are involved in conflict.

However, the social identity theory seems to assume that negative images at the tourist source could be generated as a result of conflict (s) with a host nation and yet this doesn't seem to be the case for destinations whose tourist sources are countries that have never had any conflict with the negatively symbolised entity. This suggests that there could be other factors such as a tourist perception of their personal safety during visitation, source market security advisory and how information sources portray a destination, other than those advanced in the social identity theory that might explain why and when negative symbolism of a destination is generated at tourist source markets.

There are some evidences to the fact that mass media and education might be responsible for portraying destinations as negative symbols (Manheim and Albritton, 1984; Lee, 1990; Wei, 2000). These authors argue that since information receivers tend to regard news and education as credible information sources, they might be unconsciously influenced by the value-laden pieces of information from news and education (Manheim and Albritton, 1984; Croteau and Hoynes, 2002). Despite these held symbolisms with regard to destinations, there have been research results showing that destination images can be modified after actual visitations and there are confirmed research reports which indicate that destination experience positively affects destination image (Gunn, 1972; Milman and Pizam, 1995; Baloglu, 2001). The challenge here is how to motivate large numbers of tourists at source markets where destinations are negatively symbolised to visit and later alone share positive experiences.

Fakeye and Crompton (1991) argue that tourists may

gain more knowledge about the destinations during their trips, and might become more familiar with the destinations that they have visited. Other arguments point to the view that tourists feel safer with destinations that they are familiar with and may perceive their images positively than destinations that they are not familiar with (Lehto et al., 2004; Wong and Yeh, 2009). D'Amore (1988) also advanced the idea of peace and tourism with a suggestion that mutual understanding between countries may lead to mutual appreciation and may positively influence the image held between the two countries.

Destination competitiveness

As tourism markets become more saturated than before, the destination managers' task is to seek understanding of how tourism destination competitiveness can be enhanced and sustained (Gomezelj and Mihalic, 2008). Past studies have attempted to address the complex issues in the enhancement of destination competitiveness through modelling of tourism resources and management strategies and how tourism attractions can develop value for tourists. This study gives particular attention to Ritchie and Crouch (2000, 2001); studies on destination competitiveness which explored the significance of destination image and together with studies by Gallarza et al. (2002), they shed light on attributes which attract tourists to destinations.

Crouch and Ritchie (1999) advanced a factor known as "qualifying determinants" as the final component in their tourism destination competitiveness model. They argued that this component included factors that can influence all other factors in the model and include variables such as safety, destination location and its overall cost. Crouch and Ritchie (1999) further argued that if tourists are concerned about crime, wars, natural disasters etc which this study has conceptualised as characteristics of difficult heritage at a destination, its competitive strengths amounts to very little in the minds of potential tourists. The objective of this study was therefore to advance that symbolism of a destination can be fostered by the tourists' perception of their personal safety, portrayal by information agents and source market travel advisory. This can also negatively affect destination competitiveness and may adversely hamper the tourists' motive to travel to such a destination.

Branding a destination with difficult heritage

Ritchie and Ritchie (1998) conceive a destination brand as a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that identifies and differentiates the destination, conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience, and consolidates and reinforces the recollection of

pleasurable memories of the destination experience. The ability of a tourism marketer to ensure that positive and memorable experiences linger in the minds of tourists is a critical resource in destination branding and studies have shown that when tourists purchase tourism services, they do so for a destination experience they anticipate (Otto and Ritchie, 1996).

According to Seddighi and Theocharous (2002), positive destination brand awareness reduces the need for strenuous and detailed information searches and guides tourists towards the destination of their choice. It should also be noted that destination brands also enforce tourist self-images, self-concepts and self-identities in order to satisfy their emotional and basic needs. Destination brands are therefore the means by which a prospective tourist determines a destinations' potential for satisfaction (Hankinson, 2004). Amujo and Otubanjo (2012) suggest that destinations with difficult heritage who seek to brand or rebrand must do so in a way that draws consumers to dark brands, and that it is imperative to consider a broad suite of values that include social, cultural, historical, geographical, symbolic, environmental and economic aspects in order to fully reflect on what the destination has to offer tourists.

According to Wheeler et al. (2011) destinations that wish to brand must consider a 'sense of place' concept and argue that sustainable brands are those that are developed organically, driven by the values held by local brand communities and networks, rather than a more limited consumer based values being imposed upon a destination. Ndlovu and Heath (2011) also urge any countries that wish to brand to be aware that political conflict has a negative impact on brands and reiterate that political actors in emerging markets should endeavour to prevent crisis that may impact negatively on their nation's brand identity and reputation. Amujo and Otubanjo (2012) argue that difficult heritage is a major source of unattractive brand identity since most of this heritage is viewed as human made.

A study by Srikatanyoo and Gnoth (2002) also introduces the idea of competitive marketing strategies by nations aimed at improving tourism services among other services through promoting brand images, identities and reputations in the global market. According to Jansen (2008) national branding as a distinctive practice is a very recent development in marketing literature that is subject to debates, controversies and arguments among practitioners and academics. A great deal of destination branding literature to date seems to borrow much from branding of products and services which is relatively a mature area (Berry, 1988; Balmer, 1995; Aaker, 1996).

According to Anholt (2004) and Olins (2002), nations can be branded contrary to the earlier disagreement by Girard (1999) who contends that a nation cannot be branded and rebranded in the same way as a corporation or a product. Amujo and Otubanjo (2012) argue that little attention has been given to branding or rebranding

negatively viewed nation brands, which can be described as those perceived by international audiences as being characterized by the absence of distinguishing or marked qualities resulting from large scale death in a war, disaster, torture, incarceration, dictatorial rule, drug peddling, money laundering and other crimes.

According to Novelli et al. (2012) reassuring tourists that a destination is safe is a major task in post conflict places although this was not argued in the context of all forms of difficult heritage at a destination. Whilst capacity and institution building and regaining the confidence of both the international and domestic markets are crucial to post conflict tourism recovery, a major challenge for such places is the "management of post-conflict emotions (Anson, 1999; de Sausmarez, 2007; Brewer and Hayes, 2011). Novelli et al. (2012) argues that while for some, conflict sites may become a 'new post conflict symbolic landscape', such heritage could continue evoking painful memories for many communities (McEvoy, 2011). Scholars argue that tourists attracted to difficult heritage like listening to stories of humans butchered and starved to death, or embark on a spiritual re-awakening to empathize with the pains of death as in Cambodia (Hughes, 2008), Rwanda (Grosspietsch, 2005), Srebrenica (Miller, 2006) and Dachau (Marcuse, 2001). Earlier, Mills (1993) argued that tragedy if well interpreted can appeal to people more than pleasant events and according to Amujo and Otubanjo (2012) nations with unattractive brand identity resulting from difficult heritage can leverage the hidden and often ironic Nietzschean joy in tragedy to persuade and attract consumers towards this kind of heritage.

Studies that have been conducted in the area of dark tourism also unveil an opportunity for places with difficult heritage to consider in their tourism marketing the product wealth they possess with regard to difficult heritage as a rebranding strategy (Foley and Lennon, 1996; Ashworth, 2004; Blom, 2000; Rojek, 1993; Pezzullo, 2009). A strong justification for branding and rebranding places with difficult heritage can be drawn from earlier attempts by nations such as: rebranding of France in 19th century and post-colonial nations such as Ghana, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, Pakistan and Bangladesh (Olins, 2002). Other places include Nigeria which rebranded to improve its image locally and internationally (Agba et al., 2009), Oman and United Arab Emirates and Qatar who have rebranded as positive images of open nations receptive to business, investment and political liberalism (Cooper and Momani, 2009). However, according to Amujo and Otubanjo (2012), there has not been a strong attempt by any study to articulate a theoretical framework for rebranding a nation that is scared by difficult heritage and is unattractive in that sense and went ahead to suggest a model of the kind.

Amujo and Otubanjo (2012) arguments were based on past studies such as the role of cognitive, affective and conative perceptions of destination positioning (Pike and

Ryan, 2004), importance of determining tourists preferences and matching them with their perceptions in destination positioning (Sarma, 2003), three ways in which the strength of a place brand as experienced by the host-guest and between culturally diverse groups might be affected (Govers and Go, 2003) and positioning as a perceptual distance between two brands (Sayman et al., 2002), Amujo and Otubanjo (2012) argue that their model could be useful in branding and positioning places with difficult heritage.

Baloglu and McCleary (1999) positioning strategy which consists of identifying a target market's images of a destination, comparing these images with those of competitors and selecting destination attributes that meet the needs and wants of travellers whilst differentiating a destination from competitors was also considered in their model. One of the outstanding recommendations of this model is that unlike natural and manmade attractions, a positioning model for places with difficult heritage should take a memorial leaning rather than a commercial one. They characterize a memorial leaning model as one that should be commemorative, symbolic, functional, unique and distinctive and its major objective must be that of changing deeply held prejudices and stereotypes that already exist in the minds of potential tourists and international investors.

Uganda's difficult heritage

According to Uganda Tourist Board (UTB) (2011), Uganda was once the region's leading tourism destination in the 1960's although there are no available statistics to confirm this claim, but tourist arrivals later slowed down in the period leading to Idi Amin and Obote 11 regimes of 1970 to 1979 and 1980 to 1984 respectively. According to Ministry of Tourism, Trade and Industry (MTTI) (2003) this period in Uganda's history generated much difficult heritage which partly resulted in the destruction of tourism infrastructure and the impairment of the country's image. Difficult heritage of Uganda is characterized by all tangible or intangible objects and memories that are considered to be cruel to mankind such as massacres, genocide, wars and conflicts, social discrimination, diseases and poverty and natural disasters. Uganda is believed to possess such heritage and it is blamed for failure to achieve the desired sector performance (USTD, 2004; USAID, 2006; UNDP 2010/11 – 14/15; UNWTO and WB/MTWA, 2012).

Available statistics show that Uganda's tourist arrivals started gaining in 1984 at an average growth of 20% per year (UBOS, 2007, 2012). This is attributed to marketing efforts by both government and the private sector of brand Uganda which was geared towards increasing overseas tourist arrivals through the Uganda Tourist Board (UTB) that was created in 1994. These efforts have yielded positive results although stakeholders

contend that international arrivals are still not enough to fuel the desired growth in the sector, despite Uganda being home to the region's most authentic tourism products (USAID, 2006; UNWTO, 2013). There are many factors that have been fronted to explain the weak growth in international tourist arrivals to Uganda but government and other sector assessment reports have highlighted the negative image of Uganda at source markets as a major constraint behind this trend (World Bank, 2013 and MTWA, 2013).

Tourism marketing and branding in Uganda has and remains the responsibility of the UTB which was created by the act of Parliament and launched in 1994. The Uganda National Development Plan (2010/11 to 2014/15) currently wants efforts to be concentrated towards securing international and domestic source markets and calls for deeper penetration of existing tourism source markets as well as the development of new tourism market segments.

Uganda's tourism branding challenges

The tourism situational assessment reports document enormous challenges with regard to marketing and branding Uganda as a tourism destination. These challenges stem from Uganda's vulnerable image and inadequate funding. There are arguments that this has led to limited marketing initiatives geared towards securing a selling proposition for the country's rich tourism potential and as such UTB has been operating without a tourism marketing strategy for close to five years now (MTWA and World Bank, 2012). Regarding the vulnerability of Uganda's image, there are arguments and suspicions that dictatorships, civil wars and regional violence are the main hindrances to branding and marketing of Uganda as a tourism destination. It is further argued that as much as some of these events are part of Uganda's past, their images still pervade and UTB has been unable to counter any negative publicity or event because of limited resources (African Development Bank, 2011). This paper argues that negative symbolism of a destination at tourist source market is a major factor that enforces negative image and could be hampering Uganda's tourism competitiveness and has proposed different ways in which it can be dealt with.

METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional survey design using quantitative research paradigm was the most preferred design for this study basing on the fact the overall research objective thought to assess opinions of international tourists to Uganda as a case. Opinions were sought from a total population of approximately 128,355 with regard to how Uganda is symbolised at first awareness of it and such a population is considered large and varied. Using the Krejcie and Morgan's simplified heuristics (1970), a sample size of 384 and above was considered to be adequate. Additionally, the sample determination

for this study largely depended on the statistical estimating precision that the researcher needed. The review of similar studies and methodology literature indicated that a sample size of between 30 and 500 at 5% confidence level is generally found sufficient (Hair et al., 1992; Altunisik et al., 2004; Wahid et al., 2011).

The authors argue that although larger samples are usually preferred, target respondents of between 200 and 500 are usually accepted as a critical sample size for factor analysis. A self administered structured questionnaire was also considered for primary data collection in this study since it provides an opportunity for information to be obtained on the same topic from a large group of subjects in a relatively short period of time and it was also considered to increase the respondents' willingness to disclose sensitive information compared to face to face or telephone interviews (Koponen et al., 2011). The instrument contained two sections, one testing symbolism at both nominal and ordinal scale. The totals of 494 responses minus those discarded during data processing were obtained which represented an aggregate response rate of 49.4%. Factor analysis was conducted on ordinal test items constructed by summarising nominal items that were used to measure symbolism and Cronbach-alpha coefficients were used in measuring the internal consistency of measurement items. McGrath et al. (2005) argue that coefficients greater than 0.80 are usually desirable, appropriate and achievable in practice. Suhr and Shay (2009) also argue that depending on the purpose of the instrument, the acceptable reliability coefficient (alpha) levels can be as low as 0.60. Primary responses were also analyzed using statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) to obtain descriptive statistics measuring symbolism at nominal scale.

RESULTS

Respondents were asked to describe Uganda at first awareness and overall, 60.4% of respondents' described it as a country with difficult heritage and not safe for visitors. 27.7% described it as a hospitable and beautiful country. When respondents were asked to describe Uganda as a tourism destination after awareness of Uganda, 50.2% described it as negative and 49.8% described it as positive. This means that Uganda is negatively symbolised at first awareness but this negativity reduces with increase in awareness of it as a tourism destination. Majority respondents associate negative symbolism with poverty, disease, famine and natural disasters (20.5%), political instabilities (7.4%), rebels and wars (5.7%) and poor human rights record (5.7%) (Table 1).

Table 2 shows information sources that foster negative symbolism of Uganda as a place with difficult heritage. Respondents indicated that media reports (29.2%) were the prime source, followed by a movie/drama on Uganda (17.9%), word of mouth (17.4%), a documentary on Uganda (11.2%) and a guide book of Uganda (10.3%).

The nominal items in Table 3 were summarised and then used to construct three ordinal items denoted SY1, SY2 and SY3. These items were used to test symbolism of Uganda at source markets and only two items denoted by SY1 and SY2 loaded on the factor with an Eigen value of 1.654, 9.188% of variance explained and factor loading greater than 0.45 as shown in Table 1.

The results of the factor analysis (Table 1) show that

Table 1. Symbolism of Uganda at first awareness.

Perception	Frequency	Percentage
Uganda as a country at first awareness		
A country with difficult heritage and not safe for visitors	352	60.4
A hospitable and beautiful country	161	27.7
No clear representation	69	11.9
Uganda as a tourism destination after awareness		
Positive symbolism		
Green and beautiful	332	14.5
Country full of adventure	226	9.9
A friendly country	287	12.6
Cultural diversity	123	5.4
Lots of flora and fauna	163	7.1
Smooth and plain	6	0.3
Negative symbolism		
Rebels and wars	131	5.7
Anti – social and discriminative	34	1.5
Poor human rights record	130	5.7
Poverty, disease, famine and natural disasters	468	20.5
Massacres and carnage	56	2.5
Political instabilities	170	7.4
Dangerous and uncertain	115	5
No clear perception	34	1.5
Others		
Third world country and corrupt	9	0.4

Each respondent was free to tick more than one item in each question.

Table 2. Information sources that foster negative symbolism.

Information sources that represented Uganda as a place with difficult heritage		
Media reports	305	29.2
Department of Foreign Affairs	38	3.6
A blog on internet	68	6.5
A movie or drama on Uganda	187	17.9
Word of mouth	182	17.4
A documentary on Uganda	117	11.2
Trip Advisor	28	2.7
A guide book of Uganda	107	10.3
Others		
Literature on Uganda	10	1.0
My insurer	1	0.1

Each respondent was free to tick more than one item in each question.

there is enough evidence for discriminant validity of the test items used to measure symbolism. The acceptable

Cronbach-alpha coefficient (α) at $p = 0.05$ is usually > 0.6 and the coefficient α for the test items loaded is 0.746

Table 3. Symbolism of Uganda as a destination at first awareness.

Eigen value: 1.654; % of variance: 9.188		Cronbach-alpha (α): 0.746		
Item	Question	F	R	A
SY1	Information sources portray Uganda as a country not safe to visit because of its difficult heritage	0.709	0.602	-
SY2	My country's travel advisory considers Uganda to be a country with difficult heritage and therefore not a safe place for her citizens to visit	0.458	0.602	-

Key: SY – symbolism, F – factor loading, R – Item-total correlation, α – Cronbach-alpha.

and hence a proof for sufficient evidence that the loaded test items used to measure symbolism are reliable. The item total correlation values SY1 0.602 and SY2 0.602 respectively shows that there is positive correlation between the test items and symbolism.

DISCUSSION

The positive correlation between the test items and symbolism confirms that Uganda is negatively symbolised at source markets as a place with difficult heritage at first awareness of it. This study reveals that media reports and word of mouth are largely culpable in fostering negative symbolism of Uganda as a country with difficult heritage at first awareness.

This means that much as Uganda is largely described as “a beautiful country” and “a hospitable country” after awareness of it by tourists, negative commentaries about its past and current difficult heritage continues to trickle into most information sources at source markets. It should also be noted that word of mouth has a more valence influence in destination choice process than any other source of information on a destination.

Lepp et al. (2011) study of image and perceived risk of Uganda also confirms this relationship. The study's pre-test results revealed that Uganda's image was negative arguing that tourists knew little or nothing about it and majority evaluated it on the basis of it being an African country. This means that Uganda's symbolism at source markets as a difficult place may partly be not because majority of tourists' possess knowledge of it as a place with difficult heritage, but because it is overshadowed by the general perception of Africa which is generally symbolic of a riskier region on earth after the Middle East (Carter, 1998; Lepp and Gibson, 2008).

Towards positive symbolism

The study has confirmed that Uganda is symbolised at source markets as unsafe and a difficult place to visit by tourists at first awareness. This kind of symbolism is usually as a result of widespread general bias and stereotyping of a place and it may be difficult to change.

The symbols such as names, coat of arms and colours of a place may also be associated with the negative image spread by and among social groups. This study has also established that Uganda's symbolism as a difficult place to visit is also exacerbated by its geographical location as an African country.

Symbolism often demonstrates what a place represents (physically and psychologically) and every marketer must attempt to influence positive symbolism through positive representation at source markets. It has been proved that symbolism influences human motivation and its effects are widespread and often go beyond touristic interests and could impact on other sectors of the economy (export goods and services and investment attraction).

In light of this study's finding, the symbolism of Uganda as an unsafe place for tourists at source markets could be responsible for the sluggish growth of motivations by tourists to visit and hence a negative growth effect on international tourism. Symbolism can be changed through positive promotional campaign. This study therefore recommends a continuous and proactive positive campaign of Uganda at source markets enforcing the key positive attributes of the country and the psychological benefits that come with tourists' experience of it. There is however a warning that this process of changing negative symbolism is expensive but destinations are encouraged to invest in it since the effects of negative symbolism could be widespread beyond the destination's tourism industry.

Uganda can also use articles in leading trusted media houses (news) and documentary producers such as National Geographic (education) to change its negative symbolism at source markets. This is premised on the past research arguments indicating that information receivers tend to regard news and education as credible information sources. This study also recommends that symbolism exacerbated by the geographical location of Africa can be reduced by utilizing identity building tourism products that are found to have a positive influence on tourists. Such products can be trendy, unique, highly involving and explicit on psychological benefits of the target markets.

Uganda is an attractive destination to adventurous tourists (Table 1.2) and these are usually to youthful, high energy tourists (most tourists between 18 to 35 years of

age), which means that touristic products and image enforcing slogans based on the source of the Nile, Gorillas, hospitable people and the past economic gains could be lauded in marketing drives at source markets. Such messages have the capacity to promote the identity of a place and could outshine the negativities produced by the greater African region symbolism at source markets.

Developing a strong destination brand

Destination branding can also be used to create another identity for Uganda. This is a long and consistent process that focuses on redefining the symbols that are currently used to convey the country's touristic promises at source market. Otto and Ritchie (1996) recommended that in doing so, destination marketers have to ensure that only positive and memorable experiences linger in the minds of tourists. It should be noted that branding of tourism is not the duty of the destination marketing function alone but rather a multilayer process involving a variety of activities such as developing local brand communities and networks, provision of professional tourism services by local enterprises that are reflective of indigenous knowledge at local and national level as well as increased co-ordination and consistence in tourism marketing communication.

Destination branding does not only lead to an identity and differentiation of a destination tourism services but also leads to reduction of strenuous and detailed information searches that most tourists currently go through to make decisions to travel to Uganda. This is because the new identity would result into positive symbolism that is identical with memorable and pleasurable experiences that come with visiting a destination. This recommendation cannot be realized without acknowledging the role of political actors in averting crisis that may negatively impact on the nation's new brand identity and reputation. This research has already established that more recent difficult heritage which is often as a result of political instability has a more valence influence on Uganda's negative image.

Commemoration of difficult heritage

Difficult heritage currently exists as a source of negative imagery for Uganda and majority of it is not developed for tourism or commemorated in any way. Commemoration of difficult heritage is therefore recommended by this study as an opportunity that could unveil a lot of dark tourism opportunities. This recommendation is also made in line with Pezzullo (2009) argument that tourism product development which targets difficult heritage can act as a rebranding strategy.

A more recent study by Amujo and Otubanjo (2012) also recommended that places that have suffered

negative image problems and wish to rebrand must shift from commercialization of destination natural attributes and manmade attractions to strategies that lean more on commemoration of difficult heritage. For the case of Uganda, commemoration of difficult heritage such as the expulsion of Asians by Idi Amin, Israel hostage taking by Idi Amin and rescue in 1976 would have both destination healing and commercial benefits. At healing level, Uganda would portray itself as a new nation that cares about its past and therefore hopes never to go back and at a commercial level, Asians and Israelis' would associate with this form of commemoration leading to visits and other economic exchanges with the new nation.

Conclusion

This study has substantiated that destinations with difficult heritage which has not been packaged for place advantage such as Uganda are usually perceived as places of void by tourists at first awareness. This perception is as a result of negative destination stereotyping which when widely shared among social groups at tourist source markets can result into negative symbolism. Negative symbolism is considered to be a higher level of negative insight among members' social groups at tourist source markets. This normally requires protracted marketing efforts at the affected tourist source markets plus positive post visit experiences among members of the social groups to change. There is also evidence that information sources used during travel decision making contain narratives on difficult heritage and these usually enforce negative symbolism. The recommendations made by this study provide a remedy for Uganda and other destinations with difficult heritage on how they can achieve a favorable perception at first awareness among members of social groups at tourist source markets.

Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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