Place Branding: A Way to Correct the Negative Image of Sex Tourism

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Abstract
Place branding has been important in areas including tourism, country positioning in the international market, and the protection of local producers of agricultural and manufactured products. Research and practice in each area has developed independently of the others, even though they all revolve around the same notions of place branding. The opening of new emerging markets, labor shortages in technology, and the globalization of markets, have resulted in greatly intensified global competition for increasing exports and for attracting everything from investment and tourism to foreign students and skilled labour. In turn, this has served to focus attention on place branding, which is likely to have a major impact worldwide as well as in India also. As an emerging and developing country, India has recognized the need to enhance the nation's branding in order to compete in a competitive global marketplace. The Branding India project was initiated by the Indian Government to find out how people worldwide view the nation's strengths and weaknesses. One of the most important issues placing India at a significant disadvantage is the image of sex tourism. This paper illustrates the current situation and analyses the root causes of sex exploitation and perceptual problems. Place branding strategies are proposed to correct the present negative image by placing emphasis on the positive characteristics in order to suppress negative perceptions. These strategies include the development of brand positioning through promotional campaigns that use positive features, such as natural beauty and local hospitality, spirituality and communication tools such as slogans, themes, visual symbols and events. This paper reviews place branding, discusses implications for government, business and research, and calls for integration of the various streams of thought in order to enhance our understanding of the field.

Keywords: Place branding, Goa, sex tourism, prostitution, negative image, communication tools, brand personality

Introduction
In 1982, the Indian Government presented its first tourism policy. In retrospect, one could argue that the novelty of the subject, its low priority and the belief in its potential as a social engineering tool (in keeping with Indian public ideology at that time), contributed to a rather simplistic piece of work. It took the government until 2002 to present an updated policy document. Those are expecting a clear line of thinking and plan must have been quite disappointed by the new policy. It is based on a number of incompatible perspectives, of which those of the international development community and the international lobby group of tourism and travel related industries are the most pronounced. As a result, it starts from the idea that tourism is both a threat and an engine of growth.

India has been competing in the global marketplace based on low cost labor and natural resources and these comparative advantages have made India

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a regional production hub for various industries, such as the automotive, clothing and IT/ITES industries. The country's position as an IT savvy people, however, cannot be sustained, particularly with the entry of China into the WTO and the emergence of lower-cost competitors in the region. It is essential that India finds a way to change this situation and pursue a different strategy and new country brand image.

This paper aims to explore the challenge of India being associated with the problems of sex and prostitution. Analyses of the current situation and the root causes of this problem are illustrated, followed by the place branding strategies that are proposed to correct this negative image.

Goa and Sex Tourism

The term sex tourism refers to tourists who travel to other countries, specifically to purchase the sexual services of local women (and men) (Enloe, 1989). Different forms of the sex trade flourish worldwide, ranging from pornography to erotic phone calls, call girls and hostesses, sexually provocative shows, mail-order brides, street prostitution or illegal brothels. The nature and terms of exchanges between sex tourists and sex workers vary in different places, as does the degree to which each country deals with this business (Davidson and Taylor, 1996). Sex tourism has become a major source of income in some countries, particularly those with poor and underprivileged sectors, to the point that some countries have even tried to promote the business.

Sex tourism is anchored in networks that provide services such as prostitutes, tourist guides, show organizers or massage parlors, and that serve not only foreign tourists but local customers as well (Quintanilla, 1997). Many people are attracted to this business because it is perceived as an easy way to earn money by using one's body, rather than working in more restrictive jobs such as domestic work or physical labor. Despite the violation of human rights, the sexual exploitation of minors, that is children and adolescents, also exists at various levels.

Goa (India) undeniably has serious problems regarding the sex trade, as do many other countries. There is a perception that the problem is much worse in Goa because many people think that the city provides easy access to these types of services. There are some 1.2 million children in forced prostitution in India, according to estimates by UNICEF. Local children’s rights and international agencies report that many tourists travelling to Goa seek out child prostitutes, and the greater enforcement of child abuse laws in ‘traditional’ child sex tourism areas appears to be contributing to the growth in the sexual exploitation of children in Goa.

Previous research has addressed many root causes, such as the economic, social, political, institutional and ideological factors, that have led to the growth of sex tourism in Southeast Asia. Poverty appears to be the basic cause of prostitution, although this is not exclusive. Phongpaichit (1982) explained that many sex workers in India were engaged in the business to work off their families' debts and to sustain their family units in the rural economy. Their jobs allow them to provide materials, acquire land, build new houses or buy vehicles (Kabilsingh, 1991). Moreover, the money they earn gives them feelings of independence, opportunity, power and glamour, which they never expected to obtain otherwise (Odzer, 1994).

In addition to the need to escape from poverty, other determining factors, such as an increasing culture of consumption and higher pressure to succeed in a materialistic world, drive girls or women at risk to find ways to earn money to buy new clothes or accessories. The living conditions of the financially least-advantaged sectors give rise to marked vulnerability where values are distorted, leading to related problems such as prostitution and poverty (Quintanilla, 1997). Sex tourists in Goa find themselves with the economic power to look for choices of sexual pleasures in a variety of settings and transactions. Odzer (1994) called these tourists 'neocolonialist kings-for-a-day' who use their affluence to exploit the relative poverty of the unfortunate. The proliferation of multiple forms of the sex trade has been found to occur simultaneously with the growth of the entertainment industry, particularly if government policy is to promote the overall recreation sector.

The sex trade also brought related problems, such as AIDS. The issue of sex exploitation must be viewed from a wider perspective. Some studies believe that prostitution is a violation of human rights and an outrage to the dignity of women.
(Barry, 1991), in many cases, prostitution appears as a distinctive form of economic exploitation rather than sexual oppression. Women from poor or underprivileged families may agree to participate in the sex trade in order to gain an economic opportunity to support their households. Liberal feminists believe that the prostitution can be regarded as a rational choice given such circumstances. In the network of sex tourism it is not only sex tourists who derive benefits, but the others in the network (e.g. prostitutes, local entrepreneurs and leisure companies) also gain economic benefits from foreign exchange earnings. Arguably, sometimes it is not the sex tourists, but these stakeholders with an economic interest who try to expand and maintain ongoing sex tourism.

Whether the reality of sex tourism is a form of economic exploitation or a violation of human rights, the country image of Goa has been this negative image has been widely and wildly publicised through the impact of global media. Popular culture presents the reputation of Goa as a haven for sexual adventures, as shown in many movies, songs and music videos. For example, Here in Goa, liquor is cheap and women are cheaper", these are the lines said by none other than Bipasha Basu in her movie “Dum Maro dum”, which clearly shows how badly Goa’s image is being projected nowadays. Goa, an international tourism destination is now facing a major identity crisis as more and more people now relate Goa to liquor, drugs and prostitution.

To correct this negative image, Goa needs to work on both real improvement (e.g. government policy) and image improvement (e.g. place branding strategy). Fortunately, Goa also possesses many positive features and images, such as beautiful natural scenery, rich history and a unique culture. The results of the Branding Goa research demonstrated that there is an opportunity to build and develop strategies to manage the perceived images of Goa. If Goa’s image is continuously shown in a bad light just imagine the harm, it might pose to the future prospects of Goa’s colleges and schools as well as the esteemed BITS-PILANI GOA CAMPUS. Indeed, Freire (2005) proposed that since stereotypes are dynamic and evolving these can be changed into a positive image with appropriate place branding strategy.

Place Branding Strategy

The Government of Goa recognizes that the city is undergoing a serious problem by being negatively associated with the sex industry. To correct this situation, the government needs to urge the development of a branding strategy to correct the present image of Goa and reshape perceptions while simultaneously taking direct action against sex tourism via government policy. Government positions have been to repress or prohibit prostitution, particularly child exploitation and human trafficking. NGOs and other organizations, both local and international, have been working proactively on addressing the issue and urging the Goa authorities to regulate penalisation of the exploiters of sex workers. These policies, however, have been considered insufficient in view of the rapid growth of the sex trade. Another policy is to increase prevention programs and provide more choices of lifestyle for people who choose to engage in prostitution.

Most action is taken to assist those who are the objects of trade in sex and to penalise procurers has been unsuccessful. In order to successfully tackle the sex trade and promote positive change, all stakeholders involved in the tourism business need to be more responsible and active in the elimination of the trade in sex that has emerged so rapidly over the past few years. The commitment of society as a whole is necessary as this issue involves not only much prejudice, but also requires more knowledge and information through research on the magnitude of the problem in order to understand the true situation.

Kotler et al. (2002) proposed that place image is a result of the mind trying to process and frame the beliefs, ideas and impressions that people connect with a place and that when no positive data is available negative processing results in the association of information. Thus, in the case of a negative stereotype, such as Goa and sex tourism, certain positive factors need to be accentuated while simultaneously trying to change the realities that give rise to a negative place image. Real improvements, such as the development of appropriate government policy, must be highlighted in conjunction with an image improvement concept. As Johnston (2006) stressed, it is crucial to emphasis the positive
features when trying to correct the negative perception.

The Core Elements of Place Branding

Goa’s positive qualities can be enhanced at multiple levels, ranging from the physical environment to public services, entertainment and recreation attractions and the nature of the Goa people. These collective components provide opportunities for Goa to compete in the global marketplace. Goa has the advantages of a variety of diverse natural attractions, consisting of mountains, forests, waterfalls, rivers and beaches, combined with a rich history and culture. Traditional customs offer occasions to celebrate and enjoy festive activities, and Goa is also one of the best places to shop, where visitors can find a wide selection of products and services at reasonable prices.

How can one forget about the beautiful beaches, world heritage sites, churches and the tremendous scenic beauty of Goa that attracts more than 2.1 million tourists annually? Goa is such a peaceful and holy state. If you take a walk around Goan streets, you can easily spot Churches all built alongside at many places. Goa is a perfect example of communal and religious harmony. English, Hindi, Konkani, Marathi, Urdu, Telugu, Malayalam, all these languages are spoken here in Goa. Goa should be known for its immense natural beauty and cultural diversity. I state it again that Goa shouldn’t be known as a place exclusively for alcohol, drugs and prostitution. The controversial lines of the movie “Dum Maro Dum” might help them gain cheap publicity out of it, but we as responsible Indian citizens should help in curbing such false rumors about Goa. What needs to be changed is the mindset of people regarding Goa. I urge you all to please clear your friends’ and relatives’ misconceptions about Goa and tell them about Goa’s beautiful beaches, tell them about Goa’s mesmerizing climate, tell them about the cool breeze of Goa. Let the whole world know that Goa is also a paradise on Earth endowed with heavenly beauty.

Among all the positive features of Goa, ‘people’ are always ranked as a leading characteristic that reflects the magnificent hospitality of the country. This factor has a specific impact on consumers as the friendliness of the Goa people creates a positive experience for visitors who then influence their families and friends. Rather than only relying on such positive experiences, appropriate place branding strategy can help by setting the stage to illuminate these qualities. For instance, programs such as home stay holidays that highlight the warmth of Goa hospitality should be emphasized in the national tourism plan.

Place Characteristics and Brand Personality

In addition to the core elements of a place, its positive characteristics need to be promoted simultaneously since consumers make decisions based on not only the functional quality but also on the representational and emotional quality of a place. The concept of brand personality is strongly emphasized in contemporary business because it denotes symbolic meanings beyond practical attributes. This can be defined as the set of human characteristics associated with a given brand (Aaker, 1996). Brand personality is strongly associated with a specific place since consumers often perceive the place image based on characteristics of the place and people who live there (Kotler et al., 2002).

Realizing that people are an important factor in determining place image and positioning, I have developed a typology of Goa that defines the four major characteristics of Goa branding. Based on consumer perceptions of Goa, these are ‘Fun’, ‘Fulfilling’, ‘Friendly’ and ‘Flexible’. These brand personalities illustrate a mix of the characteristics of the Goa lifestyle and places in Goa. The notion of ‘Fun’ denotes a vibrant and entertaining experience that consumers perceive in the Goa lifestyle, in people who enjoy a dynamic lifestyle that includes going out, celebrating and having fun. ‘Fulfilling’ is perceived as a sense of escape from reality or peace of mind evoked in the relaxed lifestyle and tranquil places of Goa. ‘Friendly’ is the expression most used by consumers when referring to Goa as a comfortable environment and, finally, feelings of 'Flexibility' were expressed when consumers noted the easygoing relationships among the diversity of people, places and situations in Goa.
This juxtaposition of ‘fun’, ‘fulfilling’, ‘friendly’ and ‘flexible’ characteristics appears in a ‘fusion’ form rather than as rigid beliefs, opinions or attitudes, because of the multi-layered meanings of Goa individuality, history, society and culture. This analysis of place characteristics and brand personality illustrates the underlying structure of consumers’ holistic perspectives and promotes a greater insight into Goa’s brand image.

**Place Branding Communication Tools**

To implement an effective image improvement for Goa, the positive elements and characteristics of Goa must be communicated to both tourists, and residents as the image of a place is influenced by perceived values delivered to customers. Tourism campaigns normally carry a slogan or tagline to unify and underline the values and identities of the place being promoted. For example, South Australia has the slogan 'Relax, Indulge, Discover, Enjoy' and the Maldives has the slogan 'The Sunny Side of Life'. The Goa tourism campaign has been quite successful in terms of public awareness using the concept 'Amazing Goa', particularly since many tourists enjoy the idea of experimenting with something new, exotic or different from their home environment or daily life. Yet, in choosing words to represent and position the country's image, not only must positive meanings be considered, but also any possibility of implying negative connotations.

Kotler et al. (2002) proposed that one way of handling a negative image of a place is to use the 'denying visual' to overwhelm the target audience with positive images. This strategy comes with risks. Bangkok has always portrayed itself using a picture of the Grand Palace depicted as a picturesque and serene image, whereas in reality the Grand Palace is situated in the middle of the city amid highly congested traffic. This 'denying visual' results in frustration among visitors with high expectations as they feel they are being tricked by the place branding campaign. Porritt (2006) suggested that sophisticated tourists become very uncomfortable about any mismatch between an image projected via marketing tools and reality.

**Conclusion**

My evaluation is purely based on ‘branding goa’. The problems that we observe are as follows:

a. Brand Goa does not have an owner. Just like nobody’s child – Brand Goa is growing wild. Since there is no custodian who is managing the brand, it tends to get blown in different directions without any strategic plan.

b. The Logo units are confusing. Too many fonts, a range of inconsistent colors, mixed symbols and a branding line which is neither evocative nor engaging are what need to be addressed. The font for ‘Go Goa’ is masculine and almost industrial.

c. The Goa Tourism webpage is passive. It highlights an altogether different branding line. It does not reflect the values of the brand, lacks the right tone of voice and visual style. It also lacks any interactive platform and fails to engage the visitor.

d. The branding, communication (print, TV, web, display) is not consistent. It keeps changing with different agencies having a go. It does not build on any branding idea, and there is an absence of any communication strategy. It lacks synergy and consistency in the branding identity elements. It is also not measured for effectiveness.

e. The Incredible India campaign is handicapped in the way it promotes Brand Goa. In the absence of any branding guidelines, there is absolutely no synergy in how they feature Goa. Anything goes!

f. The newly appointed brand ambassador for Goa lacks stature and is a virtual unknown when compared to brand ambassadors of other destinations. This is an area that needs a serious re-think.

The following points may give the solutions:

1. Brand Goa needs an owner. One who is responsible for the way it appears and is communicated. One who will enhance its equity and enhance its value – both in terms of perception and merchandising. This responsibility has to rest with one entity and not across departments or ministries.
2. The starting point lies in defining the ‘brand vision’ statement with the help of a professional branding agency. The brand vision must have a future focus and must be relevant to the market and the people of the state. This is where we can have a vision to be a ‘clean’, ‘eco-friendly’, ‘inclusive & sustainable’, ‘safe’ etc., along with other emotional attributes.

3. This has to be complemented by conducting professional local, national & international market research across different target segments, including visitors, trade and the local people to understand usage, attitudes and get relevant consumer insights that will help in designing the brand architecture.

4. Employing a professional design shop to develop a logo, symbol, colors and other branding elements after having defined the brand values and essence.

5. Appointing a brand custodian who will employ the branding guidelines as outlined in a published ‘brand identity manual’. This will ensure synergy, continuity and will ensure that the brand communication stays on course every time there’s a transfer of tourism directors or change of agencies.

6. Getting a professional agency which understands branding to develop a branding idea, which then gets amplified and applied across different media (traditional, web-based, mobile telephony, viral, public relations, activation, experiential etc)

7. Reviewing brand communication through research-based evaluation and having experts suggest course correction.

8. Exploring the potential of a brand that has huge intrinsic value through co-branding opportunities, merchandising, and brand extensions. The state can earn serious big bucks if they can leverage the equity of goa as a ‘brand’.

9. Negative perceptions caused by unfortunate stories of rapes, drug dealers, crime and drowning are to be managed by a professional public relations agency which understands the brand parameters and creates favorable content in terms of features, press releases, viral films and web content and disseminates good news about goa to counter an overdose of bad news.

10. Having a small budget is not an obstacle, but a challenge. A big branding idea can be easily amplified even with small budgets. But we first need to build a brand strategically and evolve a big branding idea.

11. The physical and emotional attributes of the brand have to extend to the ‘brand experience’. This includes all touch points that the consumer (visitor) comes in contact with. The brand values need to reflect the essence of the local people of goa – their needs and aspirations when taken into consideration will result in enhanced brand experience for every visitor. Else we will have a ‘desired’ brand strategy on paper with no roots in ground reality.

Anholt (2006) proposed that a country with a poor place brand image often finds that the world media will react with cynicism or indifference to its positive qualities, while the negative associations are fascinated and given prominence. Hence, it is essential that Goa place emphasis on place branding strategies to support the image improvement programme.

The implementation of place branding strategies must be encouraged at all levels, including not only organizations involved with international tourists, but also the local population, because community self-perception is highly important in building long-term, sustainable place image. During the process of reshaping a place's image, nation branding is crucially about building and reinforcing a collective identity in a holistic manner. Elements of places and people must come together to evoke a dynamic impact in the international marketplace. Most importantly, critical attention to and follow-up on the situation is essential in order to tackle the serious problem of the sex trade. Cooperation among stakeholders, such as local residents, government sectors and business organizations, can help fight against the core root causes of sex exploitation, correct the negative image of sex tourism and promote positive positioning of the Goa.
References


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