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Airport branding: Content analysis of vision statements

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ABSTRACT

Following the commercialization and privatization of many airports in recent decades, airport management companies have placed greater emphasis on airport marketing and branding. One way of understanding the branding efforts of any organization is to analyze the content and themes of their vision and mission statements. In particular, vision statements provide a statement of the future intentions of companies with respect to their plans to engage with their main stakeholders. This paper aims to contribute to the literature on airport branding by analyzing the content of 91 vision statements of airports from around the world. The analytical framework involves deductive measurement and a content analysis regarding keywords identified in a literature review, in addition to tourism-related elements in airport vision statements. Although there is an intrinsic relationship between airports and tourism development, the academic literature has not thoroughly addressed stakeholder engagement among airports and tourism organizations. For the data analysis in this study, airports were segmented with respect to geographic location, passenger movement, and airport governance models.

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1. Introduction

Since the commercialization of the airport industry worldwide in the 1970s and 1980s and the wave of privatization that followed in the 1990s, many airports have developed a strong business-oriented approach to their operations (Graham, 2008). Many airports have thus nurtured their businesses, which has led to many repercussions, including the development of airport-marketing techniques and greater business interaction with locally based nonaviation stakeholders.

In some cases, the concept of an "airport city" has emerged, with airports enhancing stakeholder engagement from a number of different perspectives, including urban transit development (Siemiatycki, 2006), environmental damage mitigation (Boons, Van Buuren, & Teisman, 2010), planning and governance (Donnet & Keast, 2014), and corporate social responsibility (Skouloudis, Evangelinos, & Moraitis, 2012). Although an intrinsic relationship exists between airports and tourism development, studies on business and governance arrangements between airports and tourism destinations are lacking in the literature. This study aims to fill part of this research gap by investigating the presence of business- and tourism-related elements in airport vision statements. Thus, a review of the literature regarding vision statements was conducted, and then, a content analysis of 91 airport vision statements was performed based on the literature review to find evidence regarding the relationship between airport branding strategies and the presence of tourism-elements in their vision statements. The methodology applied was content analysis through a qualitative approach; QSR NVivo 10 software was used to code and assess the collected text.

2. Literature review

The airport commercialization process that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s and the airport privatization in the 1990s have contributed to the emergence of a more competitive and market-oriented airport industry. Thereafter, airport marketers began to develop airport brands to differentiate themselves from their competitors while increasing customer loyalty. Paternoster (2012) explains that there was a shift in passengers' perception of airports from places with long queues, unprepared employees, dirty toilets and no fun to a service-oriented venue where excellence was the goal and strong and strategically designed brands were established.

Although branding is defined as a disciplined process in which brand awareness is built and customer loyalty is enhanced (Wheeler, 2013), the way in which airports develop their brands is complex involving a number of stakeholders with potentially different representations of the single corporate brand. According to Tse (2009), airport branding strategies must include the following elements: 1) the selection of food and beverage providers; 2) the selection of retail stores; 3) pricing strategies; 4) the architectural design and layout; 5) airport artwork; 6) services, entertainment, and amenities; 7) service staff; and 8) logos and slogans.

As emphasized by Paternoster (2008), to be considered among the best in the world, airport management must be continuously focused on defining and managing a unique brand, in addition to offering remarkable experiences. Thus, the brand together with the vision and mission statements are "two sides of the same coin" because they

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require that the airport strategically defines what must be represented to guarantee that customer experiences are positively differentiated from those of other airports.

Although several authors explain the difference between vision and mission statements (Cowley & Domb, 2012; Kemp & Dwyer, 2003; Sidhu, 2003), it must be noted that their meanings are frequently confused with one another and terms such as "values," "goals and strategies," and "corporate philosophy" are used in practice in formulating both types of statements. Thus, achieving a general consensus between the academic literature and the understanding of terms in the industry is challenging. For example, authors such as Collins and Porras (1997) and Quigley (1994) interpret vision statements as an aggregation of assertions about a company, which includes its mission, values, goals, and strategies. However, many companies do not have established mission and vision statements because managers do not believe that they have tangible benefits (Sidhu, 2003). In addition, one can argue that owing to the challenges to airport branding, in some cases, mission and vision statements are an imperfect representation of the business strategy, philosophy, and direction that an airport authority will follow.

Vision statements have been a common subject of the business leadership strategy literature since the 1980s (Levin, 2000). Although many published studies have affirmed the importance of establishing a vision statement in implementing leadership, the literature is not consistent on this topic. Such inconsistency results in significant complications because the way that a term is defined directly affects how a vision statement is understood in practice (Kantabutra & Avery, 2002). According to Cowley and Domb (2012), a vision statement is an assertion or image of the ideal of the company in the future that helps to inspire and empower the organization's interested parties, such as shareholders and stakeholders. The vision statement is used to project the company in the future and to visualize its ideal; it is a brand promise. Kotter (2012) refers to vision statements as a type of image that projects the company in the future and explains that a vision statement should contain implicit or explicit commentaries on why people should strive to create this particular future for a company. The same study proposes an eight-stage methodology for transforming an unsuccessful company. One of these stages includes the need to develop a vision statement and the strategies that will help clarify the direction in which a company should move, motivate the company's workers toward that direction, and coordinate the actions of different groups within the organization. The mission statement has a different purpose, which is to put the vision into practice and to address the purpose of the organization and what it wants to achieve (Halpern & Graham, 2013).

Recent studies have focused on attributes of vision statements that significantly affect customer and staff satisfaction (Kantabutra, 2008b; Kantabutra & Avery, 2010; Rafferty & Griffin, 2004) to define a strong/weak or positive/negative vision statement. Kantabutra and Avery (2007) investigate this question with retail stores in Sydney, Australia, whereas Kantabutra (2008a) focuses on the retail sector in Bangkok, Thailand. These studies conclude that vision statements should have the following attributes (Kantabutra, 2008b):

- Conciseness. A vision statement should be brief, but its brevity should not prevent a definitive statement of the vision.
- Clarity. A vision statement should be clear and precise such that everyone understands and accepts it.
- Future orientation. It should focus on a long-term perspective of the organization and its environment and guide the organization far into the future.
- *Stability*. A vision statement should be general and sufficiently abstract such that it is unaffected by technological or market changes.
- Challenge. It should motivate people to work toward a desirable outcome and should challenge people to do their best.
- Abstraction. A vision statement should represent a general idea, not a specific achievement, and it is not a narrow goal that can be discarded once it has been met.

• *Desirability or ability to inspire*. It should represent an ideal that is worth working toward because followers will not commit to achieving a goal when they do not consider the vision to be attractive.

Cowley and Domb (2012) assume that a good vision statement should meet several criteria that complement the aforementioned attributes: (1) being based in the company's current situation and present reality while recognizing the challenges to establishing an ideal future; (2) representing stakeholders and their interests; (3) being the product of collaborative thinking instead of a collection of individual visions; and (4) inspiring and inviting people to make it a reality.

The leader's role in communicating a company's vision is important. Kantabutra (2008b, p. 129) metaphorically explains that "creating a vision means creating a power, not a place; an influence, not a destination" in an effort to teach leaders that consistency is necessary when combining visionary messages and behaviors. Quigley (1994) goes further and states that a leader's power is the ability to translate a company's vision and values into reality and the expertise to sustain such a reality.

No academic studies specifically on airport vision statements were identified in the literature, although Kemp and Dwyer (2003) provide a content analysis of mission statements for 50 international airlines to discuss the nature and purpose of the mission statements; to identify the components of an ideal mission statement for tourism and hospitality organizations; and to analyze these mission statements to ascertain their consistency with the proposed ideal. Thus, based on other studies (Low & Lamb, 2000; Williams, 2006) that analyze the content of organizational mission statements, Kemp and Dwyer (2003) suggest that an ideal mission statement has nine elements:

- 1. *Customers*. Who are the company's customers? How can their needs and expectations be met?
- 2. Products/services. What are the company's main products/services?
- 3. Geographical market. What is the company's competitive environment?
- 4. *Technology*. Is technology the company's primary concern?
- 5. Survival, growth and profitability. Is the company committed to economic objectives?
- 6. *Philosophy*. What are the company's basic beliefs, values, aspirations, and philosophical priorities?
- 7. *Self-concept*. What is the company's distinctive feature or major competitive advantage?
- 8. *Public image*. Does the company respond to social, community, and environmental concerns?
- 9. Staff. Are employees considered important assets of the company?

Specific studies providing guidance for organizational vision statement content analysis, particularly with respect to aviation, were not found in the literature. Considering that no study apart from Kemp and Dwyer (2003) has provided a content analysis of organizational vision statements in the aviation sector, the authors used the elements proposed in Kemp and Dwyer's study in addition to a "tourism/place" element.

3. Methodology

To undertake an analysis of airport vision statements, airports located on each continent were approached to obtain their vision statements. There was no specific preference for airport size, operating characteristics, or governance model. Not all airports have their vision statements available on their publically available websites; instead, airports' vision statements are often provided on webpages dedicated to attracting investors. Furthermore, certain airports present such information in their annual reports, primarily financial reports, or master plans. Direct contact with a total of 131 airports was attempted via email or through the social media network Facebook, and a response rate of approximately 77% (101 airports) was obtained. Thus, 69.3%

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