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The Role of Internal Marketing (IM) in Sustainable Destination Management: A Case Study of Grand Bay, Mauritius

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Abstract: This paper investigates about internal marketing (IM) at a tourism destination. Research reveals considerable work in the area, but, it is observed that the concept has always been examined within a confined setting. Tourists experience a medley of services at a destination so that satisfaction is measured through the evaluation of each service element separately. As such, marketing a tourist destination is a challenging task as many stakeholders are involved. The absence of IM in the overall marketing program at a destination confirms the gap in literature and calls for a re-examination of the concept. The host community, as a co-creator of the tourism offer has always been overlooked in the process of marketing. Therein lies the contribution of this paper. The study therefore seeks to address two gaps in literature – first to provide a renewed definition of IM at a tourism destination and second, it gauges into IM implications in the sustainability context. Using semi-structured interviews to cover all segments at the destination, the findings reveal that all the stakeholders know about marketing, but most people do not understand the term IM. The lack of communication between destination stakeholders and the loose connection that exist in the motives of individual co-creators of the tourism product confirms a missing IM in the overall marketing program which in turn impedes in sustaining the tourism destination.

Keywords: Internal Marketing, Destination Management, Sustainability, Mauritius

Introduction

THE WORLD TOURISM Organization (WTO) has declared tourism as the world's biggest industry (2007) and yet, IM (Internal Marketing), as a pervasive concept, is still not present in destination marketing and sustainability agendas. Literature demonstrates that there are some areas of deficiency pertaining to the concept. In fact, IM has not been fully explored at the level of a tourism destination. The concept has only been dealt within a theoretical frame and no empirical testing has been carried out to assess its role in sustainability. Undoubtedly, the tourism industry has increased considerably in recent decades and has become one of the main sources of income in many countries (Williams and Shaw, 1992). However, the link that binds sustainability and internal marketing while managing a destination is under-researched. Sustainability presumably takes into

consideration 'physical realities' and 'social realities' and it needs to take place simultaneously and continuously over all imaginable scales and involves virtually all social entities. The work of Flipo (1986) is a testament to this view: "the more co-operative the interrelations the easier the marketing objectives are to meet". Translated to a tourism destination, the ethicality of sustainability has often been questioned as a loose connection is noted between the destination and its partners. The dilemma that plagues sustainability at a tourism destination is therefore still ongoing, a view echoed in the work of Chi & Qu (2008) who observe that destinations today are facing steep competitions and the challenges are getting greater in the years to come. This begs the question as to whether a tourism destination will be able to sustain its resources and attractiveness without marketing internally. The present paper prompts at establishing the link that binds internal marketing to destination management in the quest for sustainability.

Internal Marketing

The communication to internal stakeholders is called internal marketing and it simply refers to the "the application of marketing inside the organization to instill customer-focused values" (Ehren, 2006). IM owes its root to Berry (1976), though its practice was reflected 20 years back in the work of McGregor (1957). IM is found to have been evolved through four distinct eras according to Schultz (2006). The latter suggests that "it's not a new idea, and it has evolved since the 1970's when theorists believed that it was all about making employees happy on the job" Schultz (2006). This statement reminds of McGregor's Theory Y of which underpinning philosophy was to make employees happy and to make work as pleasant as play. Lending support to this claim, it may be argued that IM emerged in the literature as early as in the 60s in McGregor's book "The Human Side of Enterprise" (1960) though proponents claim that it sprouted from Berry *et al's* (1974) work in the early 1970s. IM was even present in Weber's bureaucracy, a contemporary theorist of McGregor's time. However, the work of Berry *et al* (1974) gained more popularity for he addressed IM as a stand-alone concept as compared to the others who presented it as a mixture in other philosophies like Theory Y, Taylorism and Bureaucracy. IM practice provides a clear signal to the internal market that the company values its employees and therefore suggests that to succeed in external marketing IM should be prioritized. If the objective of marketing is to value customers, then, that of IM is to value those valuing the customers. This is encapsulated in the commonly claimed statement: "*if you want to put the customer first, put the employees more first*". Figure 1 portrays the successful application of IM in various organizations. However, in recognition of a diversity of its usage, IM is still ambiguous and incomplete in status due to its absence at a tourism destination



Figure 1: IM in Different Organizations

Definitions

Various scholars have attempted to define IM in their own ways. While some accentuated the vision and missions (Rafiq and Ahmed, 2000), others stressed particular emphasis on employee motivation (Cahill, 1996), commitment (Gummeson, 2000) and rewards (Lee-Ross, 1999), while still some simply viewed it as a way to propel sales-mindedness or promote inter-functional coordination (Johnson and Seymour, 1985). The definition provided by Rafiq and Ahmed (2000) is a mere extension to existing definitions whilst Schultz (2006) lays special emphasis on internal relationship, communication, motivation and empowerment. The former interprets IM from an organizational perspective and the latter addresses the responsibilities of a human resource department. As such, there is confusion as to exactly what internal marketing is, what it is supposed to, how it is supposed to be done, and who is supposed to do it" (Ahmed, 1995). Ultimately, most of the definitions proposed, aim to be better at external marketing despite their limitations to an organizational setting. Rafiq and Ahmed (2000) depict the idea of IM as follows:

‘IM is a planned effort using a marketing-like approach to overcome organizational resistance to change and to align, motivate and inter-functionally co-ordinate and in-

tegrate employees towards the effective implementation of corporate and functional strategies in order to deliver customer satisfaction through a process of creating motivated and customer-orientated employees’.

The above definition presents IM in a bureaucratic manner. It spans mainly over working relationship (inter-functional co-ordination, employee motivation, job satisfaction, and empowerment) and evolve around a closed environment, whereas other informal relationships which also comprise the service encounter are ignored. As a definition provided in the millennium, it definitely misses important points that touches the tourism context, especially when the World Tourism Organization claims tourism to be the millennium industry. Recent definition of IM is provided in the work of Schulz (2006) who addresses the same situation of an office with its happy officers delivering consistent customer experience:

‘it involves all activities, actions and managerial directions that an organisation implements in order to encourage and generate employee and other stakeholders support for marketing programs within the firm’

This latest version of IM strengthens the previous ones. According to Schultz (2006), IM programs seek support from stakeholders to ensure success within the firm. This interpretation of IM is again restricted to the internal state of affair of an organisation. The interpretation is narrowly confined within the four walls of the office, whereas IM calls for a more open approach. In fact, it mirrors the reflection and extension of the same version of IM that has been flowing in literature since the 1970s. IM is more or less managerial actions aimed to influence employees to be better at external marketing. Sometimes, IM is marketing-inclined (Kotler, 2006), sometimes management-inclined (Schultz, 2004) and still sometimes operation-inclined (Cahill, 1996), but at the end of the day, the subject is still being debated within the four walls.

The Context of a Tourism Destination

Sustaining a tourism destination is not an easy task. In fact, Ko, (2005) observes that sustainability is not determined by single components. The tourism industry is large in structure, employs a high number of contact and non-contact staff, contains many diverse departments and operates on both national and international scale and is profit-making. Moreover, beyond the generic characteristics that distinguish services from goods, such as intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity and perishability (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry, 1985), there are some further differences between tourism and other services (Chi & Qu, 2008). A resident who accidentally meets a tourist on the beach is as significant in the service delivery process as a trained staff in a tour operating company. Therefore, an organic relationship exists between the residents and the tourism destination so that when a tourist buys a package, it indirectly comprises the hospitality of the host. The residents form part of the tourism setting and they have the power to influence the tourism experience to the best or to the worst. Consequently, IM is the means through which the hospitality level of the host may be boosted for an overall successful tourism experience. For instance, Cooper *et al* (2007) highlight the interdependency and co-creation aspect which are prerequisite in delivering the final tourism experience. As such, destinations are constantly under the pressure to be

both competitive and sustainable (Cooper, 2002). This argument accords with that of De Kadt (1992) who opines that sustainability has become the organizing concept for tourism policy. Therefore, the peculiar nature of the destination demands significant reliance on the commitment and involvement of those who perform and this may be achieved through the process of IM which represents a hope of survival for the existing tourism assets, be it the physical and natural attractions, the host community, culture and heritage and even the tourists. IM in tourism therefore represents a practice which attempts to incorporate internal-external alignment, integration and coherence among staff and stakeholders with the ultimate aim to maintain tourists (and customers) and sustain tourism (and the industry).

Why IM is Needed at a Tourism Destination

Cahill (1996) rightly observes that there is no external marketing without internal marketing and this statement translated to a tourism destination suggests that there can be no DEM (Destination External Marketing) without DIM (Destination Internal Marketing). The acceptance of the residents to welcome tourists within their living environment is a prerequisite as this influences tourists' satisfaction and perception level of the destination. According to Cooper (2007), 'a destination is more than a product' and thus, IM application at a destination goes beyond the conventional IM practice and thus will take into consideration the above factors. It enlives all the necessary techniques that seek to gain commitment and involvement towards the destination partners and the tourists. Nagel and Cilliers (1990) observe that customer satisfaction is "the new standard by which customers are measuring business performance". It implies that tourist satisfaction is dependent on the performance of destination actors. External customer satisfaction is dependent on internal customers' satisfaction, and striking a balance between these two types of customers, is the challenge most service organizations face. In a similar manner, it may be argued that the new standard by which tourists measure their tourism experience is through the hospitality at the destination. The work of Chi & Qu (2008) is a testament to this view: "overall satisfaction with a hospitality experience is a function of satisfactions with the individual elements/attributes of all the products/services that make up the experience, such as accommodation, weather, natural environment, social environment etc (Lounsbury & Hoopes, 1985; Pizam & Elis, 1999). This pinpoints towards the importance of conducting IM at a destination as the link that exists between satisfaction and post-purchase behavior has been witnessed in literature. There are empirical evidences that tourist' satisfaction is an antecedent of the level of hospitality which in turn is depends on IM application at the destination. For instance, the work of Chi and Qu, (2008), Cooper *et al* (2007), Kotler *et al* (2006) and Nagel and Cilliers (1990) accords with the above statement and confirm the link that connects IM, tourist satisfaction and their post-purchase behavior. Lee-Ross (1999) suggests that "may be nowhere is the understanding of employee motivation more important than in a customer service oriented business such as the tourism industry".

Sustainability: An Overview

Sustainability is a permanent concern of humankind (Tonn, 1999). From the Stockholm Declaration (1972) to various Conferences held round the world like Mauritius (2009), Chennai (2007) or Santa Barbara (2007), sustainability keeps topping leading organizations'

agenda. In short, sustainability has become the organizing concept (Cooper, 1998). Sustainability or sustainable development is often interchangeably used as both denote the same action of developing without depleting. The concept of sustainability owes its root to environmentalism in the 1970's. Sustainable Development (SD) as a concept came to the forefront of the world through the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN, 1980). With the world becoming smaller and smaller place for the international traveler, sustainability issues are pervading all over the world. In fact, a destination is the most important element of the tourism system (Cooper, 2002). It is the *raison d'être* to indulge in tourism as per its definitions: "movement outside the normal leaving environment" (Mathieson and Wall, 1982; WTO, 2001) or "the science and art of transporting visitors (Walker, 1996). If tourism is declared as the millennium industry (WTO, 2007) and the world largest global employer (Smith, 2001), then, ST becomes the millennium mantra. Hardy and Beeton (2001) argue that sustainable tourism is seen as a way to manage tourism and tourism relationship so as to direct the relationship between tourists and the host community into a sustainable one (Cavelzani *et al*, 2003).

The Journey from Sustainability to Sustainable Tourism (ST)

The journey of ST began from the United Nations Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The concept of ST conjured up the possibility of saving the blue planet from the imminent environmental disaster out of excessive pressure, overuse and misuse of the natural resources and other tourism assets. Sustainable tourism thus emerged from the term sustainable development and was used in almost all the debates and world conferences as a fashionable concept. If WTO describes sustainable development as development that meets the need of the present generation without depleting the resources, then sustainable tourism is merely indulging in tourism without depleting the existing resources. As result, green tourism, nature tourism, soft tourism, ecotourism, agro tourism, cultural tourism, medical/therapeutic tourism, educational tourism and the likes have found the day under the sustainable tourism label.

Definitions of Sustainability

Sustainable Tourism as defined by the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) is:

'the optimal use of natural and cultural resources for national development on an equitable and self sustaining basis to provide a unique visitor experience and an improved quality of life through partnership among government, the private sector and communities'.

(Source: <http://www.oecs.org/>, 2009)

Sustainability Threatened

Since the publication of "Our Common Future" (United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987), the tourism industry as one of the major international industries, have often been pointed out with serious concern. Sustainability has been threatened when tourism products have not respected the triple bottom-line (economy, society and environment). In a similar stance, Manning (1999) advocates that "tourism which degrades

any elements of host communities and nations threatens its own future". This corresponds to the prediction of Karl Marx, the German Economist, which foresaw the predicament of this industry as early as in the 1965: "Tourism industry contains its own seeds of destruction" (Marx, 1965). For tourism to succeed it must be sustainable...to be sustainable, it must be carefully planned and managed (Godfrey and Clarke, 2000). Sustainability in tourism is undoubtedly a complex issue due to the multi-faceted nature of the industry. This is so as sustainability is not determined by single components according to Ko (2005). Whether an industry is sustainable or unsustainable depends largely on all the determining factors that surround the industry.

Sustainability at a Tourism Destination

Cooper (2007) observes that "a destination is more than a product" and according to him, "destinations are constantly under the pressure to be both competitive and sustainable". (Cooper, 2002). As such, sustaining a tourism destination is not an easy task. Ko, (2005) observes that sustainability is not determined by single components and also, it is a subjective concept due to the different types of stakeholders and their different level of involvement. For instance, sustainable tourism infers continued business, maintained profit and tourist inflows for a tour operator or a hotelier. A governmental body would regard sustainable tourism as the compliance of legislations as according to them, land use and resources will be sustained thus leading to sustainable tourism. For the host community, sustainability relates to the possibility of maintaining their living area without compromising their livelihood. This statement is further substantiated in the work of Reid (2003) and Mowforth and Munt (2003) who assert that there can be no singular definition of sustainability and "not all members of a community will share the same needs". The tourism destination is a crucial element of the tourism system and not only does it provide a focal point for tourism activity but it also represents the 'pull' factor for the tourist (Cooper, 1998). The way a tourist area looks is a signature of the lifestyle of the residents and the hospitality of the host complements the tourism offer. Destination stakeholders also are decisive factors to understand if sustainable tourism is sustainable. A truly sustainable destination will recognize that it must satisfy all its stakeholders in the long term (Cooper, 1998). Thus, at destination level, if it has to be decided whether sustainable tourism is really sustainable, the existing resources and current lifestyle of the residents have to be first evaluated. If any sustainable tourism action has the possibility of altering the above factors, then sustainable tourism is not sustainable.

Destination Management

A destination is the main focus for tourism activities and thus it shapes the image of tourism for that particular area. According to the Tourism Management Institute (2007), destination management "is the activity of managing tourism in specific geographical locations for the economic, social and environmental benefit of the recipient business and residential communities." This definition takes into consideration the core components as described by Cooper *et al* (1997): the four A's namely Attractions, Amenities, Access and Ancillary services and underlines the need for a social network. In particular, it is important that the quality of each component at the destination and the delivery of the tourism services are uniform. The definition therefore recognizes that this complementarity of destination com-

ponents is difficult to control given the fragmented nature of tourism. Arguably, Destination Management Organisation (DMO) has the responsibility of nurturing this relationship and network by both managing and marketing at the destination. Ritchie *et al* (2005) strengthen this statement by contending that stakeholders' coordination is the core competency of a DMO. The authors posit that it is only through securing the cooperation of various stakeholders that the DMO can mobilize the necessary resources effectively. The DMO thus facilitates the networking between them and calibrate the activities conducted by them to ensure destination competitiveness and sustainability. The different aims of the different destination partners are converted into a collective goal. Finally, the success of a DMO is not measured through the number of tourists, but rather through the quality of relationships it entertains with tourism stakeholders. The objective is neither customer maximization nor cost minimization, but, relationship optimization between the different stakeholders. In other words, the strength of the DMO's largely depends on the centrality of its position in the network vis a vis the density of network (Presenza *et al*, 2005).

The Link between IM, Sustainability and Destination Management

As discussed above, there is a strong link that binds internal marketing to sustainability in that to achieve the latter, the practice of the former is required at the destination. Internal marketing as a process has to be integrated with the total marketing function in the pursuit of sustainability (Grönroos, 1983) and this endeavor often falls under the ambit of destination management. It should be noted that marketing a tourism product involves not only the prepaid package but also the destination setting and those constituting that setting (the residents). Under such a circumstance, it may be argued that the final tourism product reflects a co-created and amalgamated product and service. The application of IM at a destination is needed to ensure the support of the host community, as they have to be prepared, informed and motivated to face this encounter with the tourists. Arguably, IM cannot be practiced out of a vacuum, as it involves the commitment of all the stakeholders which are groomed to operate responsibly towards the residents and the destination. The interdependency aspect may therefore be dealt with the practice of IM so as to instill a sense of responsibility towards the destination and its residents, the service providers and their employees.

The diagram below offers a peek of the IM spectrum within the destination. It describes the different layers through which communication passes and how the communication is reinforced while moving towards the outward side of the circle which represents the destination. Johnson and Scholes (1989) argue that the consolidation of acceptance is vital and is achieved through communication. When communication is in the dialogue, there needs to be no zero-sum outcome (Varey and Lewis, 1999). Undoubtedly, destination management maintains the centre of gravity at the destination, as it is the entity from which all communication starts. Communication has to be given a central position in the IM process, as ideas, knowledge (tacit and explicit) information (stocks and flows) and suggestions need to be extracted from the host community, the service providers, authorities and associations. The result is co-operation and this leads to cohesion of the stakeholders in the delivery of the tourism product. Ultimately, all these efforts combined result in stakeholders' commitment, as the industry objectives become the individual goals and this promotes a natural spontaneity to serve the tourism industry sustainably

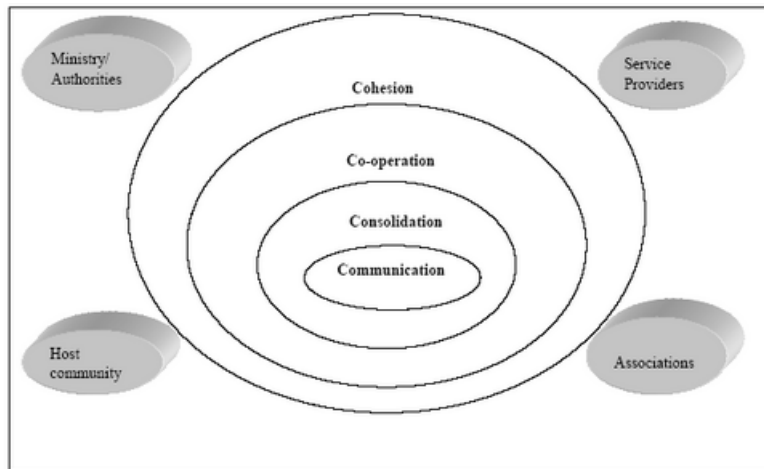


Figure 2: The IM Spectrum within the Destination

The Area of Study

Ritchie and Crouch (2003) suggest that a destination is the main focus of tourism activity and thus it shapes the image of tourism for that particular area. Grand Bay is no exception. This is so, as the image of Mauritius as a tourism destination has been shaped by the famousness of Grand Bay. This area is located in the north of the island as portrayed in figure 3 and forms part of the small island developing state (SIDS) in the Indian Ocean. The diagram below exhibits the island of Mauritius and locates the Grand Bay area which is in the North.



Figure 3: Map of Mauritius Courtesy: World Map
(www.worldmap.com)

Grand Bay has been significantly successful in its tourism effort and in creating a key tourism platform for the island by positioning itself competitively in the world market. For instance, approximately, 800 000 tourists come yearly to enjoy the beaches of Mauritius. Statistics reveals that the population of Grand Bay amounts to approximately 11 505 (Source: Central Statistical Office, 2008). In short, Grand Bay is the hub of the Mauritian tourism industry.

Research Design

In order to conduct a successful research, it is very necessary to have an appropriate design. According to Burns (2000), “a well planned and carefully constructed research design will increase the response rate and will also greatly facilitate the summarization and analysis of the collected data”. Therefore, a two-stage research design was employed. The first aimed to obtain detailed input from selected semi-structured interviews addressed to authority of-

ficers, organizations' representatives and residents of Grand Bay. The second stage dealt with the completion of a questionnaire. Thus, approximately 30 questionnaires were released among three main sets of stakeholders of the Grand Bay tourism destination. As predetermined, a pilot survey was envisaged via semi-structured interviews and questionnaires among 3 main categories of randomly selected participants namely tourism officers, tourism-rated businesses' representatives and residents. The survey was conducted in 2 areas namely Port Louis where all the tourism authorities are nested and Grand Bay where all the tourism-rated businesses and residents are based. It should be noted that some of the questionnaires had to be translated to the native language '*creole*' due to the limited educational background of most residents. However, it was also found that some of informal organisations' representatives and authorities' officers enjoyed the '*creole*' questionnaires and were more expressive in their mother language.

Methodology

Methodology refers to the overall approach to the research process, from the theoretical underpinning to the collection of and analysis of the data. 'Like theories, methodologies cannot be true or false, only more or less useful' (Silverman, 2001). The methodology adopted for the present survey is no exception. It is also worth mentioning that this is only a pilot survey. Primary data for the present survey was obtained through interviews and questionnaires survey which is extensively discussed in the next section. Secondary data is essentially data available but that was collected for a specific purpose other than the purpose of the current researcher, but which can be utilised a second time to substantiate a research project. Secondary information for this study was sourced from various institutions among which the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority, the Tourism Authorities and the Beach Authority. The tertiary information for the present survey was served by University of Nottingham Business School e-library (<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/library>), emerald online library (<http://www.emeraldinsight.com>) and Google Scholar (<http://scholar.google.com>).

Study Instrument -- The Questionnaires

According to De Vaus (2001), a questionnaire is a broad term encompassing all the techniques of data collection in which an individual is asked to respond to the same questions in a set order. Questions were therefore formulated on the basis of secondary and tertiary researches which helped in identifying the main crux areas to be investigated. They were then sub-divided into three main questionnaires and then coded differently for analytical purposes. A main question for each aspect was framed which resulted in further questions depending on the interviewees' response. The questionnaires also included open-ended and close-ended questions as the objectives were to probe in the living area of the residents so as to extrapolate in-depth information as suggested by Creswell (2002) and to extract technical information as well as to take cognizance of other issues regarding destination management and internal marketing practice.

The Semi-Structured Interview

The semi-structured interview was important as according to Fan *et al* (2008), it was a good way to understand the attitudes and actions of the different key participants of the tourism network at the Grand Bay destination. Interviews lasted an average of 45 minutes as other deep-seated issues surfaced during the intervention. The interview was developed from detailed critical review of the literature, and designed to verify participants' awareness or ignorance of IM. It was understood that sidetracking was a typical issue that could not be avoided from frustrated managers who seized the opportunity to vent out and express their feeling of discomfort on certain practices within their own organization.

Response and Analysis

Since the questionnaires were administered personally, response rate was complete yielding the predefined sample of 30 participants whose statuses varied from school leavers to retirees. The entire analysis was undertaken through a combination of desk research and field surveys and since it consisted of a very small sample, the Microsoft Office Excel Program (2007) was utilized.

Findings

The total number of residents surveyed was 20 and their statuses included homemakers, retirees, school leavers, unemployed and self employed. Both open-ended and close-ended questions were utilized to extract maximum information. Since this was a trial study, specific questions were chosen and analyzed. The results obtained were quite alarming as, of 20 residents, 15 were unaware about tourism developments within their own living area whilst the remaining 5 claimed to know about current and future tourism projects at Grand Bay though informal connection with the promoters and different ministries.

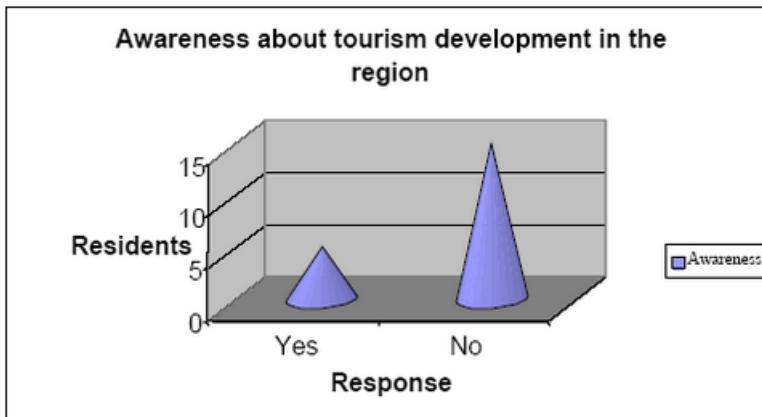


Figure 4: Awareness about Tourism Developments

Level of Support to Tourism Projects

Results pertaining to the level of support unveils an equal percentage of participants (25%) claiming to both support and not support tourism projects at Grand Bay. The reasons advanced by participants who unreservedly disapproved of further tourism developments were:

- They felt outsiders were overly intrusive in their living environment and were trading off their privacy for money.
- The pattern of ownership of most newly built complexes lead to discriminatory practices towards the residents
- Residents had to compromise their livelihood by leaving their work area to promoters endeavoring to build shopping malls.

However, 15% of participants had no opinion for this question. This was so as they were already busy with other projects whilst some blatantly lamented the lack of communication between the tourism authorities and the local community. 35% of the respondents shared both opinions as they perceived developments positively at Grand Bay, but at the same time, they were aware about the opportunity cost associated with further developments in their living area.

Authority Questionnaires

The authority questionnaires were administered in only 4 apex bodies and the Ministry. The respondents were mainly managers and directors.



Figure 5: Destination Management Plan

As indicated in the figure above, 80% (4 out of 5) of the authority officers reported not to have an established destination management plan whilst only 20% of the officers claimed to have a destination plan. The response collected from the pilot was already pointing towards the shortcoming in destination management at Grand Bay.

Familiarity with Internal Marketing

Preliminary results reveal that an overwhelming majority of respondents were not familiar with the term internal marketing (approximately 90%) whilst only 10% of respondents interviewed claim to understand. However, it is interesting to note that from the 10% who were knowledgeable about internal marketing, most of them could not give a proper explanation as they were confused with the word ‘marketing’ which normally denotes selling successfully. This situation reminds of some of the criticisms formulated against internal marketing due to association with the word marketing. Ahmed and Anosike (2006) posit that IM tends to suffer “from the negative overtones carried over from the concept of marketing because of the word ‘marketing’ in its phrase. This pilot study confirmed this statement.

Organisations’ Questionnaires

Of the 5 tourism-rated organizations in Grand Bay, it was found that IM was interpreted as a communication tool practiced subjectively and on an ad-hoc basis.

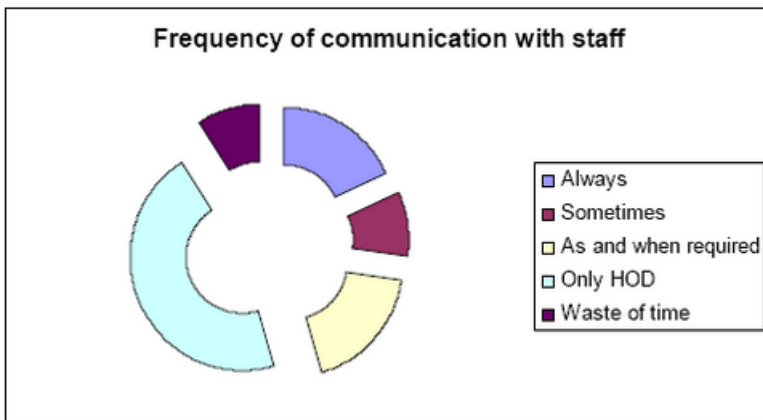


Figure 6: Communication within the Organization

The above figure displays the frequency of communication with staff working in tourism organizations at Grand Bay. It was found that an alarming rate of 60 % believed that communication has to channel through the Head of Department (HOD) whilst a meagre 5 % claimed to convene a meeting sometimes. However, 20% of respondents agreed that communication has to always top the agenda of tourism businesses and 5% of respondents displayed their resentment on regular communication with staff as according to them it represents a waste of time. 10% of operators believed in communicating as and when required. The results of the pilot confirmed the lack of communication and the loose connection that prevailed in the internal cell of most tourism organizations.

Discussions

The Need for a New Definition of Internal Marketing

The findings reveal that IM at a tourism destination is still ambiguous due to the multitude of destination partners and their conflicting objectives. Empirical evidences also support the need for a new definition of internal marketing whereby the peculiar characteristics of a tourism destination are taken into consideration viz the fickleness of demand for tourism product, the co-creation aspect, the peculiarity of services marketing characteristics, the interdependency and fragmentation of the setting, and the ‘co-petition’ aspect as discussed by Friedrichs (2003) and Krakover *et al* (2008). Based on these, a new definition is proposed:

“IM at a tourism destination consists of the planned application of marketing and allied theories and techniques to prepare residents for tourism and sensitize service providers towards a common ‘destinational goal’. It is an organic process which wraps up all tourism actors in particular residents, in the objective of attracting, delighting and pulling back the tourists in the most hospitable manner, while sustaining the attractiveness of the destination and its people.”

Cooper (2007) suggests that definitions tend to reflect “prevailing time thinking”. With an appreciation of this statement, the new definition provided for IM at a tourism destination will undoubtedly reflect prevailing time thinking. Nevertheless, after 100 years, the concern for sustainability will remain the same as the assets that constitute a tourism destination will also remain the same. Thus, it may be argued that with time, the definition provided may be modified, but the salient features that dominate a destination will always remain the same. IM is not a stand-alone strategy, but rather it absorbs some of the allied theories and cuts across various businesses, and operators and informal setting. Moreover, it is not a one-off investment, but rather it is a continual effort. It should not be a disguised means of propaganda to control and care at the same time as reflected in the work of by Mudie (2003). The definition adds a new dimension to conventional thinking in that it does not focus on customer maximization or cost minimization, but rather on relationship optimization.

The Role of IM in Sustainable Destination Management

It should be noted that IM application starts from the office but ends up outside in an open environment where the tourists finally meet the host. It is this encounter at Grand Bay that may decide about the degree of sustainability. The tourism system is a complex network of various sectors and actors. The area of study, Grand Bay, is no exception. Grand Bay constitutes a multitude of creators and co-creators of the tourism products, but tourism continues to be marketed to tourists only. It should be noted that “a significant proportion of the tourism experiences are delivered by the people” (Cooper, 2007) and thus, IM application at a destination need to address its key people first. The implementation of internal marketing at the destination is definitely lacking as leading partners such as promoters and governmental bodies missed this part of the marketing program. Same scenario is echoed in the work of Piercy *et al* (1991) who lament on the missing half of the marketing program, which is internal marketing. Visions and missions are commonly framed by the local Ministry and consequent budgets are allocated to marketing and research, but the importance of internal

marketing is still not itemized in the sustainability agenda of the Ministry of Tourism and its apex organization. Internal marketing is a complementary element of the external marketing program and ultimately sustainability endeavors and this has been acknowledged in the work of various authors like Payne *et al* (1999), Cahill (1996) and Mintzberg (2007). A fragmented and loose culture was noted at Grand Bay and this was due to the lacking internal marketing.

Conclusion and Recommendation for Future Research

Some key characteristics that emerged from the pilot support the need for more investigation in the field. The preliminary findings clearly mark important areas of concern and potential challenges pervading a tourism destination in the quest for sustainability. The participants surveyed and interviewed are not a representative sample and thus results obtained from the survey are indicative and not conclusive. Three elements dominated this pilot study namely internal marketing, destination management and sustainability and the preliminary results already mirror the inexorable link between them. This pilot survey is a prelude to the fact that there is a shortcoming in the way destination is being managed in Mauritius. This may be recurrent in other island destinations like the Caribbean, Seychelles and Maldives where sustainability is practiced in the same fragmented manner. Sustainability at a tourism destination therefore continues to pose the same daunting challenge. Future research may replicate this study in other island destinations facing similar challenges in order to establish reliability in making internal marketing an important determinant of sustainability. Moreover, the preliminary results encourage a deeper field survey and provide strong foundation to investigate in this line of study as it provides the cue for future actions. Taking into consideration the degree of involvement of destination partners, it also warrants the need of introducing more parameters in determining sustainability at a tourism destination.

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