Significance of Internal Marketing Communications in Destinations

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Abstract: According to the nature of the sector, tourism is a labor intensive industry and thereby employees are accepted as part of product or service experience. In this regard, employees have an impact on the quality of the services and the outcome of the service process. The concept of internal marketing, which is dealing with relations between organizations and employees, is used as an effective marketing and management tool at the tourism organizations as well as in destinations. In this sense, internal marketing enables the destinations to be positioned and promoted successfully through a single brand image of the destination. Internal marketing is also vital for the destination marketing organizations to retain and increase the number of the members among the destination stakeholders. Success on internal marketing can only be achieved through appropriate communication channels with a clear message with the right timing to link the private and public sector in the objective of sustainable tourism development and improvement as well as enhancing the quality of tourism experience. In this study the internal communication process and its scope between Izmir Convention and Visitors Bureau (Izmir CVB) as an urban destination marketing organization and its stakeholders is analyzed and evaluated. Internal marketing between Izmir CVB and its stakeholders are analyzed through quantitative research depending on interpretations of several interviews with the member organizations. This study reveals the deficiencies of the internal communication, internal marketing techniques and some suggestions on developing the communication techniques between Izmir CVB and its stakeholders.

Keywords: Destination marketing, Internal Marketing, Destination Marketing Organizations, Internal Marketing Communications

Introduction

To enhance the tourism experience of the visitor, stakeholders of a destination should be communicated effectively and motivated accordingly to provide a better service. In fact, this communication should also result with a possible cooperation of stakeholders in favor of destination’s management and marketing processes. Since the destination experience of the visitor depends on the individual or the tourism actors’ services, local
people and service providers in tourism should be motivated and trained to enhance the destination experience of the visitor. In this sense, the beginning of relevant process should be with the stakeholders that are members of the Destination Marketing Organization. However, Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) should try to satisfy not only the tourists or travel intermediaries but also its members considering the needs and wants of each member within an understanding of cooperation. Though, marketing techniques are mainly used in accordance with the motivation of stakeholders with various interests at a destination to achieve a mutual outcome for each party. In order to create a cooperative behavior amongst members, internal communication should be flawless and consistent which also make the DMO’s destination brand management more powerful and effective.

Because Destination Marketing Organizations’ utmost objective is to market the destination, with their very limited budget many marketing efforts are handled such as familiarization trips, participating in tourism fairs, producing and distributing print materials and/or creating an informative, attractive and interactive destination website. In addition, Destination-Marketing Organizations need to communicate these marketing efforts to its members to keep them informed about the process and progress. In this sense, internal marketing is considered as a significant means to manage relationships and coordinate activities beneficial for tourism at the destination. With the recognition of the role of stakeholders in tourism management, it’s also vital to increase the number of members of a DMO by providing high quality services in regard to its functions. Therefore, since members’ support and contribution to the marketing efforts is essential both monetarily and non-monetarily, the representatives should have a word in the decision-making process which requires a continuous mutual communication through a marketing-like approach.

On the other hand, internal marketing communication should involve a mutual relationship and dialogue to assure a single destination brand construct. In this regard, Sainaghi [1] points out that, the channels of communication can be more or less structured: word of mouth, meetings, newsletters, bulletins, local media (television and newspapers) and the style of communication tends to be informal. Thus, this study aimed to find out the effectiveness of DMO’s internal marketing communication process with its members that are the tourism stakeholders in the destination at the same time. For this purpose, DMO’s internal marketing efforts are investigated through structured questions directed to the members after that relevant literature is studied in detail. Therefore, this research analyzes the point of view of stakeholder representatives who are in the management positions in terms of internal communication. Consequently, responses of DMO members to the questions during the in-depth interview constitute the basis of the study. Overall, it is intended to find out the necessary process of internal marketing communication with an understanding of its significance in creating a successfully operating DMO.

1. **Stakeholder Approach to Internal Marketing**

Sartori et. al. [2] suggest that, several researches have focused on external marketing in tourism, however interest in internal marketing aspects is increasing due to its importance in the success of firms and destinations. Papasolomou [3] defines internal marketing as an emphasis in considering employees as partners to an organization’s efforts of achieving organizational success, rather than a cost. Keelson and Polytechnic [4] indicate that, internal marketing plays an important role in success of businesses both in economic and non-economic perspective. Furthermore, internal marketing practices are designed for attracting and retaining the most qualified and committed
employees for the organization [5]. Moreover, internal marketing dimensions are needed in the management process in order to motivate employees and to achieve employee loyalty [6]. According to Foreman and Money [7], this process requires marketing tools and concepts to be used just as effectively with employees as internal customers. Thereby, Huang and Rundle-Thiele [8] mention the function of internal marketing to enable staff to understand their role with the ultimate view of achieving quality service. So, any function that has either a positive or negative impact on the market orientation of employees could be considered an internal marketing activity[9]. According to Ferdousa et. al. [10], orientation, development of internal marketing programs and their implementations and internal outcomes like performance and firm-employee relationship are the utmost important factors of internal marketing. In addition, Bansala et. al. imply that [5], adopting employee-friendly internal marketing practices have beneficial impacts both on employee attitudes and behavior and on organizational outcomes. On the other hand, Kang et al. [11] describe internal marketing as an important approach for fostering a service-and customer-oriented culture in an organization. Turkoz and Akyol [12] also explain internal marketing with the need of a marketing-like approach which cannot be isolated from external marketing to succeed in achieving organizations’ objectives [13]. Ferdousa et. al. also mention that[10], during applying internal marketing activities, connection with external marketing activities, is an essential characteristic of an organization’s internal marketing activity. Additionally, Grönroos [14] points out the need of a continuous development of the competencies and resource structure of the firm along with internal marketing.

Presenza et al. [15] defines tourism stakeholder as any entity that is influenced by, or that may influence, the achievement of the destination management activities as performed by the DMO. The success of a DMO in meeting its objectives depends critically on its ability to address the requirements and aspirations of a wider array of groups that have their own particular interests, or stake [16]. On the other hand, cooperative behavior among actors and stakeholder groups in tourism destinations is considered as an interpersonal business [17]. According to Fyall et al. [18], the DMO is to be encouraged and supported by its industry partners to provide leadership, clarity, and consistency of strategic direction for the longer term results to be accrued. Therefore, a DMO’s one of the functions is to create and maintain relationships with the destination stakeholders [19] which much of DMO’s activities are focused on securing stakeholder support to meet short term financial objectives [20]. To realize its mandate, the DMO must have an understanding of the stakeholders that can influence the attainment of its objectives to develop and promote tourism at the particular destination. In this regard, internal marketing of DMOs requires continuous communication focus that is rich and meaningful in content with the stakeholders which contributes to the satisfaction of members and results in the increase of members that are willing to cooperate.

The partnerships between the public and private sector, and close co-operation between all local suppliers are the keys to the ability of destinations to offer quality products [21]. DMOs potentially have a great diversity of its stakeholders [22]. Cox et. al. [23] states that, because stakeholders within a network brand are championing their own brand as well as combining to create the network brand, communication and leadership as management tools for destination brand networks is essential. This multiple networks of actors exist in proximity to each other forming mutual service chains, service networks, and interactions [24]. It is therefore important to discover ways in which each of the entrepreneurs at a tourist destination feels that his/her
company is affected by tourism, so that suitable models and tools can then be
found to involve different enterprises in the effective marketing of their destination [25].
The context of cooperative behavior among actors and organizations in tourist
destination communities comprises various areas and intensities of cooperation [17].
DMOs should join and pool resources to develop and implement comprehensive
marketing strategies that enable them to compete with other destinations [21]. On the
other hand, the collaborative marketing relationships can further be complicated by the
fact that local tourism-related organizations and businesses in a destination may
conduct marketing activities with others at different levels and in various dimensions
[26].

With so many different stakeholders involved in the tourism phenomenon, it becomes
very challenging to find common grounds among the various agenda [27]. Ultimately,
the competitiveness of destinations depends on their ability to maximize their
performance for each individual element assessed [21]. As the tourism system context
becomes increasingly fragmented and volatile, its stakeholders are pressured to adapt
collaboration principles to everyday practice, particularly in the planning and
marketing areas [28]. Thus, marketing of destinations should balance the strategic
objectives of all stakeholders as well the sustainability of the local resources [21].
Instead of competing against each other independently, tourism firms are ‘cast’ as
actors in a tourism business network trying to ‘out-rival’ other destination
networks[28]. Thus this network, created by a DMO and managed through an internal
marketing framework by the coordination of stakeholders, enables destinations to be
more competitive, and effective in branding practice. Especially in the branding of
destinations, collaboration and cooperation of the stakeholders is vital to achieve a
strong brand image of the destination through development of valuable partnerships.

Moreover, Cox et. al. [23] point out that, communication as a means to build
relationships and of creating brand knowledge, communication styles need to be
flexible to reach the diverse range of network stakeholders. Hence, the communication
styles have tremendously changed over time with the rise of social media and related
platforms such as forums, blogs and etc. which ensure communication of the
destination brand with each stakeholder on a continuous manner. In addition,
according to Kemp et. al.[29], with the commitment of residents to branding of
destination, residents will act like ambassadors and this will increase touristic
revenues of the destination. In addition, motivation of residents also enable them to
support and perform in consistent with the destination brand that facilitates the
destination to differentiate itself from its counterparts. Furthermore, to generate
destination brand awareness, to obtain support from the residents, and to increase
long term revenues of tourism, internal branding for residents has become
essential[30]. In this case, it is very important to gain local residents’ support while
creating a destination brand and maintaining touristic activities successfully in the
destination [29]. Desirable incomes from residents of destination could be increased in
terms of destination marketing and branding, if destination marketers understand their
role in the process [30]. Destination branding should have a consistent mix of brand
elements to identify and distinguish a destination through positive image building [31].
Instead of acting independently and performing individual or institutional destination
marketing activites, Buhalis propose that[21], tourism establishments and other actors
should join and pool resources to develop and implement comprehensive marketing
strategies that enable them to compete with other destinations. Given the importance
that image of a destination changes over time, and it is developments at the destination
that steer the processes of change that form and shape the special characteristics of
the destination [25], imaging of a destination is handled by the DMO’s marketing
experts or a professional marketing agency handles the whole process. Although organic images are not controllable, they can be borrowed, leveraged, and managed to supplement the intended image building to the extent that they benefit spreading activation and consequently enhance the brand identity of the destination [31]. In this regard, since re-imaging and branding of destinations require a professional approach, Therefore, ensuring that senior management's desired positioning in the market is consistent with what is actually being delivered is vitally important if the brand is to succeed [32].

2. Internal Communication

Several authors stress the necessity for effective internal communications as part of an internal marketing program[33]. According to, Hume and Bus[34], internal marketing generates and disseminate knowledge by taking input from internal and external sources. Internal communication, often perceived as a synonym for intra-organizational communication, is quite often associated with employee communication [35]. In fact, giving information to employees about policies, procedures and processes of a company could be done by means of internal communication in the management process[6]. Developing a sense of community through internal communication efforts involves creating and maintaining strong relationships between an organization, supervisors, and employees [36]. Thus, in order to build trust, it is important that organizations function in a transparent manner [5] which internal communication can enable. According to Welch [37], successful internal communication can stimulate employee awareness of opportunities and threats, and develop employee understanding of their organization's changing priorities. Employees also entail information on customer needs, on their organization, and on how their contribution is vital to the organization and its customers [9]. Even though conventional channels, such as via paper, email, and face-to-face communication remain important for communicating in organizations, intranets and social media have regularly been adding to these channels [38]. Knowing the types of internal communication (vertical, horizontal, grapevine and consensus; formal and informal) is not enough when trying to create a fruitful and reliable communication atmosphere within an organization [39]. So, internal communication assessment currently focused on process explanations should be more focused on the content of the communication itself, how well it is provided, or understanding [40]. In fact, if employees feel such communication is conducted incorrectly, the poor communication process could unintentionally damage internal relationships [37].

However, Menga ve Pan [41] suggests five essential elements in measuring internal communications: conducting extensive research to generate tiered communication objectives; connecting communication messaging with organization's internal business process; introducing multiple dialogs/approaches to drive effectiveness; actively managing employee feedback to drive higher level of satisfaction in learning and growth objectives; integrating measurement quality, response time, and continuous justification with its strategic initiatives. Internal communications can also contribute to organizational commitment and play a part in developing a positive sense of employee identification [37]. In this sense, Ruck and Welch [40] points out the necessity of a stronger balance between communication related to an individual's role and wider internal corporate communication which according to Welch[37] contributes to positive internal relationships by enabling communication between senior managers and employees. Karanges et. al. [36] also focuses on the importance of internal communication in facilitating supervisor–employee relationships as a vehicle to express
values and goals, and in turn, pave the way for favorable organization–employee relationships.

According to Omilion-Hodges and Baker [42], internal communication plays a significant role in organizational functionality; mainly in strategically influencing the ways employees talk about the organization with one another and with those outside the organization. Despite the fact that, internal marketing plays such an important role, Welch [37] highlights the prominent role of communicators with persuasive writing and rhetorical messaging skills in addition to detailed understanding of media affect. Thus, intelligence concerning employee needs includes formal and informal internal communications as well as the receptiveness of the organization to meeting employee needs in the long run [43]. Omilion-Hodges and Baker [42] also comes with the idea that internal communication should be done as opposed to engaging, informing, and dialoging with associates in a strategic, purposeful, and authentic manner. In fact, whereas external stakeholders may influence an organization's profit margin, internal stakeholders shape its identity and can arguably also have a great effect on the organization's bottom line due to the variability of organizational boundaries [42]. Hence, internal communication needs to be managed strategically to be as effective as possible to function successfully [44]. Such communication is enacted through the careful development of not only message content and careful attention of the source and timing of the message, but also consideration regarding the way the message will be received and understood by employees [42]. However, as Borcaa and Baesua [39] imply, creating efficient and effective internal communication is not an easy process.

3. Methodology

The research comprises of a qualitative study to analyze the internal communication process among the DMO and its members. In this study, the mutual communication of Izmir Convention and Visitors Bureau and its members has been analyzed through a qualitative research. During the research, 45 members of Izmir CVB which consist of hotels, travel agencies, destination marketing companies and municipalities are subject to study. Therefore, each member is contacted to find out the internal marketing communication process and its significance in the marketing of destinations through studying Izmir CVB with an in-depth analysis. Since the number of the members is not very high to conduct a quantitative research, the authors preferred to conduct qualitative research through structured interviews that comprised of 15 questions. These 15 questions for the structured interview were prepared depending on the previous researches in the field of internal marketing and the questions were determined after a detailed literature review to facilitate in the identification of the communication process and the analysis of its effectiveness through internal destination marketing process managed by DMOs. Qualitative questionnaire was developed by adapting the Nigel et al. [45] questionnaire through restructuring and reevaluation of the questions that thought to provide useful and significant information in terms of internal communication.

After identifying the list of Izmir CVB members, the researchers contacted each member via office telephone to ask for an appointment in regard to the planned research. The relevant managers are informed about the research and explained about the possible results of the study to the tourism. However, DMO members that researchers contacted neither accepted the interview nor gave an appointment with an excuse of lack of time when asked to answer some questions during the interview. The members indicated the reason to reject to spend time for the interview because of their busy jobs, but they accepted to answer the questions via e-mail. Accordingly, questions
within the structured interview were sent via e-mail to the ones in the managerial positions of DMO members. Later, the answers collected from the managers who accepted to participate in the research were analyzed and discussed in view of the creation of a suitable approach that can be applied by the DMOs in terms of internal marketing.

4. Findings and Discussion

The questionnaire was covering structured questions that help the researchers to analyze the approach of DMO members in regard with internal marketing. Members of the DMO stated that there is a mutual trust between their establishments and DMO which in fact underlies the basis of organizational success. There was also an emphasis in the statements of the respondents that years-long cooperation along with mutual climate of trust was established with DMO and their members. On the other hand, a few members indicated their opinions in favor of not having complete mutual trust. Additionally, members complained about not having adequate communication between the management of DMO and the members. Since DMOs are umbrella organizations of the service providers particularly in marketing of destinations, it's understandable that members are willing to take part in the decision making process. The research indicates that members are expecting a continuous communication through various channels such as e-mails or meetings instead of only getting together in general meetings. The members also stated that they would like to participate in the decision making process more actively since they are part of DMO that pay fees as a financial support to the organization. One of these DMO members stated that, they were communicating to the organization only when DMO informed their establishment. Another member explained himself as having an effort to cooperate with DMO within the scope of a project that was related with the accommodation sector for the promotion of their city.

In the study, members admit in their statements that DMO's decisions about their city certainly have a positive effect on their services and also the destination's image. Additionally, members agree on each and every decision in favor of the city's development that enhances the quality of services and the tourist experience. The study adds to the existing literature on the cooperation of different stakeholders so that the best results from such communication emerge [46], [47]. The efforts of DMOs especially affect CVBs in the candidacy process that aim to highlight the city as a convention destination and impress meeting planners. Thus, some members argue that the representation of city and service providers in the international platform provide positive feedback in terms of both social and economic perspective. On the contrary, some other members implied that DMO's marketing efforts don't have any influence on the service providers' business. For instance, one of Turkey's biggest convention centers which is a member of Izmir CVB especially stressed disappointment about the fact that they had too many expectations as a member and partner of the DMO, but unfortunately substantial contribution was not observed by their own establishment.

According to the responses, most of the members stated that that DMO hadn't given compromise. It was pity that there was also a statement of having no necessary knowledge about the DMO's efforts which are quite extraordinary impression for a member. On the other hand, few of the members stated that they believe the compromise was given to organizations which were located in Istanbul. Almost all the managers indicated that their objectives were matching up with DMO's objectives. The members also believe that an increase in international reputation of the city through promotional efforts of the DMO would also result with a substantial increase in tourist
arrivals. Another objective of the service providers in addition to organizational economic gains is that every company should contribute to the social and environmental values of the district it locates. Additionally, one of the objectives DMOs have is to increase the share of the city in the convention tourism market where the service providers can also benefit from. While members were satisfied with the common objectives that they carry out, there were also some criticisms about DMOs objectives and to what extent it has reached its objectives. The research indicates that members have a little doubt about marketing practices of the DMO. Therefore, DMO should be clearer in its objectives and should let the members participate in the decision making process.

In their statements, members emphasized that they have knowledge about DMO’s priorities which is particularly creating and promoting products in terms of convention and event tourism. However, there was lack of information about additional issues related to the organization. On the other hand, members indicated that they would like to get information about the activities and the processes more often and with more detail. It’s promising that most of the members are aware of how to contribute to the DMO through their businesses. According to a member’s statement, their common goal was to attract customers meetings that took place in the city. Besides, members believe that in order to attract several conventions to Izmir, firstly DMO has to convince meeting planners that they are successful in the organization of these conventions with remarkable outcomes.

During the research, for the question related to communication channels, nearly all the members stated that mostly electronic mail was used sufficiently that increases efficiency in terms of speed and accessibility with DMO and phone was rarely used in communication. Almost every member stated that there wasn’t any online network besides electronic e-mail which could be great to have. Others indicated that there was an additional online platform that was not used very efficiently according to some members. Most of the members believe that DMO’s website provides easy access to information with its functional interface. However, members agreed among each other that DMO website is not an efficient information resource and has to be developed with the wider details regarding information about the city. In addition, they have declared that, in order to have an increase in the visitation of the website, the content should be updated more frequently and the appearance should be more appealing. Research has shown that DMO’s websites are among the most important communication tools that visitors of a destination employ [48], [49], [50].

The members’ role in the management of DMO and in which context they have the right to speak was also investigated through this research. Nearly all the members stated that they do not have any role in management and decisions are taken by the president and board of directors but the board is open to suggestions. Another concern of the members is that they are not being briefed regularly on the objectives or about the managerial and promotional issues of DMO because they cannot communicate on a regular basis.

5. Conclusion and Implications

References


