

Exploring the Case
Rebranding Unsustainable Destinations:
The Case Study of Miami Beach Breaking Up with Spring Break

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Introduction

Miami Beach has faced significant challenges due to spring break tourism, including overcrowding, increased crime rates, and disruptions to community life. In response, the city launched a marketing campaign aimed at rebranding its image as a safe, sustainable destination. This case study examines the rebranding efforts of Miami Beach, focusing on its communication strategy to influence and shift tourist behavior toward more community-friendly practices.

The case is aimed at students, researchers, and practitioners interested in destination management and marketing, strategic communication, and applied linguistics. The case explores the challenges of rebranding a well-established spring break destination, analyzes the effectiveness of emotional language in storytelling, and considers how branding strategies can foster tourists' behavioral changes. Furthermore, the case provides fertile ground to study the balance among economic interests, community well-being, and responsible tourism.

Key Outcomes

1. Gaining insights into the challenges and impacts of high-intensity tourism on tourism destinations and local communities.
2. Developing a deeper understanding of the role of destination branding in promoting responsible tourism and influencing tourist behavior.
3. Recognizing how rebranding can reshape tourists' perceptions of a destination and encourage responsible behavior.
4. Assessing the effects of strategic communication and emotional language on tourist behavior, particularly through storytelling.

5. Enhancing research skills and critical thinking through comparative research on similar cases of destination rebranding and engaging in discussions on their effectiveness and impacts.

Avenues for Study

The case study opens three main tracks that can be further explored:

Tourism management and responsible tourism practices

The case highlights the challenges posed by seasonal high-intensity tourism and the importance of responsible tourism practices. Students are encouraged to investigate various strategies destinations employ to promote responsible tourism and minimize disruptive tourist behavior. Comparative studies of other destinations that face similar seasonal influxes of visitors can provide a broader understanding of effective management approaches and the role of stakeholder cooperation.

Destination rebranding and image change

This case study offers an opportunity to explore how destinations utilize destination branding to address behavioral challenges. Specifically, it shows how Miami Beach's rebranding strategy aimed to shift its image from a party-centric spring break destination to one that promotes community values and responsible tourism. This track encourages students to explore the components of effective rebranding, focusing on how alignment with a destination's core values can influence tourists' expectations and behavior.

Strategic communication and its effects on tourist behavior

The marketing campaign analyzed in this case is an example of how effective storytelling and specific discursive tactics can affect tourist behavior. In particular, the case examines the use of persuasive language and emotional narratives to address disruptive behavior. Students are invited to explore the role of language in rebranding by analyzing similar campaigns from other destinations aimed at influencing tourist behavior. The case study also encourages investigation into the integrated use of social media and other digital platforms in strategic communication.

Practical Activity: Destination Rebranding Strategy Session

Objective

After reading the case study, students will apply their knowledge to develop a rebranding strategy for a destination facing challenges related to tourist behavior.

Instructions

1. Students are divided into small marketing teams responsible for rebranding a destination that faces issues similar to those in the case study.
2. Each team will conduct research to find the destination to be rebranded.
3. After the research process, each group will present the context of their chosen destination and discuss how its image needs to evolve to encourage responsible tourism while still appealing to visitors.
4. Each team will design a strategic communication plan that includes:
 - the development of a specific narrative (storytelling);
 - key messages and slogans for the rebranding campaign that reflect the shift toward responsible behavior;
 - the use of websites, social media, or other platforms, including the combination of language and visuals.
5. Teams will present their strategies to the class, simulating a real-world strategy session. Each team should explain how their plan addresses the destination's challenges and what outcomes they expect.

Follow-up discussion

After the presentations, the following questions may be useful to guide a class discussion:

1. Which rebranding strategies were most effective in encouraging responsible tourist behavior? What made these strategies stand out?
2. How did each team use storytelling to convey their destination's shift toward responsible tourism? What narratives were most impactful?
3. Which key messages or slogans were persuasive in promoting responsible tourism? How did these messages balance the appeal to both responsibility and visitor attraction?
4. How well did the teams integrate digital platforms into their rebranding strategies? What combination of visuals and language best communicated the destination's new identity?
5. How could stakeholder cooperation enhance the success of the rebranding campaign?
6. Did any of the proposed strategies consider the long-term sustainability in tourist behavior? How could these strategies be adapted to future challenges?
7. Were there any strategies that could backfire or lead to unintended consequences? What risks could arise from poorly managed rebranding campaigns?

These questions will encourage critical reflection and allow students to analyze their approaches while considering broader issues of sustainable tourism management and strategic communication.

For further exploration of the topics discussed in this case study, consider Lusby (2021) on sustainable tourism, Pike (2021) on destination branding, and Maci (2020) on tourism communication.

References

Lusby, C. (ed.) (2021) *Destination Unknown: Sustainable Travel and Ethical Tourism*. Common Ground Research Network, Champaign, IL.

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Pike, S. (2021) *Destination Marketing: Essentials*. 3rd edn, Routledge, Abingdon, UK.