

Tourism public relations as a marketing strategy to enhance competitive advantage - Icelandic experience as an overtourism country-

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to highlight the crucial role of public relations (PR) strategies in achieving and bolstering competitive advantages for tourism destinations. Tourism organizations operating at the national, regional, and local levels, tasked with overseeing these destinations, have dedicated significant resources to public relations initiatives, thus solidifying its pivotal, and often leading role in destination promotion.

In examining the effectiveness of public relations strategies in enhancing competitive advantage, it is pertinent to delve into specific case studies. The experience of Iceland provides a compelling illustration of how strategic PR efforts can propel a destination to the forefront of global tourism.

We conclude our study by presenting the destination marketing strategies that was applied by Iceland to learn more about this experience with its advantages and disadvantages.

Key words: Tourism, Public relations, Marketing strategies, Competitive Advantages, Tourism destination, Iceland tourism experience.

Jel Codes Classification: L83 M3 L25.

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العلاقات العامة للوجهة السياحية كاستراتيجية تسويقية لتعزيز الميزة التنافسية -التجربة الأيسلندية-

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ملخص

المهدف من هذه الورقة هو إبراز الدور الحاسم لاستراتيجيات العلاقات العامة في تحقيق وتعزيز الميزة التنافسية للوجهات السياحية، حيث خصصت المنظمات السياحية العاملة على المستويات الوطنية والإقليمية والمحلية، والمكلفة بالإشراف على هذه الوجهات، موارد كبيرة لمبادرات العلاقات العامة، وبالتالي ترسيخ دورها المحوري، والرائد في كثير من الأحيان، في الترويج للوجهة. عند دراسة فعالية استراتيجيات العلاقات العامة في تعزيز الميزة التنافسية، ارتأينا أنه من المناسب تقديم دراسات حالة لتجارب جيدة في هذا المجال، حيث تقدم تجربة أيسلندا مثلاً مقنعاً لكيفية قيام جهود العلاقات العامة الإستراتيجية بدفع وجهة ما إلى طليعة السياحة العالمية، ونختتم دراستنا بعرض استراتيجيات تسويق الوجهة التي طبقتها أيسلندا للتعرف أكثر على هذه التجربة بمزاياها وعيوبها.

الكلمات المفتاح: السياحة، العلاقات العامة، الاستراتيجيات التسويقية، المزايا التنافسية، الوجهة السياحية، تجربة أيسلندا السياحية.

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Introduction:

In the new millennium, tourism has emerged as the foremost economic activity on a global scale, contributing significantly to the world economy. While the growth of global tourism continues at rates comparable to other industries, the sector has entered a mature stage, intensifying competition among destinations. In response, public relations has emerged as a unique and strategic tool for promoting organizations, products, and services, fostering higher visibility in the public sphere. Particularly within the tourism sector, public relations play a pivotal role, transcending mere necessity to become a vital component in the quest for competitive advantage.

In the past, destinations relied on having plentiful tourist attractions, resources, and favorable economic factors such as low wages and appealing exchange rates to effectively compete in the global tourism sector. Nonetheless, this strategy has come under scrutiny due to empirical data indicating that merely increasing tourist numbers doesn't consistently lead to desired results. It's now clear that to ensure enduring profitability and continuous patronage, destinations need to develop competitive advantages. (Vengesayi, 2003).

In this context, the Icelandic experience stands out as a compelling case study in leveraging tourism public relations strategies to enhance competitive advantage. Iceland's tourism industry has undergone a remarkable transformation, propelled by innovative and impactful PR initiatives. By capitalizing on its stunning natural landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and commitment to sustainability, Iceland has positioned itself as a leading global destination. Through strategic storytelling, social media engagement, and influencer partnerships, Iceland has effectively differentiated itself in a crowded marketplace, attracting a significant number of visitors from around the world.

Furthermore, Iceland's proactive approach to crisis management has further solidified its competitive edge. By adeptly addressing challenges such as volcanic eruptions or environmental concerns, Iceland has demonstrated resilience and transparency, bolstering its reputation as a safe and reliable destination.

As international tourism continues to serve as a major driver of economic development, countries with tourism-based economies, like Iceland, must continuously refine their approaches to leverage their comparative advantages and achieve sustained competitiveness. It is essential to recognize that competitiveness in the tourism industry is multi-dimensional and complex, requiring a strategic blend of marketing, public relations, and destination management efforts to thrive in an increasingly competitive global landscape.

In this article, you will learn more about some of the destination marketing strategies that can help to attract more visitors, so the problematic of this research paper turns about what is destination marketing and public relation strategies? How can Iceland raise the number of their international visitors by being in the top of overtourism countries?

I- Destination marketing:

Destination marketing entails promoting a destination to potential visitors with the goal of enhancing visitor numbers to that particular location. This destination can range from specific town or city marketing to broader region or country marketing endeavors. Ultimately, the objective of destination marketing is to enhance the appeal of your location over other options, thereby increasing visitor influx and supporting the local travel industry. Additionally, it involves raising awareness of the destination to stimulate demand and enhance its reputation.

I-1-Destination marketing: context, value-chain approach and implications

The tourism experience is comprised of a collection of encounters crafted from a diverse range of goods and services. For tourists, the product encompasses the entirety of their experience, encompassing every aspect and element, including attitudes and anticipations. As suggested by Middleton and Clarke (2001), the comprehensive tourism experience can be delineated into five primary elements: destination attractions; destination amenities and services; destination accessibility (including transportation); perceptions, branding, and imagery; visitor pricing.

Therefore, a destination functions as a facilitator of experiences. Destinations are increasingly viewed as "clusters" or groupings of businesses, predominantly composed of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMTEs). Additionally, from a supply standpoint, a tourism destination represents a geographical entity encompassing a complex network of initiatives, plans, and activities, alongside a variety of stakeholders, roles, and environmental factors that collectively influence its performance. The effectiveness of this network significantly impacts the destination's performance. According to Poon (2002), tourists typically perceive and assess their visits as experiences, notwithstanding the fact that different operators provide various services. Indeed, their visit entails a structured sequence of services and providers operating independently.

The destination's value chain showcases the diverse range of participants engaged in providing all tourism-related services and products. It represents an organized sequence of enterprises, interactions, resources, and knowledge exchanges dedicated to generating and delivering value to the final consumer. This underscores the necessity for integrating supply chain operations, starting from identifying consumer needs to product development, production, and distribution. It is precisely due to this fragmentation that all stakeholders involved in the value chain must address concerns such as integration, cooperation, and networking of their operations.

In contemporary times, tourists seek and anticipate a range of services that provide diverse options and experiences involving various interconnected entities within a destination. These establishments offer an array of services, including transportation, accommodation, shopping, dining, entertainment, and more. The entirety of a destination's value chain is thus manifested in its components. Additionally, Ryan (2002) proposed the necessity of enhancing value by engaging local communities in an equitable manner. This approach necessitates collaboration and networking among the destination's key elements. Consequently, destination marketing entails the involvement of numerous stakeholders and a multifaceted product offering. Managing and marketing destinations is widely regarded as challenging due to the intricate relationships among stakeholders. Nearly all Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) and tourism industry players recognize their mutual reliance and collaborate in various capacities to promote tourism within their respective countries or regions. The complexity and interdependence among stakeholders have led to the establishment of numerous local tourism marketing alliances.

These cooperative marketing strategies prove particularly effective in destination marketing. Successful collaborative marketing endeavors require more than just strong leadership and administrative backing. Internal factors such as a shared vision, achieving common goals, and fostering open communication among members are essential for ensuring effective collaboration and member satisfaction. Moreover, there is a heightened demand for destination marketing, driven by increasing customer expectations and intensifying competition among destinations. Destination marketing partnerships play a crucial role because most destinations must compete on a global scale. However, the predominance of small businesses within destinations and the varied objectives of larger organizations pose challenges to implementing strategic destination marketing initiatives.

Furthermore, it is imperative that destination marketing operations and initiatives receive support from a Destination Management Organization (DMO), an entity designed to: oversee

the tourism system; bolster the competitiveness of the regional tourism sector; enhance destination allure; optimize destination performance; and enhance marketing efficacy. Scholars have emphasized the pivotal role that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and knowledge management can play in fostering collaboration and other joint endeavors within destination marketing. Based on the preceding discourse, it is evident that the strategic marketing approach facilitates the synchronized marketing efforts of all involved stakeholders, encompassing the linkage of tourist attractions, activities, facilities, and services with the diverse and increasingly fragmented tourist markets. (Soteriades, 2012).

I-2-Why is Destination Marketing Important?

To attract travellers to a certain destination, it is important that the plus points of that destination are highlighted. This is especially crucial when one destination is competing with another for the same tourists or visitors. An example of this would be both the Caribbean and the Great Barrier Reef offering excellent diving experiences.

The goal of most destination marketing is to promote your destination as superior to alternatives, by highlighting the things that make it unique, or the things that make it a desirable place to travel to. Successful destination marketing can then be of huge benefit to the local tourism industry, including hotels, restaurants, airlines and related suppliers.

I-3-Who is Responsible for Destination Marketing?

Responsibility for destination marketing typically falls on a dedicated destination marketing organisation (DMO), or tourist board. These organisations represent the community or destination being promoted and attempt to drive interest in the region amongst travellers by using a range of different marketing techniques.

In many ways, a DMO also serves as a link between the visitor and the destination, encouraging the visit in the first place, but also providing important visitor information. Hotels, local businesses, attractions and their owners are often members of a DMO, and funding tends to come from government sources and/or membership fees.

II-Public relations in tourism services:

In public relations terms the key to success is to make full use of media contacts in gaining positive publicity. Changing negative or ill-informed perceptions is twofold. Firstly, actions have to be taken to address problems if they do actually exist which may be the physical aspects of the City and to a certain extent much has changed for the better in recent years. The second is to use public relations to improve community spirit and visitor experience which in turn improves overall perceptions.

Success in public relations can be measured in a number of ways over a period of time and go beyond tourism. For example, over a five-year period success could be measured against the unemployment rate, the level of tourism activity, changes in house prices and expressions of community pride. The key is to undertake regular surveys of particular groups which in time will build up a picture of whether perceptions and attitudes are being changed.

It is also important that a program of familiarisation trips for media and travel personnel be developed and implemented. Local media should also be targeted by countering negative publicity and supplying positive news stories. Specific tourism related articles should be targeted at travel publications. Media kits should be developed and distributed (David Duncanson, 2010).

II-1-Fourteen (14) Destination Marketing Strategies to Attract More Visitors:

Various marketing strategies are available for destination marketing objectives, aimed at enhancing overall destination awareness and attracting more visitors. Below, you'll discover details about fourteen (14) of these strategies and how destination marketing organizations can leverage them to achieve desired outcomes. (Martijn Barten, 2024).

II-1-1-Define the Unique Selling Points:

Arguably, the foremost crucial task for any organization involved in destination marketing is to dedicate sufficient time to precisely defining the distinctive aspects of your destination.

A destination can distinguish itself in various ways, including offering unique activities for visitors or showcasing exceptional natural features such as mountains, beaches, or volcanoes.

Your destination might boast a captivating history or iconic landmarks akin to the Eiffel Tower, the Empire State Building, or the Great Wall of China. Alternatively, the culture of the area could serve as its distinguishing factor, enticing visitors with local events, museums, or sports clubs. Endeavor to pinpoint as many unique selling points (USPs) as feasible.

II-1-2-Define Target Audience & Market:

Another effective strategy in destination marketing entails identifying your target audiences. Consider who is inclined to visit the destination and for what purposes. Often, you'll need to segment this into various audiences, each with distinct motivations for traveling to your location.

For instance, your destination might attract both young travelers on gap years and elderly couples enjoying retirement. It could appeal to outdoor enthusiasts as well as those seeking leisurely beach experiences. Additionally, you should take into account different demographic groups, including tourists, business travelers, and students.

Furthermore, assess whether specific markets exhibit greater interest than others. This might include neighboring countries with excellent transport connections or individuals who share the same language.

II-1-3-Utilise Data for Analytics:

Destination marketing organisations can potentially obtain and utilise vast amounts of data, for a number of different purposes. As an example, the organisation's website can allow you to use tools like Google Analytics to find out about your visitors, who they are, where they came from and what their motivation was.

Offline, you can find out information about existing visitors, such as the average age, whether your destination appeals more to men or women, and what methods of transport they use. Once you have gathered sufficient data, you can analyse it to identify the best people to reach out to, the best ways to reach them and the best messages to push.

II-1-4-Brand Your Destination:

Branding is a strategic approach employed by businesses to ensure easy recognition. It encompasses elements such as logos, color schemes, design principles, slogans, or consistent terminology usage. The overarching goal of branding is to establish recognition and differentiate oneself from others.

Similarly, this principle can be readily applied to destinations. Develop a cohesive color palette, craft a tagline that encapsulates the essence of the destination, introduce hashtags for social media engagement, and maintain consistency across promotional messages to foster familiarity among audiences.

II-1-5-Involve All Stakeholders:

A crucial aspect of destination management revolves around safeguarding the interests of diverse stakeholders to foster trust and enhance collaboration. These stakeholders may encompass representatives from governmental bodies at various levels, accommodations, attractions, dining establishments, retail outlets, travel agencies, and tour operators.

Devise destination marketing strategies aimed at incentivizing these stakeholders to actively engage and endorse your destination. Explore opportunities for stakeholders to align with your broader destination branding initiatives and undertake their own promotional activities or marketing campaigns to amplify visitor interest.

II-1-6-Create an Amazing Destination Website:

Irrespective of their motives for travel, a large majority of travelers now utilize the internet for destination research before making bookings. A destination website serves as an optimal platform to highlight unique selling propositions, directly engage with target audiences, and showcase the destination through visuals like images, videos, and virtual reality tours.

Utilize the website to furnish travelers with comprehensive pre-trip information and promote various offerings such as accommodations, attractions, events, dining options, and more. Ensuring mobile optimization for the website is crucial, while an embedded blog can serve to entice visitors to return for more engagement.

II-1-7-Search Engine Optimisation:

When individuals utilize search engines such as Google to explore aspects related to your destination or its offerings, it's crucial to ensure that your website ranks near the top of search engine results pages. The most effective approach to achieve this is by implementing a comprehensive search engine optimization (SEO) strategy.

This entails conducting keyword research, developing content tailored to target those keywords, and employing various techniques to enhance your website's ranking. Additionally, SEO principles can also be applied to promote videos and images. An on-site blog proves advantageous in this regard as well, as it provides a steady stream of fresh content that can be optimized using strategic keyword integration.

II-1-8-Experience Marketing:

Given that most travelers are driven by experiences, it's logical to market a destination accordingly. Instead of merely showcasing attractions, focus on illustrating how individuals experience them through promotional content. Encouraging the sharing of user-generated content is one effective method to achieve this, fostering the sharing of personal moments on both your website and social media platforms.

By accomplishing this, you effectively transform your visitors into advocates for your destination. Word-of-mouth promotion can yield remarkable success as it's perceived as more credible than endorsements from organizations with vested interests. Furthermore, VR 360 tours provide an excellent avenue for online users to immerse themselves in their own experiences.

II-1-9-Video and Virtual Reality Marketing:

Both video marketing and virtual reality marketing are highly effective in enhancing destination marketing endeavors. Video content can be conveniently disseminated across various platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. These videos can highlight local attractions or showcase local individuals sharing insights about your destination.

On the other hand, virtual reality marketing takes it a step further by offering opportunities for your target audience to virtually experience facets of your destination from their own homes. This could entail a virtual tour of a local hotel, a simulated travel experience of nearby entertainment venues, or 360-degree tours of attractions or landmarks.

II-1-10-Social Media Strategies:

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram provide an excellent avenue to connect with people and showcase your destination. Indeed, the range of destination marketing strategies available on these platforms is extensive, spanning from straightforward promotional posts, images, and videos to engaging in competitions and creating viral content or memes.

Moreover, most social media platforms offer paid marketing opportunities, including advertisements and sponsored posts. These options can amplify the reach of your social media marketing endeavors and enable precise targeting based on demographics such as age, gender, location, and even online browsing behavior. (Hyder.Shama, 2016).

II-1-11-Work with Influencers:

Numerous contemporary internet users exhibit inherent skepticism towards direct advertising and other overt marketing tactics. Nonetheless, a considerable portion of these individuals could potentially be reached indirectly through influencers. Essentially, influencers are individuals with established followings on platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, or their own blogs.

Their followers typically demonstrate loyalty and are inclined to place greater trust in the influencer's viewpoints compared to those of organizations. Through partnerships with influencers, you can effectively promote your destination across various platforms, even reaching niche audiences who are considerably more receptive to the conveyed message. (Scott D. M., 2017).

II-1-12-Promote Your Destination on Travel Websites:

Aside from maintaining your own destination website, it's essential to target individuals who may not be familiar with your destination. Travel websites offer an ideal solution, encompassing both international platforms like TripAdvisor and local or niche-focused websites.

There are diverse methods to leverage travel websites for destination promotion, such as sharing images, publishing narratives, producing video content, and even showcasing virtual reality tours. Additionally, travel websites facilitate the monitoring of reviews, enabling responses to criticisms and continuous enhancement of feedback.

II-1-13-Online Advertising Strategies:

The information and data collected about your visitors and target audience can guide your online advertising strategies. Utilizing this data, you can tailor search advertising to specific regions, invest in display advertising on relevant platforms, and promote content on third-party websites frequented by your target audience.

Furthermore, re-marketing enables you to reconnect with individuals who have previously interacted with your destination website or your DMO's social media channels. This allows you to rekindle their interest in your destination, leveraging their prior engagement to encourage them to consider visiting.

II-1-14-Offline Promotional Strategies:

Once you have a clear understanding of your target audience, their preferences, and their origins, it becomes possible to determine the timing of their likely travels. Certain destinations may attract visitors during the summer months, while others appeal to winter sports enthusiasts. Some destinations may see increased interest during holidays like Christmas or other seasonal breaks.

This insight facilitates the development of a comprehensive offline promotional strategy. Offline methods could include television advertising, radio promotions, and advertising within newspapers and magazines. In the case of the latter two, options include paying for advertisements, featuring articles about your destination, and targeting specific local publications in regions where your target audience is located.

III- Iceland tourism experience case study:

Iceland's tourism industry has garnered significant attention in recent years due to its unique approach to public relations (PR) and marketing. Leveraging its breathtaking landscapes, vibrant culture, and sustainability initiatives, Iceland has become a sought-after destination for travelers worldwide. The country's PR strategies focus on authenticity, storytelling, and community engagement, rather than traditional advertising tactics (Richter, 2018). Through social media campaigns, influencer partnerships, and innovative events, Iceland has successfully positioned itself as a must-visit destination, attracting a diverse range of visitors while maintaining its commitment to environmental conservation (Prideaux, Timothy, & Chon, 2020). This paper explores the key components of Iceland's PR approach as a suitable marketing strategy, analyzing its effectiveness in driving tourism growth and shaping the country's global image as a leading sustainable travel destination and enhancing the competitive advantage of Iceland as a tourism force among the most tourist countries. Additionally, it examines the challenges and opportunities faced by Iceland's tourism industry in sustaining its PR success amid evolving travel trends and global uncertainties (Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2013). Through a comprehensive examination of the Iceland experience in tourism PR, this study aims to provide insights for destination marketing professionals,

policymakers, and stakeholders seeking to enhance their tourism branding and communication strategies.

III-1- Iceland's Public relations strategies:

In this part of our paper we will highlight which PR strategies had Iceland apply them to be the first tourist destination for most of tourists over the wide world.

Iceland has strategically utilized various public relations (PR) strategies to bolster its competitive advantage in the tourism industry. These strategies have been instrumental in promoting Iceland as a unique and desirable travel destination while differentiating it from other destinations. Here are some key PR strategies employed by Iceland:

III-1-1- Storytelling and Authenticity: Iceland has focused on authentic storytelling to showcase its natural beauty, culture, and sustainability efforts. By highlighting authentic experiences and local narratives, Iceland has resonated with travelers seeking genuine and immersive travel experiences (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006) .

Storytelling and authenticity have played a significant role in attracting visitors to Iceland. The country's unique landscapes, including glaciers, geysers, and volcanic terrain, coupled with its rich cultural heritage, have provided a compelling narrative for tourists seeking authentic and immersive travel experiences. By leveraging these natural and cultural assets, Iceland has successfully positioned itself as a destination that offers more than just superficial attractions; it offers meaningful and transformative experiences.

III-1-2- Social Media Engagement: Iceland has leveraged social media platforms to engage with travelers and showcase its attractions. Through visually captivating content, interactive campaigns, and user-generated content, Iceland has effectively reached and influenced potential visitors worldwide (Scott, Laws, & Prideaux, 2013).

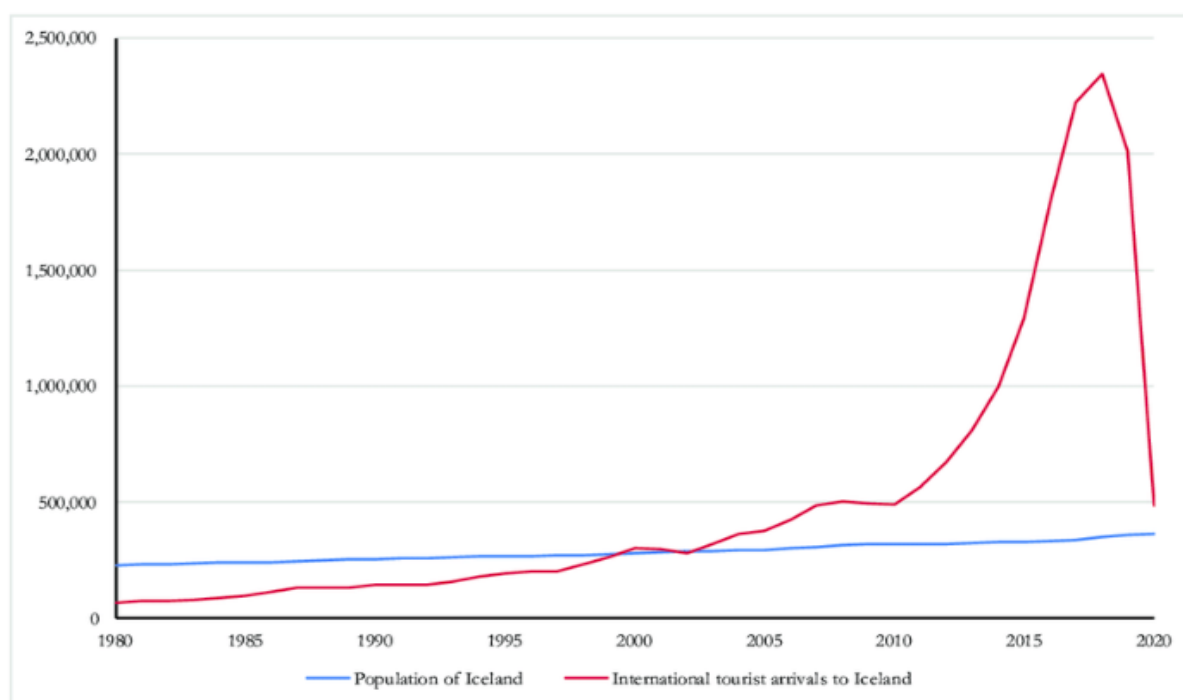
III-1-3- Influencer Partnerships: Collaborating with influencers and content creators has been a key PR strategy for Iceland. By partnering with influencers who align with its brand values and target audience, Iceland has amplified its reach and credibility among travelers (Evans & Elphick, 2018).

III-1-4- Sustainability Initiatives: Iceland has emphasized its commitment to sustainability and responsible tourism practices. By implementing eco-friendly policies, supporting conservation efforts, and promoting responsible travel behavior, Iceland has positioned itself as a leader in sustainable tourism (Korstanje & Skoll, 2019).

III-1-5- Crisis Management: Effective crisis management has been essential for maintaining Iceland's reputation and competitive edge. By promptly addressing issues such as volcanic eruptions, natural disasters, or overtourism concerns, Iceland has demonstrated resilience and transparency, thus safeguarding its image as a safe and reliable destination (Henderson, 2013).

These PR strategies collectively contribute to enhancing Iceland's competitive advantage in the tourism industry, attracting discerning travelers and fostering long-term destination loyalty.

The application of this strategies pushed the Iceland tourism to the top levels of international visitors where was their number nearly to 1.7 million international visitors came to Iceland in 2022, which was over one million more than in 2021, and it raised 85% from 2019 and 73% from 2018 with a continuously increasing by every year that what is clarified in the following figure:

Figure 01: international visitors to Iceland vs population (1980 to 2020).

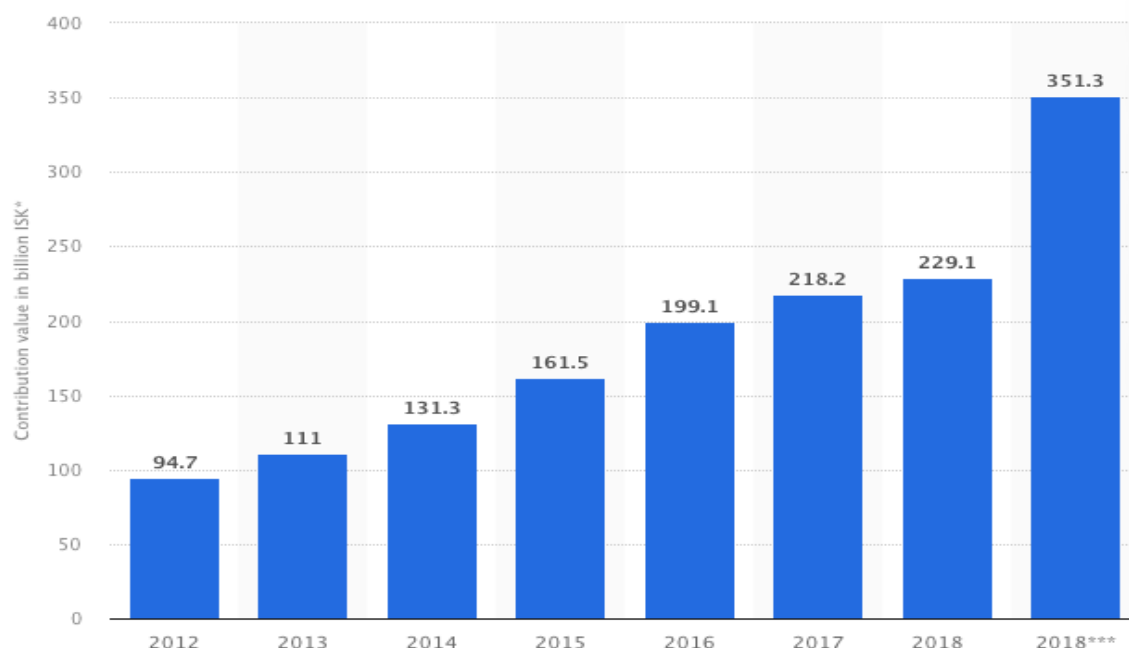
Source: Iceland tourism statistics.

Contrary to other destinations associated with overtourism, there has been no organized anti-tourism movement in Iceland. In fact, the residents have been rather positive towards tourism. Despite the increase in tourist arrivals, the percentage of residents who perceive tourists in Iceland to be rather many or too many during summer has decreased from 29% in 2014 to 19% in 2019. The residents' positive attitude is first and foremost due to tourism's economic benefits. In 2015, tourism became Iceland's largest export sector, with revenues of foreign travellers contributing to more than 30% of the country's foreign exchange earnings. Tourism also created various jobs, which has been particularly important in rural areas suffering from outmigration. Yet, there are also some negative impacts of tourism that the residents identify and we will point it as disadvantages of tourism on Iceland residents.

III-2- contribution of travel and tourism to GDP in Iceland:

In Iceland, the travel and tourism sector plays a significant role in contributing to the country's GDP, this highlights the substantial economic impact of the tourism industry, which encompasses various sectors such as accommodation, transportation, entertainment, and hospitality. Iceland's unique natural landscapes, including glaciers, geysers, and volcanic terrain, coupled with its rich cultural heritage, attract visitors from around the globe, contributing to the country's economic prosperity. Additionally, tourism-related activities create employment opportunities, stimulate local businesses, and support infrastructure development, further solidifying the sector's importance to Iceland's economy, the following figure clarify tourism contributing into GDP in Iceland with expectations of an increase in the contribution rate in the future:

Figure 02: Direct contribution of travel and tourism to GDP in Iceland from 2012 to 2018 with a forecast for 2028 (in billion ISK):



source: Iceland statistics, statista 2024 published by Ana M.Lopez, jan 30, 2024

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/787539/travel-and-tourism-s-direct-contribution-to-gdp-in-iceland/>

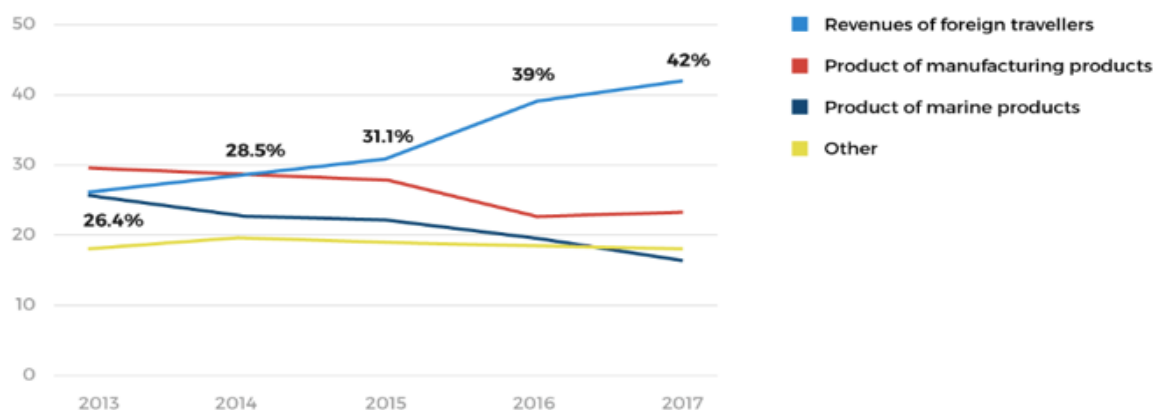
PS: 2018*** refers to forecast for the next ten years (2028).

This statistic presents the direct contribution of travel and tourism to GDP in Iceland from 2012 to 2018, with a forecast for 2028. Over this period, we notice from figure taht the direct contribution of the travel and tourism industry to GDP in Iceland has increased, reaching around 229 billion Icelandic króna in 2018. This figure is estimated the rising to over than 351 billion króna during the next ten years.

III-3- Disadvantages of overtourism in Iceland:

Tourism morphed from a minor part of the economy to its biggest industry over the course of the decade.

Figure 03: export of goods and services (%) from 2013 to 2017.



source: Iceland statistics.

As time went on and its economy recovered, prices began to rise for residents and tourists alike. What was once an affordable vacation becoming pricier despite the cheap flights that continued to bring passengers to Iceland. Gas and food became pricier for Icelanders, too, putting pressure on households across the country.

there are also some negative impacts of tourism that the residents identify, including increased traffic on the roads, increased pricing, and negative tourist behaviour, particularly at nature sites. The residents also expressed concerns that there was less space for them, as, for instance, accommodation and other tourist services would rapidly become fully booked, making it hard to visit particular tourist sites.

Conclusion:

In summary, the significance of tourism public relations as a strategic marketing tool for improving competitive advantage is paramount. As the tourism sector adapts to ongoing changes and faces unprecedented obstacles, adept public relations can stand out as the crucial factor that sets businesses and destinations apart. Referencing the case of Iceland, we observe a notable demonstration of how shrewd public relations tactics can enhance a destination's visibility and competitiveness internationally.

The Icelandic approach to tourism public relations exemplifies the transformative power of storytelling, authenticity, and strategic engagement. By leveraging its awe-inspiring natural landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and unwavering commitment to sustainability, Iceland has captured the imagination of travelers worldwide. Through skillful media management, proactive crisis response, and innovative promotional campaigns, Iceland has cultivated a compelling brand image that resonates with travelers seeking unique and immersive experiences.

Furthermore, Iceland's adept use of social media and influencer partnerships has amplified its reach and engagement with target audiences, further bolstering its competitive edge. By fostering meaningful connections with travelers and stakeholders, Iceland has fostered trust, loyalty, and advocacy, cementing its status as a premier travel destination.

The Icelandic experience offers valuable lessons for other countries aspiring to enhance their competitive advantage in the tourism industry. By prioritizing authenticity, sustainability, and stakeholder engagement, destinations can differentiate themselves in a crowded marketplace and attract discerning travelers. Embracing innovation, leveraging digital platforms, and proactively managing crises are also essential strategies for success in today's dynamic tourism landscape, and below we review some of the results of Iceland's strategic use of public relations in the tourism industry have been significant and impactful:

- **Increased Tourism Arrivals:** Iceland has experienced a notable increase in tourism arrivals, with the number of international visitors steadily rising over the years. By effectively promoting its unique attractions and experiences through public relations efforts, Iceland has attracted a growing number of travelers from around the world.

- **Economic Growth:** The growth of tourism has contributed to Iceland's economic development, generating revenue from visitor spending on accommodations, dining, attractions, and other tourism-related activities. This influx of tourism income has supported local businesses, job creation, and infrastructure development in Iceland.

- **Enhanced Brand Reputation:** Iceland's strategic public relations initiatives have helped enhance its brand reputation as a desirable tourism destination known for its natural beauty, cultural richness, and commitment to sustainability. Positive media coverage, word-of-mouth recommendations, and social media engagement have reinforced Iceland's image as a must-visit destination.

- **Diversification of Tourism Offerings:** Through storytelling and targeted promotional campaigns, Iceland has been able to highlight diverse tourism offerings beyond its iconic landscapes, such as cultural experiences, outdoor adventures, culinary delights, and wellness retreats. This diversification has appealed to a wider range of travelers and prolonged their stays in Iceland.

- **Sustainable Tourism Practices:** By promoting its commitment to sustainability and responsible tourism practices, Iceland has attracted eco-conscious travelers seeking environmentally friendly destinations. Public relations efforts highlighting conservation

efforts, eco-friendly accommodations, and community engagement have positioned Iceland as a leader in sustainable tourism.

Overall, the results of Iceland's strategic public relations efforts in the tourism industry have been instrumental in driving visitor growth, economic prosperity, and positive brand perception, contributing to the country's success as a premier tourism destination.

In essence, the Icelandic experience underscores the importance of strategic public relations in shaping destination perception, driving visitor demand, and ultimately achieving sustained competitiveness. By learning from Iceland's success story and adapting its best practices, other countries can position themselves for success in the increasingly competitive global tourism market.

Recommendation:

Based on the Icelandic experience and its successful public relations strategies, here are some recommendations for enhancing competitive advantage in the tourism industry:

- **Emphasize Authenticity:** Focus on showcasing the unique and authentic aspects of your destination, including natural landscapes, cultural heritage, and local traditions. Authenticity resonates with travelers seeking genuine and immersive experiences, setting your destination apart from others.

- **Tell Compelling Stories:** Utilize storytelling to evoke emotions and create memorable experiences for travelers. Share captivating narratives about your destination's history, folklore, and local legends to engage audiences and foster a deeper connection.

- **Leverage Digital Platforms:** Harness the power of social media, influencer partnerships, and digital marketing channels to amplify your destination's visibility and reach. Engage with travelers in real-time, share user-generated content, and leverage digital storytelling to showcase your destination's unique attractions.

- **Promote Sustainability:** Highlight your destination's commitment to sustainability and responsible tourism practices. Showcase eco-friendly initiatives, conservation efforts, and community partnerships to appeal to environmentally conscious travelers and differentiate your destination as a sustainable tourism leader.

- **Build Strong Partnerships:** Collaborate with tourism stakeholders, industry partners, and local communities to create mutually beneficial partnerships. Work together to develop innovative experiences, promote cultural exchange, and enhance the overall visitor experience.

- **Proactive Crisis Management:** Develop a comprehensive crisis management plan to effectively address any unforeseen challenges or emergencies. Transparency, timely communication, and proactive measures are essential for maintaining trust and safeguarding your destination's reputation.

- **Invest in Public Relations:** Allocate resources towards strategic public relations initiatives that focus on building positive relationships with the media, influencers, and key stakeholders. Develop engaging press releases, organize media familiarization tours, and participate in industry events to garner favorable media coverage and enhance your destination's visibility.

- **Monitor and Evaluate:** Continuously monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of your public relations efforts. Collect feedback from travelers, track key performance indicators, and adapt your strategies based on insights and data to ensure ongoing success and competitiveness.

By implementing these recommendations inspired by the Icelandic experience, destinations can strengthen their competitive advantage in the tourism industry, attract more visitors, and position themselves as premier travel destinations on the global stage.

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