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# The Relevance of Multi-Sensory Experience for Destination Brand

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## Abstract

*The growth of competition between cities, regions, and countries around the world is manifested through the creation of new strategies for selling products and services, but also attracting business investments, tourists, and local residents. Destinations have recognised branding as a strategic tool in competing with the competition on the tourism market in the context of globalisation. Destination branding involves communicating brand values to tourists and allows destinations to create a unique identity in order to differentiate themselves from the competition. The image of a destination is the result of the overall perceptions that tourists have about a place that influence their attitudes towards the destination. Tourist perceptions are linked to emotions and experience, which is why this paper explores how sensory branding affects the destination brand. The various elements of the destination brand identity are presented mainly visually and are oriented towards the sense of sight. A large number of identity elements can be verbally expressed and are directed toward the sense of hearing. However, a way should be found to increase the perception of brand elements through the other senses (smell, taste, and touch). The more pleasant the experience is for each of the senses, the better the perception of the brand will be. Sensory branding uses two or more senses to connect with customers on an emotional level and creates a multi-sensory experience. The sensory experience of a brand expresses experiences as a result of visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile stimuli provided by the brand. Brands create emotional associations in the minds of customers by appealing to their senses. A multisensory experience with a brand triggers beliefs, feelings, and thoughts to create a positive image of the destination brand in the minds of tourists.*

**Keywords:** brand, destination branding, brand experience, sensory branding, senses.

## 1. Introduction

In order to gain an advantage in the global competition, countries have created a variety of instruments and methods. The country brand is one of the most crucial

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tools. Countries benefit from investment, tourism, and security when they are seen favourably. The tourist sector is a fiercely competitive market that is expanding quickly. The destination brand is especially crucial in this context, as it has a direct impact on the development of the country brand and its positioning. Destinations have to contend with ongoing global competitiveness.

The significance of sensory branding in destination marketing and its application are the main topics of this paper. To study the use of sensory marketing to promote tourism so as to involve each of the senses to create a holistic tourist experience. The process of destination branding should start with the notion that a destination is a complex product, a collection of various goods and services, and that the goal should be to enhance the tourist's sensory experience.

The purpose of destination branding should be to improve the sensory experience of tourists, beginning with the notion that destinations are a complex commodity, a collection of various goods and services. Human senses form the basis for how people perceive goods, services, and locations, and consumers are linked to companies through memories and feelings (Lindstrom, 2016). Developing powerful brands that appeal to as many senses as possible is the aim. As a result, in order to improve the destination's positioning, marketers develop tactics that incorporate a multimodal experience there.

In order to create experiences that tourists will never forget, venues must appeal to all of their senses, and sensory marketing provides the framework for this. Brands that can incorporate all five senses – visual, aural, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile – may be created with the use of sensory marketing. Five-dimensional companies that provide tourists comprehensive, holistic experiences are starting to appear in place of the typical two-dimensional businesses. Since tourists develop their opinions on brands by interacting with them through all five senses, sensory branding provides the perfect setting to build an impressive brand image (Dițoiu et al., 2014).

## 2. Literature Review

### *2.1 Destination Brand*

Due to the fact that there are numerous branding principles that are used in marketing, but also apply to tourism marketing, destination branding has emerged as a key strategy in this industry. It was not until the 1990s that the concept of branding tourist sites came into being. Although various image-building initiatives by the cities of Glasgow and New York in the 1980s suggested that the destination could be seen as a brand, strategic approaches to destination branding at the national level were initially implemented in Spain, Australia, and a portion of Hong Kong. Subsequently, a lot of countries, areas, and towns used the branding method to better compete with rivals and set themselves apart as tourism destinations (Morgan et al., 2015).

Positive brand perception of a location can be influenced by destination marketing, and a branded destination is easier to promote (Pawaskar & Goel, 2014). Using a variety of identification components (name, symbol, logo, slogan, design,

etc.), destination branding helps to distinguish a place and give it a favourable reputation. The destination brand serves as a promotional tool associated with the pursuit of pleasant emotions and experiences, intended to depict the possible experience of the tourist who visits that (Barreto et al., 2019). A destination brand can be a name, symbol, logo, and/or other visuals that help people recognise and distinguish a place from its rivals, or it can be a collection of impressions that tourists have of a place that shape their opinions about it (Perić & Mandarić, 2020).

Destination branding, which is defined as a set of marketing activities that (1) Support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark, or other graphic that readily identifies and differentiates a destination; that (2) Consistently convey the expectations of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely localised related to the location; (3) support and strengthen the tourist's emotional bond with the location; and (4) lower the cost of consumer searches and perceived danger. All of these actions work together to improve the perception of the location and encourage tourists to choose it (Pawaskar & Goel, 2014). A brand promises an unforgettable travel experience to a certain destination for potential tourists, and for those who have already been there, the brand serves to recall fond memories.

Because tourist market is becoming more competitive, destination brand creation has emerged as a strategic tool in today's tourism business. In light of the globalisation of the economy and culture, destinations have realised that place branding may be used to counteract rivalry in the tourism industry. Establishing a distinctive character is crucial for tourism sites to set themselves apart from the competitors (Perić & Mandarić, 2020). Communicating national tourism brands' values, vision, and mission to the public and visitors is known as destination branding. The battle for natural resources, sales of goods and services, commercial investments, as well as tourists and locals, is one way that cities, regions, and nations around the world are becoming more competitive.

An essential part of creating, establishing, and enhancing a tourism destination's competitive position is brand management. Destination branding is crucial for any nation that wants to boost tourism and make its travel-related products more appealing. In addition to improving revenue and attaining worldwide market relevance, destination branding helps to fortify the destination's competitive position by offering a means of overcoming geographic distance and attracting and retaining tourists and visitors (Mandarić, 2023). According to research, destinations must offer their target customers unique, unforgettable, and fulfilling experiences that entice them to enter the brand territory. Destination branding is now seen as essential for locations hoping to maintain their position as market leaders in the global tourism industry (De Carlo et al., 2009).

Tourists and the destination brand form a close and strong bond thanks to the notion of emotional branding, which makes a unique contribution to the development of a destination brand. Offering the product as an experience becomes even more crucial in influencing the choice to buy it, as in the tourism industry, the product can only be enjoyed when the tourist arrives at the destination. When choosing to buy a tourist product, the emotional component plays a major role

(Dițoiu & Căruntu, 2014). Because a destination brand, like any other, involves trust, it only becomes a brand if its offer includes extra values and makes promises that can be kept. Tourists' positive feelings and a positive perception of the place can be sparked in this way. Because tourists may like a country but may not prefer it over rivals, efforts are made to create positive feelings and preferences by raising awareness of the destination and introducing potential travellers to the destination product (New Zealand with the slogan "Clean New Zealand", India, with the slogan "Incredible India" and Serbia with the slogan Experience Serbia!). In order to build preferences, consumers must be shown the advantages, which will lead to the conviction to visit the destination, and finally to the visit itself.

A tourist destination's branding aims to make customers believe that it is unlike any other place on the market, that it is exceptional, and that it should be remembered as entirely distinct. Customers ought to think that this brand is the greatest option available to them. Thus, travellers' perceptions of the destination are shaped by its branding. Even while many tourist sites have great lodging options, highlight the distinctiveness of their own culture and tradition, and employ comparable marketing strategies to draw visitors, each destination is perceived differently.

## *2.2 Destination Brand Experience*

According to Barnes et al. (2014), the brand experience of a place has a significant role in travellers' behaviour and gives destination marketers a comprehensive understanding of the destination from travellers' perspectives. A fundamental element of destination branding is the experience associated with a particular location, referred to as the "destination brand experience," which has been found to be a significant predictor of future visitor behaviour. A strong destination brand must consistently deliver on its promises to create a "memorable experience" that meets tourists' expectations (Sivasubramaniam & Jayawickrama, 2021).

In a destination, experience serves as a conduit for self-expression (Rini et al., 2024). The four elements of the destination brand experience are intellectual, behavioural, emotive, and sensory. The study's findings indicated that travellers' propensity to recommend a site is significantly influenced by both their sensory and intellectual experiences with it (Barnes et al., 2014). The first element focuses on the five senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell) and incorporates the visitors' sensory experience with the destination brand. This element can be used to convey how visitors perceive the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures of a certain location. the scent of flowers, the climate, the food options, the natural beauty, or the sound of the sea or lush environs. The emotional experience, which represents the sentiments, emotions, and moods of travellers towards locations, is the second element of the destination brand experience. Tourists and locations develop emotional bonds as a result of this encounter. Simultaneously, the tourist engages in a physical encounter with the location, which is defined as a behavioural experience of the destination brand and can be impacted by the destination's geographic layout, skiing, adventure, cultural, and other factors. The fourth element is the destination

brand's intellectual experience, which helps tourists solve difficulties by enhancing their capacity for cognitive thought.

The brand of the destination can also serve to improve the perception of the destination by tourists who have been to the destination. Perceptions about a destination can be based on experience, but also on rumours or prejudices. Four basic components can be singled out that influence destination branding: recognition, image, quality and loyalty (Perić & Mandarić, 2020).

One of the main objectives of destination branding is destination brand awareness, which defines travellers' knowledge of a place's existence as well as their perceptions of it. Several characteristics and visual components of the brand identity are the most effective ways to recognise and set a recognisable destination brand apart from rival locations.

Tourist preferences and destination choice are significantly influenced by image. The perceptions that travellers have about a specific tourism site form the foundation of its image. Additionally, a destination's image affects visitor loyalty, favourable word-of-mouth referrals, and the likelihood that tourists would return.

When promoting a tourist destination, a destination brand ought to possess a particular attribute. A destination's quality is determined by how tourists view it and if it can live up to their expectations. Regarding the calibre of the attractions and activities they engage in, most tourists provide a more generic account of their experience (Rini et al., 2024). The two elements of quality include aspects of the service delivery process (e.g., ambient circumstances, accommodations, food and beverage, recreation, etc.) and personal interaction and experience (friendliness, efficiency, reliability, etc.). Therefore, tourists consider their personal experiences in addition to the environment, goods, and services when evaluating a destination's quality. As a component of the service process cost, quality has a significant role in tourist satisfaction, which in turn affects their loyalty.

Loyalty is a goal for strategic market planning in the long term and is also used as the basis for developing a sustainable competitive advantage, which is an advantage that can be realised through marketing efforts (Rini et al., 2024). Although loyalty is a key component of brand market value and a gauge of consumer devotion to a specific company, it is debatable from a tourism and travel standpoint. It is possible that tourists will show their happiness by recommending the destination to others rather than returning. Tourists' intentions to return, suggest the place to friends, and visit again demonstrate the highest degree of destination loyalty.

### *2.3 Sensory Branding as a Tool for Better Positioning of the Destination*

The branding literature implies that people have brand value in their brains, highlighting both the significance of consumers as active producers of brand value and the importance of brands as operational resources in marketing strategy (Merz et al., 2009). The significance of overcoming the limitations of mass marketing is acknowledged by sensory branding. By focusing marketing on the human brain and its five senses, it connects with consumers in a more intimate and personal way. Since consumers' feelings towards products and services are closely related to

branding, it makes sense to investigate how sensory branding can be handled and the effects it has on brand customers (Lindstrom, 2016). The sensory appeal of a destination is one of the most crucial areas of attention in recent years when thinking about how the senses contribute to pleasant and unforgettable tourist experiences. Destinations have a variety of multisensory attributes that can be investigated and included in marketing efforts to support local sustainable development, as well as tourists' experiences and memories of the location. The human body plays a vital part in producing good experiences, which are referred to in the tourism literature as sensory landscapes (i.e. tactile, visual, visual, sensory dense), since the majority of tourism research concentrate on visual influences.

The development of emotional relationships between the consumer and the brand includes aspects of enabling the maximum sensory experience of the brand (Gobe, 2006). The logo, brand colour, and other components of the brand identification are primarily displayed visually and are meant to appeal to the sense of sight. Additionally, many identifying components that are aimed at the auditory sense can be spoken aloud (name, website address, slogans, jingles, etc.). Finding a method to maximise the awareness of brand features through other senses is necessary, though. Customers and the brand develop a strong emotional bond as a result of the brand becoming more accessible to them. As a result, the brand must be perceived through sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell. The better the brand is perceived, the more enjoyable the encounter is for all the senses.

The senses are the best way to experience a brand as that is how it is presented. If a brand's use and appearance are not aesthetically pleasant, its utility may be negligible. Good design and its associated advantages, such as utility, are insufficient; it is also crucial to give the customer a sensory experience. Innovation-based solutions that offer a variety of novel sensory experiences are the foundation of a successful business.

Emotions and sensations become even more significant in influencing the consumer's decision to buy the product when it is presented as an experience, as in tourism, the product can only be experienced when the tourist travels to the place. Since the emotional component has a significant impact on the decision to purchase a tourist product, there is no longer a product that does not arouse the consumer's senses. When a tourist visits a certain location, they continue to take in the ambiance, which means that their experience there is strongly tied to their senses.

The tourist's destination is a place, an area, a region, or a country where they stay for a while. The offer at the destination level includes the tourist receiving units, the infrastructure, and the tourist potential, which can be natural, human-made, or cultural, and includes the people who live there and their traditions and ways of life. This means that the location can be thought of as an umbrella (Buhalis, 2000) that brings together all of its parts into a single experience.

In terms of his impression of that specific destination, the tourist creates his own image of the destination by obtaining, picking, arranging, and analysing information about it. In actuality, the tourist's perception of the place reflects the sensory and/or intellectual data, or, to put it another way, his interpretation of reality. When a visitor

is exposed to external stimuli, they form strong opinions about the place's qualities at the intersection of the destination's image and their own requirements, desires, and other inherent qualities. As a result, the multisensory component element gives the destination image a holistic quality.

Building a strong destination brand is the goal of the organisations that handle marketing and destination management. The destination brand, as seen by the traveller, is the culmination of all the attitudes, sentiments, and perceptions about that specific location. At the component level, this destination brand includes the experiences produced by the competing suppliers, who, in turn, rely on local access conditions, policies, culture, and other inseparable factors. This makes it extremely complex because it must maintain a consistent experience at the product level. To ensure a positive brand image, it is necessary to identify the strong associations with the location. Brands with more sensory elements become more complex. With the aid of destination branding, which creates some distinctive marks, the tourist's emotional bond with the place is gradually strengthened (Diţoiu & Căruntu, 2014).

The management of the destination's most crucial touch points is essential to the destination branding strategy's success. Essentially, a tourist's experience can be achieved through a variety of touch points, which facilitates the development, exchange, and delivery of suitable experiences. This should lead to a higher level of visitor satisfaction and a greater propensity to recommend the location. Sensory branding should be used in many settings and occasions to foster these favourable experiences. By addressing the consumer's mind and senses from an emotional and cognitive perspective, sensory branding distinguishes a location from the competition.

## 3. Methodology

The present study conceptualises a theoretical model based on multisensory experiences and how it can be used to enhance destination branding. The approach is an outcome of synthesis of literature from the fields of brand management and marketing. The paper also presents an example of good practice in promoting the Vrnjačka Banja as a destination that can be experienced through all the senses. The study used secondary data sources from the Internet, science literature, and organisation reports. The purpose of the case study is to demonstrate how a place might be advertised in a way that appeals to visitors' senses.

With 686,556 overnight stays in 2023, Vrnjačka Banja is the most popular and largest spa in Serbia. It ranks third in terms of tourists overnight stays in Serbia, behind the capital city of Belgrade and mountain Zlatibor (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2024). An analysis of the information on the official website of the tourism organisation Vrnjačka Banja (https://vrnjackabanja.co.rs/, 2025) was conducted, which supports and appeals to the use of human senses in the perception of the destination brand.

## 4. Analysis and Results Interpretation

Only a small percentage of the 3,000 communications that the typical consumer gets about various businesses each day make a lasting effect. Because of this, the most prosperous businesses are adopting fresh branding techniques that appeal to the five senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Human memory is imprinted with events, moods, sensations, and various products that result from sensory perception. However, just two of the five senses, sight and sound, are used by the majority of advertising messages that consumers see on a daily basis. The solution is to construct a brand whose perception is based on all five senses, not just sight and hearing, because of the potential that an offer that appeals to all the senses can develop.

What are the main sensory pleasures that have helped Vrnjačka Banja achieve such a high ranking in the Republic of Serbia's tourism market? To put it briefly, the following is crucial:

Its tradition and the basic elements of its identity are clearly communicated (the sparrow symbol, green and yellow colour, pleasant climate, the long-standing slogan that the spa represents the queen of continental tourism in Serbia, hospitality, uses - healing water, health - hiking tours, etc.).

The park's layout, vegetation, fresh air, and birdsong are thought to be the spa's fundamental elements that appeal to all senses.

Tourism comes in a variety of forms. The number of organised trips and favourable word-of-mouth recommendations are rising because other types of tourism, such as youth, convention, cultural, etc., are becoming more and more represented in addition to medical tourism.

The tourism season lasted all year long because of the many cultural manifestations and activities that took place. Some target groups arrive because of film, theatre, and music festivals that appeal to the senses of sight and hearing.

Tourist attractions that appeal to all human senses and create strong emotions include the Japanese garden, the Bridge of Love, facilities for children, and adjacent monasteries. These facilities are associated with particular rituals and elicit emotions such as love and faith.

The immediate proximity of Mountain Goč reinforces the spa's tourist facilities and makes it suitable for various sports activities.

New hotels have increased the availability of lodging; visitors appreciate the modern decor, welcoming interior, and well-trained staff.

The improvement of the gastronomic offer and the promotion of wine tourism is made possible by the opening of new wineries and exclusive restaurants, complementing the rich offer through the senses of taste and smell.

The emotional relationship that the tourist develops with the destination through a multisensory experience leads to a high retention rate.

In order to establish an emotional connection with consumers and produce a multisensory experience, sensory branding employs two or more senses. Experiences resulting from the brand's visual, aural, gustatory, olfactory, and tactile stimuli are expressed through the brand's sensory experience (Akoglu & Ozbek,

2022). So, sensory marketing should be seen as a "bridge" between what tourists experience and what the place has to offer. The goal is to reduce the differences between how people think about and project the destination's identity and image by creating unforgettable experiences that help people have the feelings, ideas, and memories they want (Dițoiu & Căruntu, 2014). By appealing to consumers' senses, brands help them form emotional connections in their minds. Customers' perceptions of brands are positively shaped by a multisensory brand experience, which elicits specific beliefs, feelings, ideas, and views. An individual's impression of a product, service, or other components of a service process as an image that stimulates the human mind and senses is known as a sensory experience (Hultén, 2011).

Empirical research on the degree of sensory use at the Vrnjačka Banja destination would be beneficial in the future. Five-dimensional branding is necessary for tourism in order to convey authentic experiences to travellers. A sensory profile is a visual depiction of how human senses are used and how much of each sensation is used to build a brand's identity. It was created by Martin Lindstrom, and it is important because it shows how the senses can be used to create a brand. The sensory profile can be used to assess a brand's appeal. It is possible to apply a sensory profile to a destination, beginning with the types of tourism that are practiced in a certain location and the tourist attractions that are perceived and experienced there. Every sensory dimension has a component that may be determined at the level of sensory experience that, if preserved over time, can eventually become the destination's sensory signature (Dițoiu & Căruntu, 2014).

## 5. Conclusions

The powerful destination brand's structure has evolved in the modern era. As the value of competing destinations continues to grow, so does the usage of sensory branding. Such branding appeals to multiple senses. In the global knowledge age, destinations use every instrument at their disposal to gain a competitive edge. They adjust their brand tactics frequently as a result.

The creation of brands that have attributes that allow for a full sensory experience is known as sensory branding. The identity of such a brand is constructed through symbols, shapes, messages, customs, and rituals. An amazing experience can occur when a firm allows the brand to be experienced via all five senses. Successful businesses typically aim to generate a favourable brand experience by appealing to all of the senses of the customer. The level of sensory involvement in brand perception and experience is closely correlated with the brand's strength in the market compared to competitors and its place in the consumer's consciousness.

The linkage between multisensory branding and tourism is simple but often elusive: memories are linked to our senses, experiences mould our senses, and memories have a direct impact on our emotional composition. Therefore, by designing experiences that are both pertinent and targeted, the tourism manager may appeal to the tourist’s senses and feelings, creating positive and long-lasting memories that visitors can later recall to promote the resort and its service to friends

and family. Tourist marketers have failed to effectively exploit multisensory marketing, despite it being a relatively recent phenomenon in the tourism industry.

The multisensory experience is a crucial part of destination branding. Each destination aims to manage how people view them. Destinations, however, cannot be advertised as products. The historical, sociological, and cultural heritage of the countries in which they are located is reflected in the brand values of the destinations. The top priorities for a destination's brand and sensory marketing strategies are, of course, highly targeted markets or market segments, as well as the visual, aural, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile identification characteristics that give rise to a destination's sensory signatures. These elements may be taken into consideration at one point in time, in a particular context, in the construction of well-defined product or product objectives. The importance of a multi-sensory experience for destination brand must therefore be understood in order to maintain a competitive advantage.

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