Building Bridges: The Role of Public Relations in Enhancing Hong Kong's Low Travel Zone Economy

Eugene Chan

Technological and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong,
Hong Kong SAR, China

eugeneyhchan@thei.edu.hk

Abstract. Public relations play a significant role in promoting tourism in low-travel zones. The low travel zones are largely characterized by low tourism activities. The conference paper examined the diverse public relations strategies that can be used to promote a destination. The techniques discussed are campaigns on social media platforms, destination branding, and media relations. The public relations strategies help promote tourism in low travel zones thereby enhancing the economic development of such places. The paper highlights the significance of aligning public relations efforts with destination branding to create a compelling narrative and image of the destination which can attract potential tourists to that place. Challenges that counter the efforts of promoting low travel zones such as sustainability issues, limited resources, and competition from urban centers with iconic features are equally discussed in the paper. Integrating effective public relations strategies can enhance the appeal of Hong Kong's low-travel zones. This drives tourism in the low travel zones thereby fostering economic growth and development of Hong Kong's low travel zones.

Keywords: Public Relations, Destination Branding, Low-altitude tourism.

1 Introduction

In low-altitude tourism, there is interest in activities and places that require no ascent to high altitude and will be accessible to travelers of all types. It often can refer to coastlines, plains, valleys, and gently hilly terrains. These may include beach holidays, cultural tours in interior cities, nature excursions in forests and wetlands, and boating in rivers and coastlines. Low-altitude tourism has a few characteristic features distinguishing it from high-altitude tourism. The plus side that exists in the low-altitude settings is the availability of oxygen. It includes minimal susceptibility to altitude sickness and allows people with specific health conditions to be suitable for these places. These low-altitude places generally have climates, longer growing seasons, and a more diverse plant and animal life compared to the higher ones. These regions enjoy an acceptable infrastructure, with relatively higher populations and accommodation types, transport options, and tourist attractions. Therefore, these water sports are available to visitors, animal-spotting trips, cultural activities, and many others.

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Tourism to China's altitudes has grown, especially in the eastern coastal areas and along the major river systems, such as the Yangtze and Pearl River Deltas. From vibrant metropolises like Shanghai and Guangzhou to timeless water towns like Suzhou and Zhouzhuang, a great array of experiences can be encountered. It also offers beach escapes, seafood galore, and island-hopping, thanks to its more than 14,500-kilometer coastline, especially in Hainan, a province often referred to as "China's Hawaii." Major cultural and historical areas are located in the low-altitude parts, including UNESCO World Heritage sites such as Hangzhou's West Lake and Suzhou's Classical Gardens. Secondly, China is increasingly investing in eco-tourism projects in the regions by way of wetland parks in the Yangtze River Delta and mangrove forests in Guangxi, which provide natural experiences to visitors while emphasizing the protection of the environment. Thus, by promoting tourism at lower altitudes, China wants to develop its tourism products and attract domestic and international tourists in search of multiple experiences without problems presented by destinations at high elevations.

It can be seen that China's present low-altitude tourism has the following features:

1. Focus on ocean and river: This aspect reflects on the vast coastal region of China, besides its many rivers. Activities including beach vacationing, island retreats, and visiting scenes in water towns fall under this category. Utilizing the advantages that China enjoys, this approach seeks to try and provide a range of activities on land.
2. The richness of Culture and History: Low-altitude regions of China are rich in UNESCO World Heritage sites and historical landmarks. This combination of city explorations, along with quaint towns and villages, shall offer the traveler exposure to the rich cultural heritage of China, without deterring elements from high altitudes.
3. Ecotourism and Natural Experiences: The country has also been developing tourism projects related to ecology in regions like wetland parks and mangrove forests. The approach has sought, therefore, to create some balance between tourism and the preservation of the environment. It avails the sufficient opportunity for exposure to nature while at the same time creating more interest in sensitization to ecology and sustainability.
4. Accessibility and Infrastructure: Transportation systems and infrastructure are very well developed in low-altitude spots in China. As such, there is enough accommodation for travelers, and movement around the various attractions is easy. This region offers a hub of attractions to different categories of visitors, even for health reasons.
5. Variety in Food and Activities: In the lowlands of China, a great number of local dishes exist; these might be seafood dishes along the coastal regions. This not only allows for the exploitation of flavor but also affords opportunities to engage in culture and become acquainted with the natives of the area. Food explorations can thus be carried out with activities such as boat rides, aqua sports, or even traditional craftsmanship, which further enhance the travel experience.

2 Economic Growth and Public Relations

Public relations in tourism and the growth of economics are largely related and well-documented by researchers. Public relations strategies are critical in disseminating a

positive image of a place that is regarded as a destination for many tourists from around the world. These strategies help in attracting visitors. The influx of many tourists from all over the world stimulates the economies of the destination by creating job opportunities for people and generating revenues for the local government and the people at large. In Hong Kong where some areas tend to be less frequented by visitors, and tourists, public relations can help in transforming that area into a famous area where tourists can visit and spend some time there. Highlighting the natural attractions of an area, their unique historical as well as cultural dimensions, public relations can help in positively altering the perceptions people have about an area. This may encourage local tourists as well as tourists from abroad to visit that area. The economic effect of tourism is profound in several areas which have been previously overlooked. However, a robust public relations campaign can help in shifting the focus of the tourists from cities that were previously frequented by them to places that were never familiar to the tourists. This helps in economically developing those new places thereby distributing benefits that come along with tourism. This is very important in the sustainable growth and development of an area.

3 Strategies of Public Relations in Hong Kong

Public relations strategies for promoting low travel zones in Hong Kong are varied and can be highly successful if well implemented. The main public relations strategies that can be effective include campaigns social media platforms, destination branding, and media relations [3].

Media relations for a long time as been key in the efforts of Hong Kong to promote tourism in its low travel zones. This involves engaging the international media as well as the local media to showcase unique aspects of the low-travel zones. Features in documentaries, travel magazines, and several news segments highlight the cultural richness and the unique characteristics of the low-travel zones. This helps in sparking interest among the tourists who get interested in visiting such places to have personal experience.

Campaigns in social media have equally played a key role in promoting tourism in low-travel zones [2]. Social media platforms such as Facebook, WeChat, and Instagram among others have helped in reaching potential tourists globally especially young tourists who like adventuring and exploring less conventional destinations. The social media campaigns have taken advantage of appealing content such as cultural festivals, local cuisine, and photographs of the scenic landscapes of the low travel zones to create an online presence of the low travel zones in Hong Kong.

Destination branding which largely involves the development of a compelling and desirable brand identity for Hong Kong's low-travel zones. The brand identity integrates well into the tourism campaigns thereby ensuring that the low travel zones are represented in every promotional material. According to Foroudi (2016), social media as one of the moderators of the favorability of place branding were acknowledged, and

based on the review of the related literature and qualitative analysis, theoretical model in destination branding presented in Figure 1. [2] [Destination branding focuses on positioning low travel zones as a cultural hub, a haven for food enthusiasts among others.

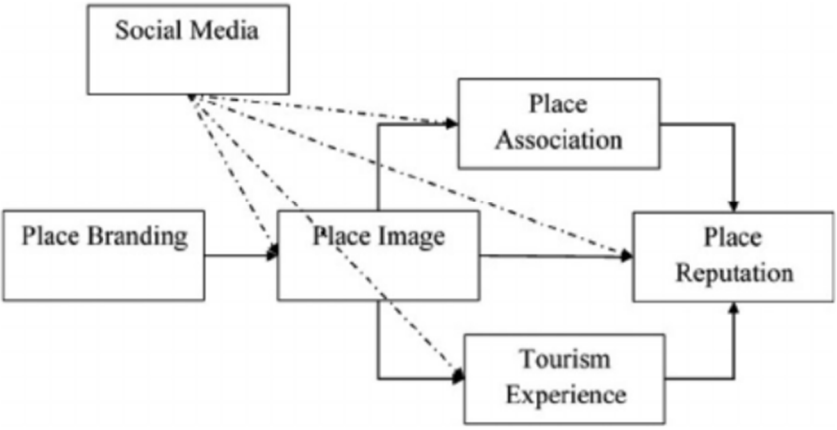

Fig. 1. Theoretical model (adapted from Foroudi et al., 2016). [2].

4 Literature Review

According to Robson (2021), destination branding and public relations are taken as different domains which are a very substantial overlap in the methods used and their overall objectives. The synergy that exists between public relations and destination or place branding is evidenced in the tourism sector whereby both the target of crafting and promoting the image of a place or destination [5]. In the context of the low travel zone in Hong Kong, integration is very critical. Employment of effective public relations strategies promotes the attributes of the zones which are unique and aligns them with the branding efforts to make sure that they are compelling and consistent to resonate well with the potential tourists. Robson (2021) highlights the major challenges in harmonizing destination branding with public relations which can bring about misalignment that often conflicts with messages that confuse tourists. However, it is suggested that a coordinated approach whereby the public relations activities are well aligned with the destination branding strategies can help enhance the effectiveness of the strategies to promote low travel zones (Ruiz-Real, Uribe-Toril, and Gázquez-Abad, 2020) [6].

Hana, Rowley, and Keegan (2021) emphasize the significance of aligning destination identity with brand identity by ensuring that the public relations efforts are largely authentic and resonate well with potential tourists. The alignment is important for the low travel zones in Hong Kong since the creation of a compelling brand identity helps enhance their appeal to potential tourists. Stakeholder engagement is yet another important factor to consider in ensuring that the public relations and branding efforts are

sustainable and effective (Hana, Rowley, and Keegan, 2021) [3]. The public relations efforts ought to be well coordinated to maintain the attractive image of the low travel zones. This is supported by the findings in a research study carried out by Rather, Najar, and Jaziri (2021) who established that recognizing the "emotional brand attachments" of the tourists helps in promoting tourism in low travel zones [4].

According to Ebrahimi, Hajmohammadi, and Khajeheian (2020), social media plays a crucial role in destination branding efforts. Amplifying branding messages in social media platforms helps in promoting destinations that are considered to be low travel zones. The author highlights the power of social media in engaging potential tourists by creating unique and powerful content that can influence people to visit the low-travel zones. Monitoring and efficiently managing social media interactions ensures that brand messages are positive and consistent [1]. This helps enhance tourism in low-travel zones in Hong Kong. By effectively managing social media, public relations professionals can reinforce good and positive narratives, and in the event of any issues that can negatively affect the destination being promoted, swift responses are given to counter any negative implication of the messages.

5 Challenges in Promoting Low Travel Zones in Hong Kong and Future Directions

Despite the many successes of public relations efforts in promoting low-travel zones sin Hong Kong, many challenges still exist. One of the most notable challenges is the stiff competition with urban centers in Hong Kong. The urban centers have iconic attractions that many low-travel zones in Hong Kong do not have. These attractions overshadow the low travel zones which are being promoted. This challenge is compounded when the visitors have limited knowledge of the beautiful sceneries in the low travel zones. The other challenge that continues to affect the public relations efforts of promoting low-travel zones in Hong Kong is limited resources. Limited resources render public relations efforts of brand promotions less effective particularly in reaching the targeted potential tourists (Skinner, 2021) [7]. Sustainability is yet another critical challenge that continues to affect efforts to promote low-travel zones in Hong Kong. Tourism has a significant effect of potential harm to the natural and cultural heritage of the low travel zones in Hong Kong if not well managed. Therefore, public relations efforts must be designed in a way that enhances the sustainability of tourism.

6 Conclusion

Public relations in brand promotion particularly in the tourism sector is indispensable. It is an important tool that helps to enhance the economic viability of the low-travel zones in Hong Kong. Developing public relations strategies can help attract as many tourists as possible to a destination that is regarded as a low travel zone. The low travel zones in Hong Kong hold significant potential. However, realizing this great potential demands concerted efforts from all people and stakeholders. Redefining, reengineering,

and expanding public relations strategies can help promote tourism in the low-travel zones in Hong Kong. The success of the public relations strategies will promote the economic development of the low-travel zone sin Hong Kong.

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