

## DESTINATION BRANDING- A CURRENT SOCIAL MEDIA APPROACH

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**Abstract:** *Destinations are marketed in various ways, the best medium being Destination Branding. As it is today, a lot of cities and states have formed internationally renowned brand names through various innovative campaigns and the help of Brand Ambassadors, creative taglines, vibrant ads & billboard displays and an effective far-reaching social media campaign. The best example can be that of the 23 Mediterranean Countries that used Facebook for an effective Destination Branding. Social media is considered as one of the most important forms of communication in this modern era of Technology, the use of Facebook and the micro-blogging website, Twitter has seen a staggering rise. This conceptual research focuses on the process of Destination Branding using two key pillars of Social Media, that are very new, quiet effective in terms of reach and the best of all, free! The two media are Instagram and Snapchat. Using the Case Study approach, cities like Lyon, Amsterdam and Philadelphia have been studied their campaigns have been immensely successful, as revealed by the numbers of people reached by the Instagram campaigns. The research also consists of suggestions and tactics that Destination Marketers and Branders can use as campaigns on Snapchat, to make effective use of opportunities in Real Time Marketing. The objective being to bring out the fact that today, a Brand does not really need a famous person as an Ambassador and that Hashtags are the new-age way of search engines and how these strategies can be used by small cities in India. The research also focuses on giving suggestions about how Goa and Bangalore can use hashtags on Instagram and Snapchat effectively to promote the brands that they stand for.*

**Keywords:** *Instagram, Snapchat, Hashtags, Destination Branding, Destination Marketing*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of Destination Marketing has grown to various heights, with the influence of various forms and mediums of Marketing. The growth of Social Media has lead to further development in the marketing of a Destination. Facebook, Twitter, Blogger, Word Press and YouTube are the best platforms of Social Media that a destination marketer can use to effectively market a location. As of the last decade, what Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) have started focusing on is developing a Brand for the destination and the process of Destination Branding is being adopted. The focuses are shifting towards development of brands out of destinations and how they can develop a strong relationship with prospective clients as well as existing clients, in short, the conceptualization of Brand Management for a Tourism Product. Morgan and Pritchard had very well claimed that Branding is indeed the most powerful weapons available to DMOs and Destination Marketers. (Morgan and Pritchard 2002)

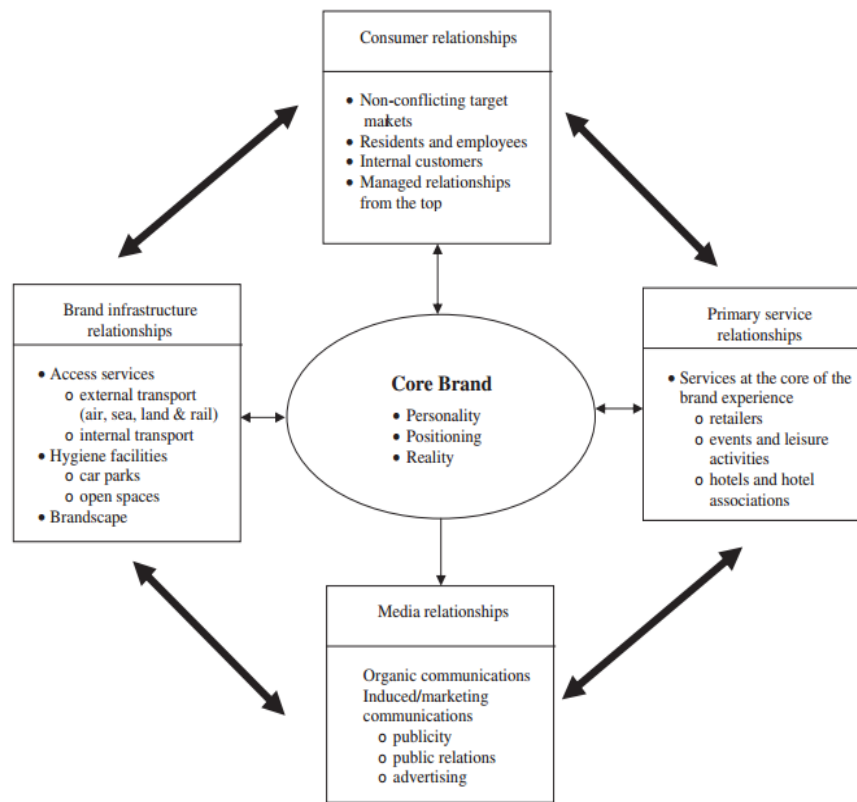


Figure 1: Source Branding  
(Source – Hankinson 2004)

A more conceptual framework about Destination Branding, enunciated by Hankinson (2004) is displayed below in, Figure 1. Today's DMOs, keeping the Core Brand in mind, should concentrate more on media relationships where aspects such as Publicity, PR and Advertising of a Destination are looked into. While maintaining a strong two-way communication relationship with the consumers, Branders should understand which platforms one can use to better reach out to a destination's target group. For example, the Destination Branding for a city like Las Vegas would rather be focused towards attracting that part of the population which is open to Casinos, parties and fun. Using the concept of "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas!" a Brander can successfully administer his or her Social Media campaign to reach out to the prospective consumer base.

Today's modern era of Technology has seen the growth of Social Media platforms. The newest and most famous among them are Instagram and Snapchat. Instagram was founded and launched in 2010 as a free mobile app and Snapchat was launched in 2011, initially called as Picaboo, also a free app. These pillars of Social Media, if used efficiently by a brander, a destination can easily reach out to the consumer base that it appeals to; looking at the fact that these platforms are largely accessed by today's 'hashtagger' & 'selfie' generation!

### 1.1 Objectives of the Study

- To bring out the potentialities that Snapchat and Instagram hold as effective mediums of Destination Branding.*
- To measure and understand the reach of Hashtags in Instagram.*

### 1.2 Strategic Brand Management for a Tourism Destination

As far as Brand management is concerned, a Tourism Product, or any product for that matter has to completely understand three aspects related to it. An effective synchronization between the

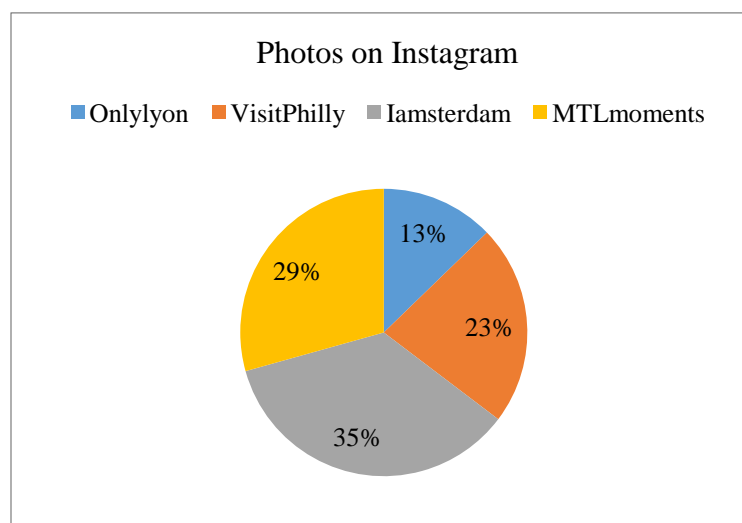
following three aspects can lead to effective Brand Management by the DMOs and Destination Branders:

- a. Brand Identity
- b. Brand Positioning
- c. Brand Image

A product has to understand how it is portraying its identity along with whether it is portraying what it wants to. This identity has to be portrayed such that it is positioned in the client's mind. Finally, the image that the crowd develops through all marketing has to be checked and rechecked. This loop is a key to effective brand management. A tourism destination has to build its image among the customers through use of powerful media. In terms of Social Media, Instagram is a platform where people, acting as personal Brand Ambassadors of the Destination, can put up pictures of their personal experiences. This paves way for Marketers to use such experiences to their benefit and create trends.

### 1.3 The era of 'Hashtags'

An international perspective: With examples of Philadelphia, Lyon, Montreal and Amsterdam, we understand that Instagram, along with its features of micro-blogging and Hashtags can serve as a platform for an intensive branding campaign. The following is a chart on the number of photos associated with the hashtags of each of the campaigns, Onlylyon, Iamsterdam and VisitPhilly (Hashtag). The number of photos tagged with the hashtags, are mediums to earning free media points and free visibility among customers. Each campaign has been strategically planned to reach out to thousands of people who are active on Instagram. According to the statistics available online about Instagram, on an average there are about 300 million active users a month, out of which 90% of them are under the age of 35 and an average of 2.41 posts per user per day, such is the reach of this platform. With this potential, DMOs and Destination Branders in India can make use of it to promote the smaller and lesser known destinations. (Figure 2)



(Source: Primary Data collected from Instagram)

Figure 2: Photos on Instagram

An Indian perspective: When statistics related to India are studied, one can notice the number of photos that have the impression of the hashtag: IncredibleIndia is a staggering 509,449. Among these, only a mere 125 photos have been uploaded by the official Instagram page of the campaign. The difference is proof of the number of free media points India is successfully able to gain without investing a single rupee; all thanks to the individual brand ambassadors who chose to upload the picture with an impression of IncredibleIndia. This exact strategy can be

used by smaller cities in India that have a potential to attract tourists. Taking a look at the local destinations in India, the trending hashtags are: (Figure 3)

Nammabengaluru (#)

Godsowncountry (#)

Vibrantgujrat (#)

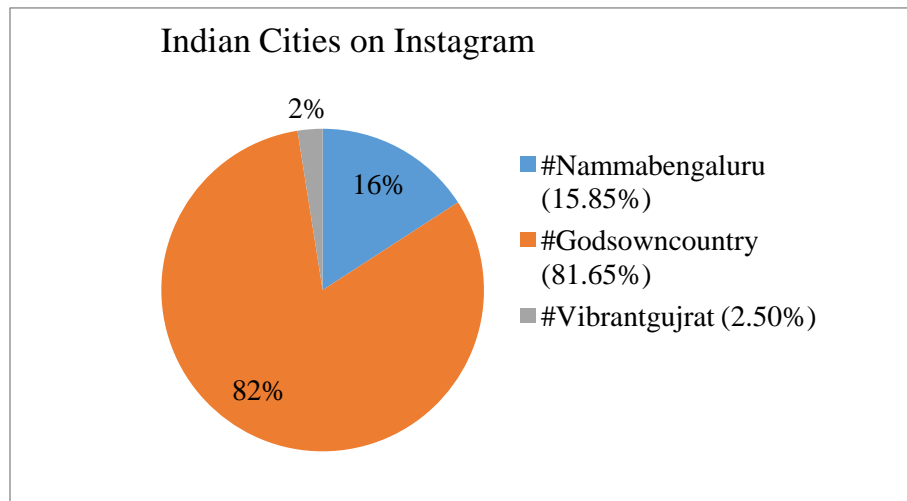


Figure 3: Indian Cities on Instagram

(Source: Primary Data collected from Instagram)

The hashtag strategy has worked very well for Kerala as we can see in the Figure 4 Comparison of Campaigns: When specifics are compared, the public transport systems of Lyon and Bangalore show a sharp difference. The hashtag campaigns used are Ilovetcl and Nammametro:

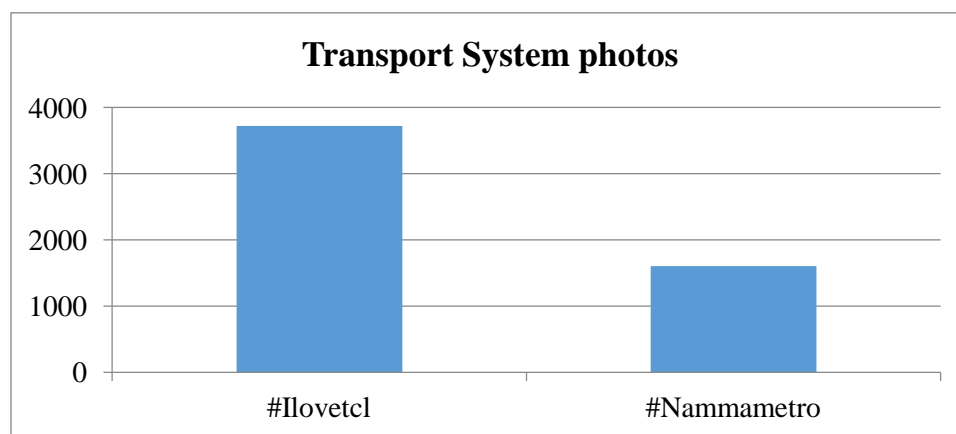


Figure 4: Transport System photos

(Source: Primary Data collected from Instagram)

The clear difference between the numbers of photos points out what gap Bangalore's Brand is falling short of. Through effective promotion of the hashtags, these numbers can shoot up, thus providing Bangalore's transport system a strong image among tourists as well as users. The Geofilters of Instagram & Snapchat: Another very effective way of promoting a destination is by tagging the location or adding an Instagram picture on the Photo Map. This attaches the

location to the picture and is available for a person to view. But this Geo-filter feature is not very famous on Instagram. To make up for this hindrance of Instagram, a second platform called Snapchat can be used. Snapchat is an emerging social platform and it has a core audience that is young, global and engaged. Snapchat has two sections, one being a strong platform for companies like MTV, BuzzFeed, Cosmopolitan and the like, called the Discover section and secondly, the Live section that is a boon to Real Time Marketers. The Live section of Snapchat works on the simple concept of Content collection, curation and broadcasting.

The most famous initiative of Snapchat in terms of helping promote travel and tourism was that of the Our Story feature for various cities including Bangalore, Delhi and Mumbai.

This feature is being used by various companies such as Disney, Marriott, Aer Lingus, GrubHub and the like. As a travel destination that looks at attracting the generation Y and Z, Sanpchat seems to be a very promising tool as it is considered to have 100 million daily active users, out of which 71% fall below the age of 34 and 45% between 18 and 24. Indian destinations can tap into their target through this platform and expect brilliant results as there are over 12 million Indians using this application. The ‘greetings from...’ feature is an added advantage to destination branders as they can have customized designs that can show on Snaps sent. In this case too, the ambassador of the brand need not be a famous person, but can be a mere citizen or a tourist to a city. According to an article, as of 2014, there are no DMOs that currently hold an account on Snapchat, this is a clear indicator of the chance that is available to smaller DMOs to hold the first mover’s advantage (Freeman, 2014).

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research undertaken, with a city like Goa in mind, the target audience is clearly people between 18 and 30. Both Instagram and Snapchat can be used intensively by the DMO to effectively market the Goa brand that has been created. The following are a few suggestions based on the research:

- Hashtag campaigns such as:
  - Casinocity
  - SunburnIndia
  - Goanadventures
  - Homestaygoa
  - Goaonbikes
- Effective use of Snapchat by:
  - Green Resorts
  - Adventure Sport organizations
  - Bike rental services
  - Traditional Markets

Bangalore can make sure its NammaBengaluru and Nammametro campaigns are in full swing through implementation of marketing campaigns on Metro tokens. The Bangalore Brand can be promoted on all kinds of material such as tickets on BMTC, railway tickets and local Travel Agents.

## 3. CONCLUSION

Social Media plays a key component in Destination Branding and Destination Marketing. Components of Brand management such as Brand Identity, Brand Positioning and Brand Image can be the bases for any DMO. Destinations, with the help of Instagram and Snapchat have seen immense success since the apps’ launch. Famous and successful Hashtags like Onlylyon, Iamsterdam, MTLMoments and VisitPhilly have paved the way for successful Destination Branding on such platforms of Social Media.

In India hashtags like Nammabengaluru exist, but are not very effective in their content. In this view, the localities themselves can become individual brand ambassadors of Cities in India, thus providing curated and effective content. Geo-filters and Hashtags of Instagram and Snapchat can thus be effective tools to enhance the marketing efforts of Destination Marketing Organizations.

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