

## **CITY BRANDING: EXPLORING THE BRAND “BEIRUT” AS A TOURISM DESTINATION IN THE BRITISH MARKET**

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**ABSTRACT:** *In this study, brand of Beirut is evaluated in the context of British consumers. Tourism and Destination Branding Tool was used in determining the questionnaire. Accordingly, questionnaire was designed and distributed to randomly chosen 383 British people. Sample size was achieved through using sample size calculator over the internet. However, only 100 questionnaires was totally filled by the participants and therefore, only those were included in the analysis. In the analysis, descriptive statistics were used just as it is used in STCRC study. In this perspective tourists' general expectations from the short and long term holidays were determined and compared with the results of experience gained in Beirut. Findings showed that British people mostly look for fun and entertaining places which also have a good accommodation. In long holidays they also look for good restaurants and sport facilities. Nevertheless, Beirut is found by them as far below compare to their expectations. In fact, they were not satisfied with their stays in Beirut and not willing to come back to the city in the future. This result also showed itself in the drop of the tourist coming to the city. In this context number of preventive measures should be taken by the government urgently to correct this situation.*

**KEYWORDS:** Tourism, Brand Image, Beirut, City Branding

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### **INTRODUCTION**

According to Keller (1998), the source of the term branding comes from the phrase “brand”, which is an old assertion of the Norse standing for burning and employed for marking the livestock of the cattle owners to distinguish them from others. In the past, it was made compulsory by the unions to press the specific marks on the products that artificers offered for the purpose of protecting their clients as well as themselves from lower standard of quality. In addition to this, artists who perform fine arts also embroil their marks on their works (Kotler and Keller, 2006). In the current business environment, branding has importance in the view of the clients as well as the companies. In the view of de Chernatony and McDonald (1992), a successful branding creates differentiating characteristics for the products, services, places or individuals in such a manner that generates added value for the consumers to observe related features which heavily fulfil their anticipations of the offering. Just like the companies, cities and places can also take advantage of branding nevertheless there is lack of literature on the mentioned issue. In this context, in this study, brand of Beirut is evaluated in the context of British consumers. Therefore, followings are the objectives of this study:

- To identify the preferences of the British tourists in terms of their short and long term leisure holidays
- To identify the perception of British tourist towards making a holiday in Beirut

- To make recommendations to improve Beirut's brand image to attract more tourist to the destination

Beirut is the capital and largest city of Lebanon. The city had gone through number of wars and terrorist activities over the years. However, it has fabulous touristic attractions which made it Western people to call the city as The Paris of the Middle East before the civil war occurred in the country. Nowadays, the city and the government trying to improve the Beirut's image in people's eyes and willing to make the city Middle East's best again. In fact, the tourism industry in Beirut has been historically important to the local economy and remains to this day to be a major source of revenue for the city. However, tourist traffic at Beirut airport down 40 pct since 2010 (The Daily Star Lebanon, 2014). Therefore, improving the tourism activities can help the overall country's economy and development of the Lebanon. Therefore, conducting a study on how tourists see Beirut would be rather important and beneficial. British people were chosen to study since they were one of the nations who visited Beirut mostly in the past.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Keller (1998) indicates that customers understand brand as a sign of superiority and acknowledgement which is useful for recognising the companies' offerings. As there is a link between brands and the companies creating them, it allows for being held responsible for any defects. In this sense, the risks related to buying a good or service are decreased while the confidence in making the purchase is heightened. Furthermore, brands are also used as a means for contact and help developing associations between companies and their clients. In addition to these, being familiar to a brand helps consumers to save time and sources to explore new options. Moreover, brands are useful for consumers in maintaining their self-image by means of consuming the given brands' offerings (Keller, 1998).

### Place Branding

Place branding has materialised as a result of the consumers' acknowledgement of service brands (Moilanen and Rainisto, 2009). Therefore, scholars also performed researches to analyse the possibility of branding places. According to Qu, Kim and Im (2011), places or destinations can also be branded in the way that goods or services are branded. Besides, Ekinci (2003) mention the increase in the arguments for branding concepts on people, places and countries.

The definition of brand is made as a remarkable and symbolic means for persuading consumers to make the purchase of the offerings of a certain company (Parkerson and Saunders, 2005). Besides, the offering has common qualities and a collective meaning (Parkerson and Saunders, 2005). Furthermore, it is considered as a channler for communication which sources from the companies and their clients (Lucarelli and Berg, 2011). In the view of Dinnie (2011), as brand is a tool for communication, it is attributed to the products and services which are used in society. Therefore, the scholar indicates that tourism can be considered as a way of service which is used as a cluster; it is possible to apply branding in tourism sector in order to deliver certain messages to consumers (Dinnie, 2011). Likewise, Pike (2008) argue that tourism is a product which has various facets in the need of potent contribution and a broad investigation. In this sense, branding within the tourism sector helps clients to decrease the time used for searching and making decisions (Pike, 2008).

Besides, as Balakrishnan (2008) indicate, branding places allows for developing product images for potential clients. Once the factors which indicate the need for branding in tourism, it is required to define the concepts of destination branding and place branding (Balakrishnan, 2008).

According to Marzano and Scott (2009), a destination brand is a tag, sign, characteristic or another vision that identifies and differentiates the destination. Besides, destination brand delivers messages to the consumers in the pledge of an exceptional travel involvement that can only be experienced in the given destination (Marzano and Scott, 2009).

Baker (2007) considers places through being individually involved or through the usage of presentations given by the press. The analysis of places develops as a result of the steps in the consumers' thoughts (Baker, 2007). The first step is intentional partaking which stands for the participation in the formulation of a city plan. The second step is analysing the attitudes of the other people who have got involved with the given places. The third step includes evaluating a place by means of assessing how it is reflected in the press, visuals, films, books and so on (Jago et al., 2003).

Blain, Levy and Ritchie (2005) suggest that place branding is related to an overall brand strategy along with alternative marketing approaches and patterns concerning a place. On the other hand, a number of academics argue that it is not possible to regard places as products since places have a structure comprising of various facets (Pike, 2005). Similarly, Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2006) indicate that places cannot be branded due to the fact that it is not possible to consider them as products. In line with this, the governments of the given destinations cannot be regarded as the producers of the products and the tourists cannot be considered as consumers since they only make use of the place but do not consume it.

Besides, Pike (2005) argues that it is complicates and difficult to brand places or destinations when compared to product or service branding. Pike (2005) proposes six major reasons for his argument. The first one is destinations have heterogeneous features unlike products or services. Besides, there are a high number of interest groups concerning destinations which involve the local people, tourists, travel agencies and political rulers and so on.

As political rulers are one of the main interest groups concerning a destination and the consequences of political judgements have a direct impact on the destination, the traditional branding models to turn irrelevant in relation with destinations. Furthermore, branding concerning a particular destination may result in the disturbance of common interests and emergence of conflicts within the community. Besides, it is possible that destination loyalty is partial. Moreover, destination branding calls for considerable investment of financial resources which may be difficult to fulfil (Pike, 2005).

Despite being in agreement with these academics, Morgan, Pritchard and Pride (2002) also argue that destination branding can be possible with several challenges. According to Morgan, Pritchard and Pride (2002), it is necessary to assess a destination either partially or wholly due to the fact that it is possible for a place to have a prestige as a whole or through individual services or provisions which possess their own standing separate from the total prestige of the destination. Besides, it is also possible for a destination to offer specific and exclusive involvements for each tourist visiting (Ashworth and Voogt, 1994) due to the fact that they possess various features including historical places, shopping, entertainment or sports and so

on. These different characteristics can be employed by all people such as the local community or individuals who possess a certain liking for the offerings (Ashworth and Voogt, 1994).

Due to the factors mentioned above, it is challenging to brand destinations as different consumer fractions can visit and use a certain destination. Like mentioned before, the purpose of branding is to generate visions of the product in the minds of the consumers. Therefore, branding places and destinations is also based on creating certain images in people's minds (Blain, Levy and Ritchie, 2005). In addition to this, as individuals' involvements can differ from one person to another, evidently, the images which are created throughout the involvement will be different from each other (Blain, Levy and Ritchie, 2005).

### **City Branding**

Braun, Kavaratzis and Zenker (2013) argue that when branding cities, it is critical to develop uniqueness which can be observed compared to alternative destinations. In the view of the scholars, the uniqueness developed should surpass developing awareness in communities due to the fact that it will allow for additional developments such as economic investments and so on (Braun, Kavaratzis and Zenker, 2013).

Barun (2012) suggest that there are apparently unique city brands including those of Paris, Rome or New York where every one of these brands offers promises for helping the decision making process of the clients. As soon as the distinctive image is united with the name of the city, the prices offered in the city will increase due to the fact that the involvement flourishes through the offered characteristics (Barun, 2012).

Scott et al. (2011) note that image has importance in outlining the relationship of a person with a city. In spite of the fact that a part of a city can generally be considered as significant, it is possible that a person can have the opposite idea due to the fact that every single person has different features resulting from their demographic and cultural background (Hudson and Brent Ritchie, 2009). A person may consider a place important while another person may think the opposite. Hence, since every single person has a different point of view in terms of evaluating things, their thoughts as well as meanings they attribute to a place will also be different (Kolb, 2006). In this sense, when developing a city image, developing various minor images is necessary (Kolb, 2006).

Depending on the descriptions above, it is possible to argue that branding a city is possible despite its complications (Gnoth, 2002). The Tourism Segmentation Model of Jafari (1982) is recognised as a useful tool to analyse city branding. The academic suggests that the distinctive features of a city can be better understood through classifying the city's offerings into factors which should be further categorised into smaller segments (Jafari, 1982).

The offerings of a city can be divided into two categories that aim at local people and tourists (Konecnik and Go, 2008), whereas the identified factors are socio-cultural such as history, customs and so on; natural features like the geographic position, climate and so on; and built up features including the buildings, shopping centres and religious figures and so on (Konecnik and Go, 2008).

## METHODOLOGY

In this study Tourism and Destination Branding Tool was used. This tool was developed by Hugh Wilkins, Bill Merrilees and Carmel Herrington on behalf of the Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC) Australia. "This tool is the basis for understanding the criteria pertinent to establishing a destination brand and the role of destination brand and image as a motivator for destination vacation choice" (STCRC, 2014).

Accordingly, questionnaire was designed and distributed to randomly chosen 383 British people. Sample size was achieved through using sample size calculator over the internet. However, only 100 questionnaires was totally filled by the participants and therefore, only those were included in the analysis. Indeed, people who have not visited Beirut were not included in the analysis. Questionnaires were done face-to-face and distributed in London and the process took around 30 days.

In the analysis, descriptive statistics were used just as it is used in STCRC study. Tourists' general expectations from the short and long term holidays were determined and compared with the results of experience gained in Beirut. Following table presents the demographic characteristics of the participants:

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants'**

		Frequency	Percent			Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	56	%56	Employment Status	Full time	37	%37
	Female	44	%44		Part time	23	%23
Age	18-25	21	%21	Having Dependent Children	Casual	5	%5
	26-35	31	%31		Not employed	12	%12
	36-45	18	%18		Retired	7	%7
	46-55	15	%15		Self employed	16	%16
	56-65	13	%13		Yes	34	%34
	65+	2	%2		No	66	%66
	Relationship Status	Single	36		%36	Approximate gross combined household income	Less than £25 000
Couple		64	%64	£25 000-35 000	9		%9
Highest Level of Completed Education	Completed high school	14	%14	£35 001-45 000	18		%18
	Certificate of diploma	17	%17	£45 001-55 000	13		%13
	Trade qualification	7	%7	£55 001-75 000	16		%16
	University / college degree	50	%50	£75 001 - 150 000	13		%13
	Post graduate degree	12	%12	Greater than £150 000	14		%14

**ANALYSIS AND RESULTS****Importance of Destination Characteristics when Selecting a Destination for a Short Break (2–4 days) or Longer Holiday (5+ days)****Table 2: Descriptive Statistics / Short Breaks (i.e. 2–4 days)**

	N		Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
	Valid	Missing					
Comfortable	100	0	4.16	5.00	1.135	1	5
Exciting	100	0	4.12	4.00	.956	2	5
Relaxing	100	0	4.37	4.00	.691	3	5
Dynamic	100	0	4.09	4.00	1.074	1	5
Quiet	100	0	4.11	5.00	1.154	1	5
Cosmopolitan	100	0	4.06	4.00	1.099	2	5
Safe	100	0	4.13	4.50	1.125	1	5
Urban	100	0	4.20	4.50	1.005	1	5
Unspoilt	100	0	4.06	4.00	1.052	1	5
Natural	100	0	4.29	5.00	.868	2	5
Friendly	100	0	3.71	4.00	1.175	1	5
Educational	100	0	4.19	5.00	1.143	1	5
Fun	100	0	4.57	5.00	.573	3	5

According to the results, fun, relaxing and natural beauty is the mostly looked characteristics of a place when British people look for a short holiday. They do not mostly look for a friendly environment and cosmopolitan places.

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics / Longer Holidays (i.e. 5+days)**

	N		Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
	Valid	Missing					
Comfortable	100	0	4.61	5.00	.490	4	5
Exciting	100	0	4.12	4.00	.956	2	5
Relaxing	100	0	4.37	4.00	.691	3	5
Dynamic	100	0	4.11	4.00	.984	2	5
Quiet	100	0	4.17	5.00	1.120	1	5
Cosmopolitan	100	0	4.11	5.00	1.171	2	5
Safe	100	0	4.38	5.00	1.013	1	5
Urban	100	0	4.20	4.50	1.005	1	5
Unspoilt	100	0	4.06	4.00	1.052	1	5
Natural	100	0	4.33	5.00	.829	2	5
Friendly	100	0	3.79	4.00	1.122	1	5
Educational	100	0	4.19	5.00	1.143	1	5
Fun	100	0	4.55	5.00	.609	3	5



In their longer holidays, British people mostly look for a comfortable place and the places where they can have fun. However, again, friendly atmosphere is not the requirement of most of the British people in their longer stays.

### Importance of Features when Selecting a Destination for a Short Break (2–4 days) or Longer Holiday (5+ days)

**Table 4: Descriptive Statistics / Short Breaks (i.e. 2–4 days)**

	N		Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
	Valid	Missing					
Surf and sand	100	0	4.09	4.00	1.074	1	5
Good shopping	100	0	3.78	4.00	1.115	1	5
Good restaurants	100	0	4.06	4.00	1.099	2	5
Spectator sport	100	0	3.81	4.00	1.032	1	5
Nightlife and entertainment	100	0	4.24	4.50	.976	1	5
Theatres and cinemas	100	0	4.03	4.00	1.068	1	5
Sport facilities	100	0	4.29	5.00	.868	2	5
Golf-courses	100	0	3.62	4.00	1.196	1	5
Outback landscape	100	0	4.19	5.00	1.143	1	5
Good accommodation	100	0	4.60	5.00	.550	3	5

Night life and entertainments, sports facilities and good accommodation are the mostly looked features of the British people when selecting their short breaks. Shopping and golf are rather over looked by many British people in their short term holidays.

**Table 5: Descriptive Statistics / Longer Holidays (i.e. 5+days)**

	N		Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
	Valid	Missing					
Surf and sand	100	0	4.22	4.00	.960	2	5
Good shopping	100	0	4.07	4.00	.685	3	5
Good restaurants	100	0	4.53	5.00	.577	3	5
Spectator sport	100	0	3.81	4.00	1.032	1	5
Nightlife and entertainment	100	0	4.24	4.50	.976	1	5
Theatres and cinemas	100	0	4.03	4.00	1.068	1	5
Sport facilities	100	0	4.29	5.00	.868	2	5
Golf-courses	100	0	3.62	4.00	1.196	1	5
Outback landscape	100	0	4.30	5.00	.916	2	5
Good accommodation	100	0	4.68	5.00	.469	4	5

Night life and entertainments, sports facilities, good accommodation, good restaurants and surf and sand are the mostly looked features of the British people when selecting their long holidays. Golf and spectator sports are rather over looked by many British people when selecting their longer holidays.

**Table 6: Visiting Beirut**

Visiting Beirut				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	100	100.0	100.0	100.0

People who have not visited Beirut were not included in the analysis. Therefore, all 100 participants have visited the city once in a while.

**Table 7: Reasons for Visits**

Reasons for Visits					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Leisure/Holiday	62	62.0	62.0	62.0
	Business	22	22.0	22.0	84.0
	Combination of both	16	16.0	16.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Most of those visits were done for the holiday purposes.

**Table 8: Satisfaction with Stay in Beirut**

Satisfaction with Stay in Beirut					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Unsatisfied	6	6.0	6.0	6.0
	Unsatisfied	51	51.0	51.0	57.0
	Neutral	25	25.0	25.0	82.0
	Satisfied	13	13.0	13.0	95.0
	Very Satisfied	5	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

More than half of the visitors were unsatisfied with their stay in Beirut.



**Table 9: Likelihood of Returning to Beirut for a Holiday or Short Break**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Very Unlikely	10	10.0	10.0	10.0
Unlikely	52	52.0	52.0	62.0
Neutral	21	21.0	21.0	83.0
Likely	17	17.0	17.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Findings showed that most of the visitors are not planning to come to Beirut.

**Table 10: Importance of Destination Characteristics when Selecting a Destination for a Short Break (2–4 days) or Longer Holiday (5+ days) – Beirut Case**

	N		Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
	Valid	Missing					
Comfortable	100	0	2.38	2.00	1.196	1	5
Exciting	100	0	2.40	2.00	.888	1	4
Relaxing	100	0	2.28	2.00	1.120	1	5
Dynamic	100	0	2.41	2.00	1.074	1	5
Quiet	100	0	2.56	2.00	.988	1	5
Cosmopolitan	100	0	2.47	2.00	1.039	1	5
Safe	100	0	2.39	2.00	1.145	1	5
Urban	100	0	2.52	2.00	.969	1	5
Unspoilt	100	0	2.55	2.00	1.359	1	5
Natural	100	0	2.21	2.00	1.018	1	4
Friendly	100	0	2.79	3.00	1.175	1	5
Educational	100	0	2.42	2.00	1.165	1	5
Fun	100	0	2.59	2.00	1.026	1	5

When comparing the results with general expectations of the British people, it can be said that Beirut is far below the expectations. The city is not considered as fun and comfortable which are very important for the British people when they select their holidays.

**Table 11: Importance of Features when Selecting a Destination for a Short Break (2–4 days) or Longer Holiday (5+ days) – Beirut Case**

	N		Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
	Valid	Missing					
Surf and sand	100	0	2.42	2.00	1.130	1	5
Good shopping	100	0	2.33	2.00	1.016	1	5
Good restaurants	100	0	2.39	2.00	1.053	1	5
Spectator sport	100	0	2.47	2.00	.948	1	4
Nightlife and entertainment	100	0	2.45	2.00	1.140	1	5
Theatres and cinemas	100	0	2.49	2.00	.969	1	5
Sport facilities	100	0	2.36	2.00	1.020	1	5
Golf-courses	100	0	2.39	2.00	1.188	1	5
Outback landscape	100	0	2.50	2.00	1.096	1	5
Good accommodation	100	0	2.42	2.00	1.075	1	5

Again comparing the features, the city is not providing the accommodation needed by the British people and entertainment is not meeting the expectations.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this study, brand of Beirut is evaluated in the context of British consumers. Tourism and Destination Branding Tool was used in determining the questionnaire. Accordingly, questionnaire was designed and distributed to randomly chosen 383 British people. Sample size was achieved through using sample size calculator over the internet. However, only 100 questionnaires were totally filled by the participants and therefore, only those were included in the analysis. In the analysis, descriptive statistics were used just as it is used in STCRC study. In this perspective tourists' general expectations from the short and long term holidays were determined and compared with the results of experience gained in Beirut.

Findings showed that British people mostly look for fun and entertaining places which also have a good accommodation. In long holidays they also look for good restaurants and sport facilities. Nevertheless, Beirut is found by them as far below compare to their expectations. In fact, they were not satisfied with their stays in Beirut and not willing to come back to the city in the future. This result also showed itself in the drop of the tourist coming to the city. In this context number of preventive measures should be taken by the government urgently to correct this situation. In this context, first of all, entertainment activities should be increased in the city. The governors of the Beirut can introduce concepts like Disneyland and can increase the tourist coming into the city. In addition, accommodation quality in the city should be increased by providing low interest rate loans to the hotels by the government. Sport facilities within the hotels and city should also be improved. For the nightlife entertainments, new and exciting places openings should be encouraged and financed. Safety should also be improved by the government. After these improvements, brand image of the city should be increased through

establishing a public relations campaign. In doing this, city should be distinguished from the others. In fact, according to Marzano and Scott (2009), a destination brand is a tag, sign, characteristic or another vision that identifies and differentiates the destination. Besides, destination brand delivers messages to the consumers in the pledge of an exceptional travel involvement that can only be experienced in the given destination (Marzano and Scott, 2009). In the case of Beirut, culture, food and the fun (through opening new entertaining places) can be used. As it can be seen, there are many issues that the Lebanese government and the local governor should deal with. In this context, next study should be conducted for identifying what government is doing for improving the current situation.

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