

Branding and Positioning Strategy of New Businesses in Wellness Tourism: The Identity Building in Competitive Market



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Abstract

The rapid growth of the global wellness tourism industry presents both opportunities and challenges for emerging businesses seeking to establish a unique market identity. This paper explores strategic branding and positioning approaches tailored for startups and small enterprises within this evolving sector. It emphasizes the increasing importance of authenticity, sustainability, and personalized experiences as core values influencing consumer behavior. The paper highlights how digital branding, influencer marketing, and experiential brand building foster deeper emotional connections and trust among wellness consumers by referring to the examples of global cases, the recommendations of the practical branding solutions are implied to startups, such as the storytelling, customization, and compliance with environmental-friendly endeavors. The research also presents the stepwise strategic framework that startups should follow to develop differentiation and credibility within the competitive market environment. The findings underscore that successful brand development in wellness tourism must transcend traditional marketing by integrating wellness ideologies with modern digital engagement strategies. Ultimately, a well-executed branding and positioning framework grounded in consumer values and data analytics is essential for long-term sustainability and competitive advantage in this niche market.

1. Introduction

Wellness tourism across the world has reached a new boom and in recent years there has been a sharp rise due to more and more consumers becoming aware towards their health, self-care and overall well-being. Wellness tourism is described as a type of travel linked with the actions of individuals to maintain or improve personal well-being and includes a wide range of activities that meet this description e.g. spa treatments, yoga, and meditation retreats, nature and rural healing and wellness practices such as Ayurveda, and Traditional Chinese Medicine (Global Wellness Institute [GWI], 2023). With increased customers demanding healing and refreshing tourism, new industries are exploiting these growing opportunities. Nevertheless, in order to thrive in this highly competitive and value-oriented industry, they need to put in place effective branding strategies and positioning, which portrays the essence of wellness and appeal to targeted consumer segments.

Positioning and branding is not a marketing process only but vital towards developing brand identity that conveys the notion of trust, authenticity, and differentiation which are all driving factors in consumer preference in wellness tourism (Kotler et al., 2021). Within the digital era and customers being massively dependent upon reviews online, social media, and digital storytelling, the development of a strong brand narrative is imperative. The new wellness tourism brands are faced with the challenge of differentiating themselves in an overcrowded marketplace, at the same time as aligning with the desires of consumers in their ethical sustainable and personalized tourism experiences (Smith & Puczkó, 2014).

Technology aspects such as digital branding, use of influencers, and insights have now become crucial in development of brand perception and customer loyalty. When moving into the market, effective use of such tools can help close the distance between market entry and brand discovery (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). In addition, wellness tourism companies, which implement positioning approaches promoting the unique value propositions, i.e., nature-friendly retreat, culturally-based healing practices, or mental shaping activities, can achieve niche dominance and sustainable performance.

In this paper, the author will look into the branding and positioning strategies of an emerging business in the wellness tourism industry. The study will provide valuable information to new ventures, in the form of practical lessons, in terms of how they can research and establish an effective brand, as well as position themselves, within the international wellness tourism industry.

2. Objectives

- To examine the significance of branding and positioning of a new venture in the wellness tourism sector.
- To explore how digital media, influencer marketing, and experiential branding help to increase brand awareness and consumer contact.
- To suggest strategic branding solutions to start ups and small businesses that need to create a solid presence in the wellness tourism industry.
- To recommend an elaborate branding plan specifically to startups and MSMEs within the wellness tourism industry.

3. Review of Literature

The Global Wellness Institute (GWI) has estimated that the wellness tourism sector would hit the \$1 trillion mark in 2024; it is estimated to rise to 1.4 trillion by 2027. Branding and positioning have turned out to be a strategic instrument with this growth and particularly in upcoming businesses that want to develop an image and publicity in the competitive world.

The concept of branding plays a crucial role in shaping perception of consumers and developing trust in the field of wellness tourism. Kotler et al. (2021) establish that a good brand assists in ensuring that the core values of a business are communicated, establish an emotional connection between them and the consumers, and separate the offerings in the crowded market. When it comes to wellness tourism, brands have to incorporate trustworthiness, sustainability, and holistic health (Smith & Puczk, 2014). Such values do not only appeal to health-conscious travelers, but also creates long term loyalty.

New wellness tourism ventures may find it difficult to present a well-defined brand profile. Gilmore and Pine (2007) express the importance of authenticity as one of the prerequisites of experience-based brand strategy in such industries as wellness tourism. When founded on local culture, age-old traditions of healing, and eco-sensitive design, authenticity can significantly boost the credibility of the brands and the consumer appeal.

Positioning can be defined as how a brand is liked in the mind of the consumers compared to other brands (Ries & Trout, 2001). Positioning can also be carried out through unique products like Ayurvedic retreats, digital detox packages, or bespoke mental wellness packages in case of new businesses in wellness tourism. Such niche services enable firms to focus on particular market segments and not to run directly into big players who are already established in business.

According to Kotler and Keller (2016), a strong position needs to build upon a well-understood value offering - what a brand specifically is offering and why it is important to the target clientele. As part of the wellness tourism trend, there is an increasing level of positioning consistent with the larger social and environmental

issues, such as sustainable tourism, involvement in local communities and mental health awareness (UNWTO, 2020).

Online marketplaces also play an oversized role in consumer preference in the world of the digital age. According to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019), social media, websites, and online reviews form an important part of digital branding that forms a significant influence on brand identity. Wellness travelers are also relying now on digital content to determine the credibility and the attractiveness of the wellness destination. The art of telling stories through a visual language, consumer testimonials and the power of influencers can make a big impact on expanding brand reach, and the decision to purchase.

Keller (2013) also notes that it is important to manage brand equity in the digital, where messaging consistency and consistency of visual identity led to greater brand recognition and preference. Micro-influencers and user-generated content are effective ways to use a small budget to brand a company, especially the new ones (Freberg, 2021).

Consumer behavior is a crucial element of developing successful branding and positioning strategies. Stress reduction, preventive health care, self-discovery, and getting in touch with nature, are the typical motivators of wellness tourists (Voigt et al., 2011). Brands which overlap their message and their experience with these motivations are likely to be more successful. Through analytics tools and customer feedback systems, firm can tailor products based on customer response to enhance customer satisfaction hence grow brand allegiance (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019).

In addition, health and wellness consumers are quite demanding and are interested in supporting values that are clear, socially conscious, and ethical (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2010). New enterprises, therefore, need to make sure that the whole process of branding appeals sincerely to these values and cannot be seen as a mere marketing gimmick.

4. The Relevance of Branding and Positioning in Wellness Tourism Ventures

1. Competitive Market Differentiation

The wellness tourism market is growing at a significant rate and tourists are more concerned with the demand in wellness tourism experience, either to improve physical, mental, and spiritual health. Branding and positioning can position a new venture in a crowded market because they can make the Unique offering very clear, such as Ayurveda retreats in India, yoga and mindfulness camps in Bali, or high-level spa getaways in Switzerland. This distinction appeals to target markets fitting the brand in terms of its core values and offerings (Chen, Prebensen, & Huan, 2018).

2. Building Trust and Credibility

The topic of wellness tourism entails personal and individual experiences. Emotional trust promoted by a strong and consistent brand is the ingredient that helps to attract health-conscious travelers and who care more about safety, hygiene, and authenticity. A good reputation creates a trusting relationship between the customers and the brand by making it known that the company is transparent, resulting in more bookings and positive word-of-mouth (Global Wellness Institute, 2023).

3. Attracting the Right Target Audience

Strategic positioning will make sure that marketing is used in a way that it appeals to a particular niche in the wellness tourism market- say eco-friendly travelers, luxury travelers or even spiritual pilgrims. Such interest assists in building custom-made experience and offers that would work better in aligning with the customer demands (Voigt & Pforr, 2014).

4. Increasing Strength of Customer Loyalty

A good corporate wellness brand establishes good brand association and builds an emotional relationship with the customers, resulting in repeat business and branding. When customers find a connection between a brand philosophy-holistic healing, sustainability, or wellness within a community, they are more inclined to be faithful clients (Pike & Page, 2015).

5. Strategic and Economic Benefits

Effective branding will enable wellness tourism projects to achieve high prices and remain profitable in face of uncertain economic situations. It also offers bargaining power in arranging associate wellness practitioners, lodging places and travel agents (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 2016).

5. In What Way Digital Media, Influencer Marketing and Experiential Branding Increases Brand Awareness and Consumer Engagement

1. Digital Media

Digital media includes the webs, social media platforms, blogs, email marketing and digital ad display sites. These tools enable businesses to be continually visible to consumers and therefore raise visibility and engagement with your brand.

Impact:

- It permits two-way interaction between brands & consumers where consumers can explicitly communicate with brands and offer immediate feedback.
- Digital media platforms like Instagram, YouTube and Facebook, enable companies to interact with global clients with precise messages.
- Furthermore, digital media also allows us to collect data on consumer behavior and preferences (Chaffey, D., & Ellis-Chadwick, F. (2019)).

2. Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing involves the usage of individuals strong online presence (influencers) to market the products or services of a brand. Influencers develop trust and earnestness, and their recommendations are easier to relate to and more effective than any ordinary advertising.

Impact:

- Influencers are able to influence consumer behavior through perception and trial.
- Customers usually value advice given by influencers more than they value brand input.
- It assists brands in marketing to niche market in an efficient way with the help of specific influencers (Brown, D., & Hayes, N. (2008)).

3. Experiential Branding

Experiential branding is about memorable and emotional experience on brand senses. That can include in-person events, interactive pop-ups, brand activations, or virtual reality (VR) campaign.

Impact:

- It causes a more emotional involvement of the consumer and the brand.
- Those consumers which have positive brand experiences tend to become loyal brand advocates.
- It makes brand experiences memorable so that the consumer will tell other people about them, increasing word-of-mouth marketing (Schmitt, B. (2011)).

6. Strategic Branding Approaches to Startups and Small Companies in the Wellness Tourism Sector

Small and new ventures in the wellness tourism industry have twofold challenges they must all deal with by competing against established brands and gaining the confidence of health-conscious customers. Strategic branding is necessary in order to establish a market presence. In order to convert the objectives into actionable results, wellness tourism startups and small businesses are to adhere to a step-by-step approach to branding and positioning their business.

1. Develop a Good Brand Name

A brand name must have a good logo, tagline, design scheme and value alignment. As an example, Six Senses Resorts and Spas have developed the images of wellness, sustainability, and cultural immersion on the local basis. Their branding is focused on sustainable practices, using natural materials to design, and unified brand voice based on the idea of holistic healing (Kotler and Keller, 2016). This brand has made Six Senses a high-end wellness brand in the world.

2. Storytelling As an Emotional Binding

Storytelling creates trust and emotional appeal to consumers. Ananda in the Himalayas (India) has been able to employ brand storytelling by emphasizing the roots in the Ayurveda, Yoga and Vedanta traditions. Its story relates the well-being to the Indian spirituality and natural healing, which make it genuine and attractive to the entire world (Gilmore & Pine, 2007). This bond is also enhanced by sharing customer transformation stories on such digital platforms.

3. Paid Content Marketing and Digital Media

The digital-first strategy will guarantee awareness and interaction with consumers. The Body Holiday, Saint Lucia employs integrated digital media approach based on the content written with the help of the SEO and interactive websites and wellness blogs. They present personal wellness stories of guests through Instagram campaigns and stories on YouTube. As a digital brand, this has helped the resort to appeal to health-conscious millennials and develop a global presence (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

4. Influencer and Micro-Influencer Partnerships

Influencer partnership offers niche and credibility. Yoga Barn in Bali collaborates with micro-influencers in yoga, wellness and spirituality. These influencers post on Instagram and YouTube their retreats and create

genuine peer recommendations. Studies have established that clients appreciate influencer promotions over brand-led campaigns (Brown and Hayes, 2008). These alliances enable startups to have low-cost visibility in competitive markets.

5. Experiential Branding and Personalization

Experience branding leaves a long-term memory which turns a visitor into a supporter. Kamalaya Wellness Sanctuary (Thailand) offers custom-made wellness services like detox, stress management and sleep improvement programs to guests based on profile information. This personalized experience creates emotional bonding and loyalty of customers. Serene buildings and custom-created retreats are some of the experiential touchpoints that are the extensions of brand identity (Schmitt, 2011).

6. Social Responsibilities and Sustainability

Sustainability increases the trust of wellness travelers. Chiva-Som international health resort (Thailand) uses its branding to integrate eco-friendly operations, interaction with the local community, and organic food sourcing. This branding strategy is in line with the principles of ethical consumers who are increasingly demanding socially responsible wellness experiences (Font & McCabe, 2017). The certifications and awards of Chiva-Som focus on sustainability as a branding tool.

7. Proposed Startup and MSME Branding Plan

1. Define the Core Identity

MSMEs and start-ups need to start their branding process by establishing their vision, mission, core values and unique value proposition (UVP). These pillars create the identity of the business and convey how the business is distinguished in a competitive business environment (brandlogg.com).

2. Learn what the Target Audience is

It is necessary to have a thorough knowledge of the target audience. Business owner must also carry out extensive research on demographic, psychographic, and behavioral profiles of their consumers, cultural tastes, and buying preferences. Such knowledge assists in making sure that the branding activities are compatible with customer requirements (brandlogg.com).

3. Carry out Competitive Analysis

Startups are encouraged to undertake systematic research on direct and indirect competition where the positioning of their brands, strengths and weaknesses of the competition is evaluated. It helps companies to recognize market gaps and all possible differentiation opportunities and does not involve imitation but rather creates a unique brand presence in the market (www.designerpeople.com).

4. Design Visual Branding and Strategy

Professional visual identity is created with the help of a logo, color palette, typography, imagery, and tagline to make sure that the brand remains recognizable and consistent. In conjunction with this, entrepreneurs are advised to build a consistent brand messaging policy, which specifies the tone of voice and narrative style that will be used in all communication channels (www.cpluz.com).

5. Create an Online Presence

Digital presence is crucial to startups and MSMEs. This will involve coming up with a professional, friendly, and search engine optimized web site that will represent the brand identity and values. The selection and use of social media platforms must be strategic and regular to present the stories of the brand, interact with the customers and increase visibility (www.protium.co.in).

6. Apply Economical Branding instruments

Startups with low resources may implement relatively inexpensive branding methods like Google My Business, WhatsApp Business, and free design tools to enhance the presence. Moreover, inexpensive programs like branded wrapping, display, and business stationery help strengthen the brand awareness of customers (www.protium.co.in).

7. Provide Regular Brand Experience

There should be consistency in all customer touchpoints in order to establish credibility. The brands should make sure that the product design, customer service, digital communication, and physical materials of a business reflect its brand values and thus form a coherent and credible brand experience (brandlogg.com).

8. Include the Storytelling and the Emotional Branding

Entrepreneurs are encouraged to create an emotional bond with customers sharing real stories about the way of the company, its mission, and values. Customer testimonials and user experiences can also be used as a form of storytelling to show how the brand can bring value to the lives of people (blog.startupstash.com).

9. Monitor, Measure, and Adapt

The success of branding activities should be evaluated by the number of visits to websites and social media use by the startup, customer reviews and feedback as a tool to measure the success of their efforts. This knowledge can be used to optimize the branding strategies and provide flexibility in response to the changing customer demands and market dynamics (cpluz.com).

10. Capitalize on Local Commercial and Authenticity

Startups must present the elements of regional culture, language, and design in the branding to establish better ties with the community. Ethical business and partnership with the community contributes to credibility and trustworthiness, which increase customer loyalty and brand recognition (cpluz.com).

11. Re-allocate Resources Strategically

Lastly, MSMEs and startups need to focus on allocating resources towards branding. Initial stages should invest most and allocate financing in foundational elements like brand identity, digital presence, and messages. As the business expands, more funds may be allocated to sophisticated branding activities and scaling plans (www.protium.co.in.).

8. Conclusion

As the wellness tourism industry becomes more competitive, new companies have to go beyond the traditional forms of marketing and adopt strategic branding and position to be noticed. Since wellness travelers value authenticity, sustainability and custom experiences, brands that instill these practices in their identity and operations will have a stronger chance of success. Digital media, influencer marketing, and experiential branding have been a turning point of increasing the brand visibility, emotional connection, and customer engagement. As much as these tools aid in narrowing the distance between market entry and consumer loyalty, they also place new ventures as viable and reliable alternative to an overly populated place.

The strategic brand solutions, including transparent identity creation, narrative building, online interactions, sustainability laws, and targeted niche, help startups and small companies to create differentiation meaningfully. Besides, brands with the core values that resonate with the key motivations of the wellness travelers, including emotional transformation, self-care, and ethical values build much closer relationships and develop long-term relationships with customers.

Finally, wellness tourism branding and positioning requires a combination of purposeful messaging, offerings that rely on local cultures, and the use of innovative digital communication. Powered by intimate knowledge of the market and market trends behind them, these strategies can result in long-term competitive advantage, as well as brand equity.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript.

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