i-SITEs and the Implementation of Authentic Sustainable Strategies: 100% Pure Rhetoric?

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Research Question

In what ways do New Zealand tourism organisations translate the 100% Pure 'clean-green' branding campaign into authentic sustainable management strategies. What are the sustainability practices, policies and perceptions of these organisations?

- To answer this research question the following will be considered:
  1. What are the drives and constraints of the strategic sustainability policies and procedures?
  2. How are sustainability strategies implemented from the top-down and the ground-up to ensure authenticity and embeddedness?
  3. What is the influence of management and employee buy-in, attitudes and personal values?

GAP

- The focus of this research is to investigate process by which ecological sustainable strategies are implemented and embedded throughout an organisation.

- A criticism of 'green' strategies is that they may be superficial rather than embedded, and open to accusations of 'greenwash'

- The tourism industry provides an ideal context to examine these issues when its strategy for competitive advantage is differentiate by adopting a 'green' image and 'authentic' imagery and engagement with the natural environment.

Literature Review

- The literature reviewed for this research is in two parts.

- An investigation of sustainability from a business perspective, with particular reference to the tourism industry.

- Strategy is explored from the perspectives of top-down and bottom-up implementation

Research Methodology

- This research used interpretivist and qualitative data collection and analysis tools and techniques

- This research data was obtained using two approaches:

  - A multiple case studies technique

  - Observation of the i-SITE buildings; a place where tourists interact with the 100% Pure brand

- Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts was undertaken to identify, analyse and report patterns (themes) within the data

Findings

Sustainability and Authenticity: Participant's Concepts and Actions

- Sustainability: a comparison of key words and phrases

Key Words	Participants	Literature Reference
Environment and Environmental	Manager: F Information Consultant: L, N, S	Schianetz *et al.*, 2007, p. 374 Soteriou & Coccossis, 2010, p. 191
Conservation	Manager: E Information Consultant: N, P	Roberts & Tribe, 2008, p. 584
Preservation	Information Consultant: P	Roberts & Tribe, 2008, p. 584
Ecology	Information Consultant: S	Timur & Getz, 2009, p. 221 Brown & Stone, 2007, p. 716 Soteriou & Coccossis, 2010, p. 191
Pollution	Information Consultant: Q	Mackoy *et al.*, 1997, p. 38
Managing resources	Manager: E, F, H Information Consultant: M, P	Timur & Getz, 2009, p. 221
Natural resources	Manager: E	Schianetz *et al.*, 2007, p. 374

Findings

Sustainability and Authenticity: Participant's Concepts and Actions

- Participant Responses to Home Action Quick Questions

Action	Participant's Responses				
	Always	Mostly	Often	Sometimes	Never
Conserve Energy	10	0	3	1	0
Use Energy Efficient Light-Bulbs	4	3	0	3	4
Conserve Water	6	0	0	2	6
Recycle	9	2	1	1	1
Compost	6	0	0	2	6
Use Reusable Food Containers	7	3	2	0	2
Avoid Excessive Packaging or Use Reusable Bags	5	4	2	1	1
Disposing of Durables	6	4	0	1	3

Findings

Sustainability and Authenticity: Participant's Concepts and Actions

- Authentic: a Comparison of Key Words

Key Words	Participants	Literature Reference
Real	Managers: E, G, H Information Consultants: P, R, T	Yeoman *et al.*, 2007 Beverland & Farrelly, 2009 Leigh, Peters & Shelton, 2006
Original	Manager G Information Consultants: M, P, Q, S	Yeoman *et al.*, 2007
Genuine	Manager E Information Consultants: L, M	Beverland & Farrelly, 2009 Chronis & Hampton, 2008 Gardner *et al.*, 2011
Not copied, fake or imitation	Manager E Information Consultants: P, T	Yeoman *et al.*, 2007
Has a History	Managers: F, H Information Consultants: K, R	
Consistent	Information Consultants: K, P	
Pure	Information Consultant T	
Unique	Information Consultant Q	
Raw, rough around the edges	Information Consultant O	

Findings

The Physical Environment and Third-Party Accreditation

- "Increasing number of tourists, particularly from overseas, particularly from Europe … are particularly asking for eco-friendly products or products that have been Qualmark assessed."

(Manager G)

- Most participants suggested that looks and comfort levels of the i-SITE was more important than energy efficiency.

- The i-SITE with a Silver Enviro Award had few features that were easily identifiable and observable as being sustainable.

Barriers to Implementing and Embedding Authentic Sustainability Strategies

1. The communication of strategies, polices, procedures, and practices at the i-SITEs from strategic leaders

- "There is probably a piece of paper somewhere in some folder that I haven't read, because I have been super busy."

  (Information Consultant N)

- "As the manager I think that you should take that on board to make sure that everyone is doing the right thing." (Manager M)

Barriers to Implementing and Embedding Authentic Sustainability Strategies

2. The process of bottom-up engagement

- Using a bottom-up or grassroots management approach has the ability to create "greater buy-in, increased expertise, energy and enthusiasm" (Kezar, 2012, p. 726)

- "You would have to be pretty passionate about it to put money out of your own pocket to start up a worm-farm."

(Information Consultant R)

- "I got the sustainable manager over from council to go through everything that we are doing and there was nothing they thought we should be doing more." (Manager H)

Barriers to Implementing and Embedding Authentic Sustainability Strategies

3. Strategic vision and commitment

- A solution to the limitations of either a top-down or bottom-up approach is to create a sustainability philosophy and culture that transcends the values, behaviours and actions of the whole organisation (Balmer et al., 2011)

- The creation of an organisational strategic vision, in this case linking 100% Pure with sustainability and environmental concern, will lead to more enduing changes in the organisation

- "Sustainability is kind of part-and–parcel of what we do." (Manager G)

Research Implications

- This research has shed new light on the understanding of the concepts of sustainability and authenticity in a tourism and differentiation strategy context.

- The implementation and the embedding of authentic sustainability strategies is reliant on a strong organizational vision and commitment, and that the whole organisation needs to be involved to implement authentic sustainability strategies.

Policy Recommendations

- TNZ are the guardians of the 100% Pure New Zealand brand, and as such have a duty to ensure that the imagery and philosophy of this brand are translated into a strategic vision.

- Local councils need to have more direct involvement with the management and employees of the i-SITE.

- Qualmark and the i-SITE Network both have a duty to educate and disseminate information relating to sustainability to the i-SITEs.

Acknowledgements

References

Balmer J, Powell S, Greyser S. 2011. Explicating ethical corporate marketing. Insights from the BP Deepwater Horizon catastrophe: The ethical brand that exploded and then imploded. *Journal of Business Ethics* **102:** 1-14. DOI:10.1007/s10551-011-0902-1

Kezar A. 2012. Bottom-up/top-down leadership: contradiction or hidden phenomenon. *The Journal of Higher Education* **83:** 725-760.