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## Editorial

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**Biographical note:** Rajagopal is a Professor of Marketing at Graduate Business School (EGADE), Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education (ITESM), Mexico, and a Visiting Professor at Boston University, USA. He is Life Fellow of the Royal Society for Encouragement of Arts, Manufacture and Commerce, London. His biography has been listed in various international directories since 2008. He received PhD from Ravishankar University, India. He has been conferred SNI III - the highest recognition of National Researcher of Mexican National System of Researchers by the National Council of Science and Technology, Government of Mexico. He has several scholarly books and research papers on marketing to his credit.

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In the growing competitive service marketplace, building brand image for intangible products has become a major challenge. Most leisure and tourism companies are engaged in co-creating brand image through proliferation of consumer experiences assuming that consumer-driven brand images are more sustainable than the print and digital advertisements. A sustainable brand image helps companies develop plans towards acquisition and retention of consumers. In the environment of locally grown leisure and tourism hubs offering an ethnic and sociocultural brand image, developing a mass brand appears to be difficult for companies. The growing fragmented local brands over the popular national and multinational destination brands, such as ecological and energy parks, have made it increasingly challenging for marketers to obtain quality interface on brands with consumers. As more customers rely on experience led brand promises, brand placement is grown considerably and is followed as a practice of integrating brands into public events, sales agents, local entertainment media particularly internet and embedded in short films. Brand placement engages consumers, overrides the self-bias notions and even impacts purchase behaviour - as evidence-based decision (Kohli and Thomas, 2011).

Many stakeholders in leisure and tourism industry including customers to investors and employees to salespeople believe that sustainability in building brand image is an important factor, which significantly influences the decision-making process towards buying services. In a dynamic and congested marketplace of leisure and tourism services, developing brand leadership is dichotomised by the fierce strategies of attaining brand and value leadership especially. The common mistake most emerging companies make is to link the brand leadership with cost and quality indicators, which adversely results into the value leadership. Such situation often flares a major gap between consumer perceptions, destination brand image and performance of the firm. Hence, most strategic

decision-oriented companies lean towards developing brand image integrating the consumer experience, value and involvement (Peloza et al, 2012).

The 360° channel strategy in leisure and tourism marketing encourages consumers towards convenience shopping based on experiential values embedded in the brand. However, few brands have closely examined the profitability of such efforts, and they promote high rate of consumer acquisition. Most effective brand images with competitive advantage for promotions coax prospecting consumers to make impulse decision to buy experiential services such as hospitality and transport. Luring online brands sometime turn counterproductive in reference to market share and profits against the experiential brands, which are co-created with consumers to drive significant difference. Leisure and tourism companies should also consider giving the online customers some incentives through a local store for pickup to develop the evidence of service brands rather than delivering contents to their personal addresses. Therefore, it can be argued that services are intangible, dynamic, experiential and need to be co-produced with real-time experience of customers and employees (Bitner et al, 2008). However, random growth of leisure and tourism service products has substantially increased the sense of freedom of decision but lowered the control on value realization. Thus, companies drive consumers to describe a service brand in experiential terms with reference to experiential motivation. Such convergence of service brands with consumer experiences would help brands grow laterally in the marketplace delivering value for money (Wolfenbarger and Gilli, 2001).

Some studies suggest that brand referrals pay significant role in driving consumer decisions towards buying. It can be argued that referred brands deliver more value to consumers than traditional brands. The higher the brand reference to a service brand, the higher the brand image. Conventionally, leisure and tourism brands are spread through the word of mouth and develop lifetime-value customers at a low pace, focus on customer satisfaction and use promotional programs that heavily rely on social media. Referral brands rely on disseminating information of satisfied/delighted customers as an experiential base, motivating prospecting customers towards high brand value. Major advantages of brand referral programs for service brands include greater credibility of consumer experience with the brand, peer recommendations over paid advertisements, access to new customers and better convergence of consumer needs to a service (Berman, 2016). It can be argued that the attributes of leisure and tourism brands shift in consumer culture provide a stimulus to dynamic innovation in the arena of personal taste and consumption. Accordingly, the brand images tend to reposition their consumer benefits. Such dynamism in consumer preferences is considered as a part of an international cultural system and is driven by the continuous change in value and lifestyle. The Relationships between satisfaction and behavioural intentions (intention to revisit, search for alternatives and word of mouth appears to be significant in general (Chandel and Bansal, 2014). Co-created service brands include learning, mobilising and realigning for new consumers that pave the way for successful institutionalisation of a strategic change initiative. These elements rely much more on an understanding of the mix of task-related, emotional and behavioural factors.

This issue of the journal includes five papers that address the brand image and consumer value perspectives in reference to destination image, experiential marketing, and consumer perception and satisfaction, eco-tourism and hospitality services. The above research papers represent study areas of India, China, Malaysia and West Africa. These papers discuss contemporary research propositions and attempt to establish convergence between the role of consumers and companies in managing buying decisions

in a competitive leisure and tourism marketplace. I hope the collection of research papers appearing in this issue will enrich the existing literature on the topic and stimulate future research.

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