

“Smile for me **Jamaica**”: A snapshot of **Kingston’s destination** image and the need for a **collaborative marketing** approach

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Objectives | The overall objective of this study was to analyse the perceptions of local tourism stakeholders in Kingston (Jamaica) about destination image and potential strategies for developing a more collaborative destination marketing model for tourism development. This abstract presents a summary analysis of the results after the first round of pilot study interviews conducted in Kingston, Jamaica (July 2013). The significance of this study is to initiate a process that provides an opportunity for the people of Kingston to promote the aspects of their culture that they feel would attract tourists to their communities and assist in the development of a collaborative destination marketing strategy. The focus of the project was identified in collaboration with Touch the Road due to their extensive experience in dealing with local tourism stakeholders in Kingston and because the philosophy of this company matched the desire to develop a bottom-up collaborative destination marketing approach.

Methodology | Given the exploratory nature of this project, qualitative research was identified as the most appropriate methodology to study the stakeholders perceptions of collaborative strategies and challenges currently facing increased international tourism to Kingston (Creswell, 2013). This study employs a phenomenological approach differing from positivist approaches in that the emphasis is on “grounded” theory development. This approach includes a more flexible approach to the research process where perspectives and interpretations of those being studied become the key to understanding the phenomenon being analysed (Finn, Elliot-White & Walton, 2000).

Six semi-structured interviews were conducted in Kingston, Jamaica including the following stakeholders: (i) the lead singer and brain behind Raging Fyah, an up and coming reggae band; (ii) the owner of a sound-system nightclub – a very integral component to Jamaica’s musical history – Kingston Dub Club; (iii) the director and tour coordinator of Trench Town

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Culture Yard; a tribute to downtown Kingston's influence in Reggae music throughout history; (iv) the credited pioneer of community tourism in Manchester Parish in central Jamaica who is also the President/Founder of the Countrystyle Community Tourism Network; (v) the Director of Product Development for Jamaica's Tourism Product Development Company, the certifying and training body that manages and grows Jamaica's tourism product; and (vi) the owner and head chef of Veggie Meals on Wheels, Kingston's first Rastafarian vegetarian (Ital) food truck. Non-random selection and snowball sampling were used to identify local tourism stakeholders for participation in this study. Interviews were recorded and ranged from 15 minutes to 90 minutes. For the purposes of this research, each of the researchers developed a detailed summary of responses and quotes for each question and then analysed each category of questions to present overall themes for analysis and discussion.

Main results and contributions |

Stakeholder involvement

The majority of the respondents note that online marketing and social media marketing will be important for the development of tourism related products and services in Kingston, Jamaica. One participant also noted that not everyone who might want to visit Kingston is technologically savvy so we should continue to invest in ways to support marketing efforts such as stickers, posters, radio, and television. There seemed to be a consensus that it is important for Jamaicans themselves to promote their culture and communities both within Jamaica and to an international audience. An interesting point was raised by the local musician that the best way to market Kingston is by performing shows there. For example he noted that local musicians and art forms should be better supported and encouraged to perform in Jamaica instead of paying large sums of money to bring in bands from other countries. He points out that there is an international demand for Jamaican reggae music that should be better supported in Jamaica.

Stakeholders also provided important feedback about their biggest challenges. A very unique perspective was that often Jamaicans do not support products that lack 'hype' or a 'current cultural relevance'. An example of this is how Jamaica's international association with Reggae Music is pervasive yet France seems to currently dominate cultural production and consumption in this genre, according to the entertainment stakeholders interviewed. Specifically the shift from reggae music to dancehall music has yet to resonate worldwide as much as reggae has. Since Jamaica's musical culture, particularly dancehall, was referenced so often the authors propose interviewing an additional stakeholder within the dancehall/entertainment industry, whether it is dance or music, in the next phase of this project.

Similar points were raised about the disintegration of Jamaica's sound system culture. Historically the sound system and its corollaries – street parties & live DJ events – were a vehicle for impoverished communities to generate income. From those who built 'the sound' to those who manned it and transported it, many made a decent enough living and could support their families. According to the owner of a local nightclub, he frequently worries about having his permits in order rather than focusing on running his own sound business—which most importantly require staying on top of the music. "Jamaica used to have a huge culture of building huge sound systems. But now a sound can't run or find any work because of the law [noise abatement act]. So I think the culture is being held back by that law." He even notes that travellers worldwide come to Jamaica to see what a real sound-system looks like and have a hard time finding anything authentic. "All over the world people want to learn how to build the sound that Jamaica started and sadly Jamaica is not even sustaining their own legacy in the sound business".

Another interviewee expressed exhaustion at the idea of promoting his music locally. He said it was difficult enough to sell his Reggae music to his own people locally never mind travellers who only visit for a week or less. He spends his time marketing his band internationally and booking tour dates abroad. When asked this question he said, "Who am I going to promote it to here? Most people in Jamaica don't go to the hotels where we would promote to tourists – and many tourists don't leave hotels to even get to see our music here – they get it when they are home and online."

For the one stakeholder that had gotten through the gatekeepers at Jamaica's most widely used tourism resource, the Jamaica Tourist Board (www.JTBoonline.org), they expressed grievances about the organization's follow-up regarding promoting their listings. Although they are a local community-based project that embodies the cultural heritage tourism product Jamaica espouses to support; they rely entirely on menial entry fees and donations from travellers. The manager even points out that despite their affiliation with promoting Bob Marley and his Trenchtown connections they've never collaborated with the Marley Foundation & Museum less than ten miles away.

Potential of tourism industry development in Kingston, Jamaica

Germaine to the discussion are the main challenges tourism stakeholders face in Kingston Jamaica. First and foremost all stakeholders agreed that the international perception of Kingston portrayed as a “Forbidden City” to travellers is damaging to business and discourages entrepreneurs from entering the market. There has been a recent push to attempt to rectify the global perception of Kingston but a cultural shift, to be discussed in the conclusions section, must occur in order for this to happen.

Related to the same cultural shift is the ongoing competition amongst all-inclusive, resorts, and local tourism practitioners. Often the resorts practice a fear-based rhetoric that is meant to keep travellers, and their foreign dollars, within their hotel walls. This practice of competition is damaging to the overall industry and prevents a collaborative spirit amongst practitioners particularly in Kingston.

Similarly, respondents noted that Jamaican government policies, tourism funding and recent legislation have historically favoured large all-inclusive resorts and long-time industry stakeholders. Emerging entrepreneurs, SME’s and MME’s are left to find their own devices and compete with largely supported Multi-National Corporations (MNC). The one avenue stakeholders have to participate in is the monthly Resort Board Meetings that were reinstated by the Ministry of Tourism in 2012. As of 2014 they are not yet implemented regularly as initially advertised. Likewise Kingston is known as the cultural and entertainment heartbeat of Jamaica yet noise abatement legislation and expensive permits prevent the planning and execution of musical and cultural events. Ironically travellers are drawn to Jamaica to experience these perceived “regular happenings” that aren’t actually happening. Due to stifling legislation these events are often locked off by police or well supported by the Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB) or Ministry of Tourism (MOT). These events are rooted deeply in Jamaica’s culture and musical history and should be a vehicle for economic growth and tourism development. While the Jamaican Tourism Board does seem to be working on more creative and innovative ways to promote Jamaica, the stakeholders in this study did not feel that enough was being done to get the message out about the potential of Kingston specifically.

Epistemic community involvement

Results for this portion of the interviews focused on community involvement and collaboration among stakeholders. Responses relate to perceptions of support of tourism products and services and a discussion about whether or not stakeholders are currently collaborating or should be collaborating more to better develop tourism in Kingston. In conclusion these stakeholders offered suggestions for more supportive and collaborative spaces for aiding tourism stakeholders in promoting their tourism products.

Like every good Jamaican ‘reasoning’ (a relaxing session where ideas are shared) each participant echoed a similar sentiment about the nature of collaboration that needed to exist among stakeholders in the future. Along with having a shared commitment to providing travellers, and most importantly their own people, with quality cultural heritage products and services; the participants agreed an industry wide cultural shift that embodies more reflectiveness, cooperation and transparency is vital if Jamaica is to remain competitive.

When asked if services and product development is currently supported the responses varied. Three of the respondents remarked that they had some support to develop products but do not have sufficient funds to market them. These same stakeholders felt that only larger events and location were promoted and that local artists and cultural venues do not get enough attention. One noted that artists in Jamaica are not paid nearly enough for their work but that musicians from around the world are brought there and paid huge salaries. Another remarked that they are not really interested in the commercial spotlight and that their product was created for Jamaicans first with the goal of reviving reggae music in Jamaica. He noted that he is glad that tourists do visit his location to experience music and that he would like his product to grow organically. One stakeholder said that his products are supported locally by his friends and family and that he is able to market well due to the solidarity and support for his product. He felt that without this local support he would not be able to stay open.

Their suggestions for adjusting the current collaborative strategies included: forums, avenues for sharing events, distributing money more equally among stakeholders, providing more opportunities for smaller business owners and entrepreneurs, adjusting legislation to be more inclusive and supportive of small entities, and encouraging stakeholders to share what they are doing so that everyone in the community benefits. The Jamaican Tourist Board remarked that they are currently working on finding ways to collaborate better and working on efforts to increase travel to Kingston.

Limitations | This study was limited to six semi-structured interviews and as a result of this, the above information cannot be generalised to all tourism stakeholders in Kingston, Jamaica. That being said, the information gathered and conclusions made are extremely important in the movement to increase awareness about tourism products and services in Kingston, Jamaica and provide a valuable resource for building a model for collaborative tourism development. Many of the concerns were consistent from one stakeholder to the next implying that more research is needed to build on this work.

Conclusions | It is clear from this research that the tourism stakeholders interviewed would value a more collaborative destination marketing approach and feel strongly that destination image is something that needs a considerable amount of work in Kingston. They seem frustrated with the lack of positive tourist and or cultural information about Kingston and felt strongly that Kingston has products and services that international tourists seek. These stakeholders would really like to see better support of their products and services and more accessible avenues for training and marketing their products. They recognise the importance of collaboration as a marketing strategy and hope for additional resources, education and support to do so. While they recognise the many challenges that Kingston still faces, they were all strong in their support to increase tourism development in Kingston so that its rich culture, diversity and history can be shared with international tourists.

In an attempt to discern conclusions that actually reflect a more representative examination of the current situation the authors agree more research must be done. Based on the Caribbean Tourism Organizations (CTO) (2004) Tourism Tree, future interviews will be collected representing nine industry branches that collectively make up Jamaica's larger tourism product. For the purpose of refining this study twelve qualitative interviews including both a SME stakeholder (small organizations) and MME stakeholder (medium to large organizations) will provide a more representative qualitative sample.

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