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Egyptian crises and destination brand image: the resurrection of the mummy

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ABSTRACT

Previous research has shown that a country's perceived image during and after the crisis affects tourism, yet the impact of communications on the holistic destination brand image in a sustained crisis remains limited. Based on a case study of Egypt of the Arab spring and the Covid-19 pandemic, this study investigates the effectiveness of strategies to alter one destination's image. Due to the recurring recoveries in Egyptian tourism, we believe that strengthening the resilience of the destination brand image during a prolonged crisis can offer valuable insights to practitioners and academics. The researchers conducted a media content analysis and a sentiment analysis of 3662 online and social media publications to gauge the alignment between Egypt's projected and perceived destination brand image. While the tourism literature has primarily focused on crisis communication and strategies to alter a negative destination brand image, few studies have examined strategies that focus on building an enduring, resilient destination brand. This study offers a normative and exploratory model of Adaptable Destination Strategies during crises (ADS). The ADS model contributes to existing literature and destination management organizations by suggesting an integrated strategy toolkit for extended destination brand image governance grounded in diversification, collaboration, communication, and consistency.

Introduction

The tourism industry provides economic growth, employment, and sociological activity and is considered one of the most important industries worldwide. However, it is also one of the most vulnerable to crises and disasters (Avraham, 2020a; Fakhry, 2022). For example, before the Covid-19 pandemic, the tourism industry had contributed 10.4% ($9,170 bn) to the global GDP (Statista, 2021b; WTTC, 2021). Nonetheless, in the context of a crisis such as the pandemic, the tourism industry's delayed rebound compared to other businesses is justified by its impact on a destination's reputation and image, directly affecting its attractiveness (Cassedy, 1992). Previous research has identified two types of crises: unexpected and long-term, both negatively impacting a destination's image. (Avraham & Ketter, 2008; Avraham, 2020b). Crises can be short-term and sudden, such as natural disasters or epidemics, or long-term, such as political turmoil and high crime rates, resulting in a prolonged negative image.

Though research suggested increasing concern and recognition of destination marketing's impact on a destination's viability and success in tourism (Avraham, 2016), former studies on tourism crises primarily focused on individual post-crisis case studies lacking in long-term analysis of image restoration strategies throughout the years (Mair et al., 2014). This also resulted in a literature gap between theoretical findings on ongoing effective crisis communication for building reputational capital (Coombs, 2007) and decision-makers policies to alter a destination's negative attributions. Against the background of the unprecedented devastating impacts of the continuously evolving public health crisis, Covid-19 (UNWTO, 2021), destination marketing's conventional assumptions were further challenged. Moreover, according to Lee and Kim (2020), the crisis's sustained nature sheds light on the opportunity to contribute to a solid reputation by tackling the concept of destination brand image.

This study focuses on Egypt by exploring links between destination communication, image restoration strategies, destination brand image, and resilience. Since the Arab Spring in 2011, Egypt has witnessed a series of internal and external political conflicts and terrorist attacks. This resulted in constant instability and security concerns reported in the international media, impacting the destination image, negatively affecting tourists inbound (Avraham, 2016; Maher & El Fkharany, 2022; Karimi et al., 2022; Sharples et al., 2022; Statista, 2021a), and creating an ongoing tourism crisis environment. After a decline in tourist arrivals in the wake of the Arab Spring in 2011, tourism contributions to Egypt's GDP reached Egypt's highest level in 2019 before falling due to pandemic disruptions in 2020 (UNWTO, 2020). According to Statista (2022), in 2019 the value added by tourism to the Egyptian GDP reached 34 billion U.S. dollars. It declined to half in 2020 but increased to 22 billion U.S. dollars in 2021. Following years of recovery, some researchers also posited that tourism policymakers could reposition Egypt as an attractive destination and one of the strongest tourism brands in the Middle East and Africa (Avraham, 2016; Fakhry, 2022). This study aims to analyse Egypt's destination strategies to understand the recovery pattern. Three research questions guide the project.: (1) Which communication strategies were used by destination officials and marketers throughout Egypt's most recent crises? (2) How did Egypt utilize ongoing communication strategies during Covid-19? (3) Did Egypt's communication strategies effectively impact its perceived destination brand image and strengthen its resilience? Answering these questions, the paper employs a multi-crisis case study comparing marketing strategies applied by Egypt after and during crises to recover from (1) the post-Arab spring political crisis (2016–2019) and (2) the Covid-19 pandemic (2020 - 2021). This research aims to identify the primary factors involved in a successful and resilient branding strategy based on a case study of Egypt.

This paper makes three contributions to previous literature on destination brand image resilience. Firstly, it attempts to extend the existing model from Avraham and Ketter (2008) by adding further details and analyzes to the new proposed model. Secondly, though numerous studies have used Egypt as a case study for their research, they have analyzed one crisis or one type of crisis. In this paper, we look at two crises of two different types, one preventable (i.e. Arab Spring) and one victim crisis (i.e. the Covid-19 pandemic). Finally, no research we found used both social and traditional media to examine Egyptian crises. We have implemented content and sentiment analysis of media communications and social media posts.

Literature review

Tourism destination image, imagery, and brand image management

Numerous scholars established a strong connection between the image and tourism destinations' success (Avraham, 2020b; Ketter & Avraham, 2021; Maher & El Fkharany, 2022; Marzouk, 2022; Shazly, 2022). Earlier research implied that a place image comprises cognitive, affective, and conative factors (Gartner, 1994; Shazly, 2022). However, this distinction of factors led to ambiguity and implied incompleteness and lack of relevance of the destination image definition (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Shazly, 2022).

Furthermore, faced with the predominant quantitative nature of tourism destination image studies only focusing on cognitive attributes as variable to their analyses, Echtner and Ritchie

(1993) alternatively suggested a definition of destination imagery as: 'the perceptions of individual destination attributes' and 'the holistic impression made by' it 'consists of [both] functional … and psychological characteristics' (p. 44). Although destination image is a widely researched topic, alternative, multifaceted image perception constructs are needed due to the intricate nature of destinations, terms such as imagery are therefore important.

Over the last two decades, destination marketing, image, and brand have received increasing consideration from researchers (Avraham, 2020b; Fakhry, 2022; Ketter & Avraham, 2021; Tasci & Kozak, 2006). However, the literature remains inconclusive and expresses disparities in the definition and scope. While Ritchie and Ritchie (1998) perceived destination brands as visuals (name, symbol, logo, graphics) that distinguish the destination and promise a unique experience, Gretzel et al. (2004) focused only on the emotional aspect of a brand, representing the affective component of a destination image. In this paper, a destination branding refers to actions taken by place marketing authorities to leverage a destination's strengths and increase visibility. A strong brand aligns a destination's image and characteristics presented by the marketer in the minds of the audience (Dinnie, 2008). For this study's purpose, the research will focus on forming a holistic descriptive brand image, previously defined as imagery.

Destination branding involves marketers projecting a strong, favourable, and unique image while audiences perceive the brand image in their minds. This study focuses on examining the overall destination image as a result of proactive. The differentiation and conceptualization of the destination's brand image associations are beyond this research's scope.

Destination crisis management

Touristic destinations have witnessed different types of crises, whether economic turbulence, wars, terrorism attacks, natural disasters, epidemics, or pandemics (Gössling et al., 2020). Crises became increasingly associated with local, regional, and, recently, global tourism industries (Avraham, 2015; Avraham, 2020a; Karimi et al., 2022; Liu & Pratt, 2017; Selim et al., 2020; Shazly, 2022). Scholars have been focusing on studying the influence of crises on tourism regarding the economic reaction (Hadi et al., 2019), behavioural travel intentions and demand (Li et al., 2018), image recovery strategies (Avraham & Ketter, 2008) and resilience (Holladay, 2018). When looking at the impact of crises on destination marketing and image management, Parsons (1996) distinguished three types: Immediate crises (e.g. natural disasters) that are unpredictable and unpreventable; emerging crises (e.g. slowly developing epidemics), which could be stopped or limited; and sustained crises (e.g. political turmoil and pandemics), which are long-term and the most damaging to a destination's reputational capital and image.

The WHO declared the Covid-19 outbreak a global pandemic on March 12, 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020). This brutally disrupted the global economy and continued to impact global tourism in 2021. Subsequently, data showed an 87% decrease in international tourist arrivals in January compared to 2020 (UNWTO, 2021). Although touristic destinations have encountered significant crises and disasters in the past decades – 9/11 attacks (2001), the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) (2003), and the economic crisis (2008), none of these led to a similar decline in global tourism, as they were more limited and regional in scope. The Covid-19 pandemic's unprecedented impact shed light on the need for innovative resilience and recovery models for destinations in sustained crises.

Destination crisis communication management

Industry leaders widely acknowledged the significance of media communications between tourism crisis management authorities and tourism markets. Stocker (1997) highlighted a three-strategy basic response model grounded in communicating regret, building trust by ensuring the accident will not happen again, and offering aid to the victims. Benoit (1997) presented 'denial,' 'evasion of

responsibility,' 'reducing offensiveness,' 'corrective action,' and 'mortification' as five general groups of image repair strategies. Nevertheless, the literature suggested that researchers in the crisis communication fields widely adopted two distinguished theoretical analysis models: The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2007) and the multi-step model for altering a place image (Avraham & Ketter, 2008).

Ketter (2016) posited that SCCT is more appropriate for businesses and organizations; linking it to a destination suffering from a severe image crisis is challenging due to its complex nature. Hence, the relevance of SCCT strategies in tourism can be argued on a public policy level. For this reason, our focus is on Avraham and Ketter's (2008) model for altering a place image rather than SCCT. Nonetheless, there are several limitations in directly applying Avraham and Ketter's (2008) model to these crises, which is why we will present an adapted version of the original model at the end of this paper.

The multistep model for altering a destination image

The 'multi-step model for altering a place image' is a holistic conceptual framework designed by Avraham and Ketter (2008) to specifically assist tourism authorities in communicating a positive image through the media. The model first suggested a preliminary analysis of determining image recovery context then, marketers and policymakers can choose between the suggested 24 media communication strategies grouped in three clusters (SAM): 'Source,' 'Audience,' and 'Message' strategies (See Figure 1).

Applying a complete destination analysis using the multistep model is beyond the scope of this research. Therefore, only the third step (SAM) will be considered for communication strategy analysis.

Various case studies have used the SAM framework to analyze destinations' marketing post-crisis efforts to reconstruct a positive image. However, minimal research analyzed strategic communications from a multi-crisis perspective (Avraham, 2020b). Furthermore, most previous case studies focused on DMOs communicating efforts to rebuild the reputational capital deficit. In a global pandemic where almost all destinations faced the same unsafety threats, this study aims to highlight
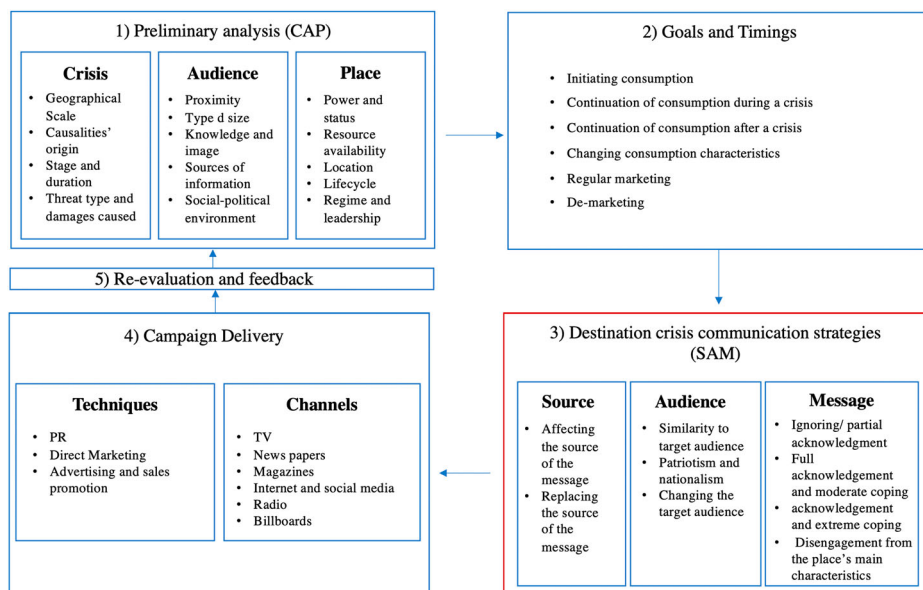
Figure 1. The multi-step model for altering a place image.

outreach efforts stemming from building on existing strengths (Coombs, 2007). This research also examines communication strategies that build on existing reputational capital rather than reconstructing a negative perception.

From reputational damage to destination resilience

In the past two years, the word resilience has gained extensive attention following the devastating impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Further, the repetition of crises in the tourism industry emphasizes the importance for destinations to develop resilient solutions to manage sudden changes and endure in the long term (Su et al., 2021).

Fabry and Zeghni (2019) argued that the concept of resilience extends to governance practices based on 'resource and knowledge creation' (p.96). Resilience in this paper refers to the ability of tourism organizations to adapt quickly to crises and shocks through introducing change and creating knowledge. Resilient tourism governance involves introducing new and innovative courses to adapt in the face of disruptions (Folke, 2006; Hudson, 2010). Despite the established importance of communication and marketing in destination viability, destination resilience developed through robust branding strategies has yet to permeate the destination crisis management literature. This paper explores building the resilience potential of destination brands through strategies, policies and activities that mitigate risks, seize opportunities and strengthen brand's ability to adapt quickly, continuously and innovatively, before, during and after crises.

Implications on Egypt

Considered one of the primary touristic destinations in the Middle East and Africa, Egyptian tourism has been associated with Sun, Sea, and Sand, cultural and heritage tourism throughout the years (Fakhry, 2022; Tomazos, 2017). Nonetheless, like other tourist destinations, Egypt has had short-term and long-term crises (Avraham, 2020b). This paper examines two significant crises that affected tourism in Egypt, the Arab Spring, and the Covid-19 pandemic. Many studies have investigated the effects of the Arab Spring through a destination image lens (Avraham, 2015; Avraham, 2020b; Karimi et al., 2022; Shazly, 2022). Currently, there is a growing body of literature that analyzes Egypt's reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic and its attempts to attract clients back to Egypt (Fakhry, 2022; Hassan & Soliman, 2021; Ketter & Avraham, 2021; Maher & El Fkharany, 2022; Marzouk, 2022; Ryu et al., 2022; Selim et al., 2020). While the Arab Spring and the Covid-19 pandemic are major crises, they fall into different categories: one was preventable, and the other was a victim crisis (Coombs, 2007). Thus, we attempt to advance the literature by analyzing both mega-crises through a content analysis of traditional and social media channels. We have found no previous study that has examined the topic in this manner Table 1.

Table 1. Crises in Egypt (2011–2021)

Crisis	Type	Date
Egyptian revolution	Political	1/25/2011
Protesters breach US embassy	Political	9/15/2012
Egyptian protests against Muslim Brotherhood	Political	6/30/2013
Middle East Respiratory Syndrome	Health	26/4/2014
Terrorist attack on Russian airline crash in Sinai	Terrorism	7/15/2015
Cairo Coptic cathedral bombing	Terrorism	12/11/2016
Mosque bombing in northern Sinai	Terrorism	24/11/2017
Terrorist bus bombing	Terrorism	11/2/2018
Covid-19 first case	Pandemic	2/14/2020
Nationwide rain floods	Natural disaster	3/11/2020
Suez Canal obstruction	Economic	3/23/2021

Existing case studies on Egypt's perceived brand image focus on using quantitative analysis to measure the cognitive factor in destination image formation and its impact on visiting intentions (Baloglu & Mangaloglu, 2001; El-Said & Aziz, 2019). Though previous research conducted a comparative analysis between Egypt and other countries to position the brand image, the evaluative nature of research methods and usage of semantic scales, denoted the lack of studying the multi-dimensional construct of a brand image. Furthermore, while, in the last decade, Egypt's destination branding efforts have been communicated (Avraham, 2016), no updated study has examined the holistic brand image.

Moneer (2020) used Benoit's (1997) 'multi-strategies model for repairing a destination image' to analyze Egyptian policymakers' decisions following the 2015 Russian flight crash terrorist attack and identify 'corrective actions' as a strategy to restore Egypt's safe image on the international scene. Furthermore, Salem et al. (2021) drew on SCCT theories to study the Covid-19 Egyptian government and hotel response to the crisis by focusing on relationships between private and public sector communications.

Methodology

A case study approach was used to examine the destination brand image formation and the effectiveness of the strategies employed. Previous literature in destination marketing suggested that a qualitative research approach is necessary to avoid misanalysing a destination image by fragmenting its formation measures (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). Additionally, Yin (1994) defined case studies as an empirical method to analyze a recent case based on a specific and delimited real-life example. Therefore, this is an exploratory and explanatory case study that uses content and sentiment analysis on social media and news articles to examine destination marketing in Egypt, with a focus on providing viable implications for practitioners and academics.

This paper examines communication strategy patterns as applied to one destination and two crises. Two main periods were identified: 2016–2019 (P1) and 2019–2021 (P2). These periods represent two significant yet different crisis contexts for the destination. The former (P1) identifies post-crisis strategies to alter the negative perception following the series of political turmoil and terrorist attacks between 2011 and 2015. The latter (P2) was chosen to analyze the ongoing strategies during the health crisis of Covid-19. To study DMOs' approaches to strategic communication in conjunction with brand image studies, this paper analyses the case of Egypt in two different phases (See Figure 2).

Phase 1: content analysis

Qualitative content analysis has been proven relevant for advertising promotional data (Avraham, 2021). To uncover the media communication policies applied by Egyptian authorities in times of
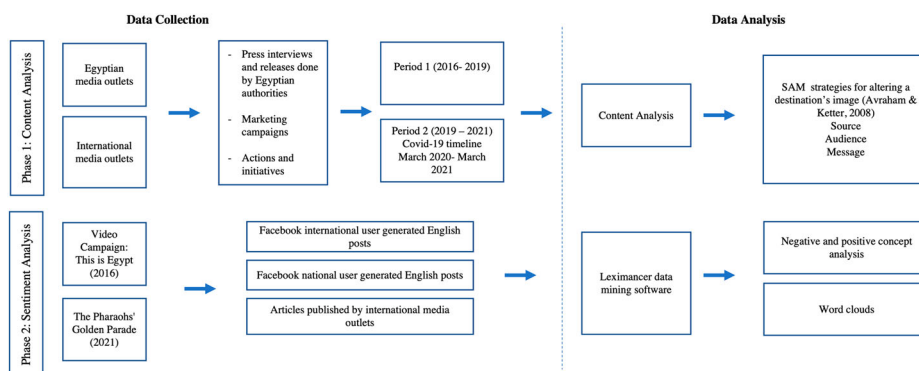

Figure 2. Research methodology flowchart.

crisis, three types of content were collected and analyzed: (1) press interviews and releases by Egyptian authorities, (2) Marketing campaigns launched by DMOs, and (3) Marketing actions and initiatives (e.g. events and opening of new attractions). The content was collected through three different sources (1) news coverage from Egyptian and international media outlets, (2) DMOs' social media pages and websites, and (3) a global tourism news website. The analysis of actions and initiatives communicated by the private sector, such as hotels, restaurants, and airlines, is beyond the scope of this paper; this research only analyzed strategies made by the policymakers of the public sector, including tourism officials, DMOs, tourism boards, authority marketers, and collaborators.

Based on a pilot search to determine the popularity and frequency of covering Egypt, six international media outlets were chosen for their focus on international and middle eastern news. Finally, a search on online public archives was conducted using keywords: 'Egypt' + 'Tourism,' 'tourism crisis,' 'tourism campaign,' 'policies,' 'covid-policies,' and other similar combinations. More than 430 articles and social media posts were analyzed using the SAM communication strategies developed by Avraham and Ketter (2008) as part of the 'multi-step model for altering a place image.' Later, according to the most systematic strategies, the content of 57 sources was thoroughly examined.

Phase 2: sentiment analysis

To examine the role of the media on destination image formation, we conducted a sentiment analysis of social media UGC on Facebook, YouTube, and international media reports. Sentiment analysis was applied in many public perception studies on specific destination events, including South Korea (Lee & Kim, 2020) and Singapore (Kim & Lee, 2020). However, no prior similar research has been found on Middle Eastern destinations, specifically Egypt. Due to the time constraint, only two-time brackets of three months from each period were selected, (1) 8/1/2017–10/31/2017 and (2) 1/2/2021–30/4/2021. This selection was made to study two extensive tourism promotion campaigns unveiled through content analysis. The first is the 'This is Egypt' video series launched by the Ministry of Tourism in 2016 and 2017. The second is the Golden Parade international media event, which took place in Cairo on April 3, 2021. The aim of analyzing these two defined brackets is to study the communication effectiveness by measuring the direct impact of both campaigns on the perceived destination brand image expressed through different media sources.

Data collection

According to Mair et al. (2014), online content generated by tourists carries emotions and judgments towards a destination, which contributes significantly to explaining the perceived holistic image. Based on previous research, Facebook is considered an important social media tool in destination image formation (Ketter & Avraham, 2012), and with both campaigns being initially launched on YouTube, this paper first conducted social media sentiment analysis collected through posts and comments on both platforms. The study sample included 3612 Facebook and YouTube extractions and 55 media articles. Data was collected from tracking posts published on DMOs' pages and following the hashtags #ThisIsEgypt #ExperinceEgypt, #EgyptTravel, and #Egypt. Previous studies have also analyzed the hashtags in Egypt's destination promotions (Fakhry, 2022; Marzouk, 2022), thus confirming the relevance of examining the hashtags in this study.

Data analysis

Leximancer, a text mining software, was used to conduct sentiment analysis on collected text documents by analyzing the content and identifying positive or negative expressions. The software uses seed words as a starting point for concepts, and through machine learning, generates a complete thesaurus of emerging concepts. (Leximancer, 2021). After importing the study sample, the

Leximancer concept seed portal was first reviewed to apply the profiling process, removing irrelevant seeds such as 'http' and merging similar ones, 'Pharaoh,' 'Pharaonic,' and 'Pharaohs,' for instance.' In addition, likelihood scores were generated by the model to measure positive sentiment, and 'concept maps' representations were assessed on each text set to represent a holistic brand image perception. Finally, the results from both periods were compared to measure the effectiveness, consistency, and resilience of Egyptian DMOs' crisis and branding strategies.

Results

Source strategies

Among different Source strategies, results show that Egyptian DMOs focused largely on cooperating and developing media relations and partnerships. This includes partnerships with media outlets such as Beautiful Destinations, CNN, Ctrip, Discovery, Expedia Group, and Isobar announced in September 2019 by the former Minister of Tourism, Rania Al-Mashat. These partnerships aimed to diversify marketing and media platforms and change the narrative of the sector. An example of this is the 'People to People' video campaign with Beautiful Destinations, which highlighted Egypt's diversity as a tourist destination and the unique qualities of Egyptians. (Egypt Today, September 10, 2019, May 8, 2019). Additionally, the Tourism Reform Programme launched in 2018 aimed to upgrade digital marketing tools as a central policy for tourism marketing and promotion. A key strategy was encouraging User Generated Content (UGC). This resulted in the launch of the Ministry's first dedicated tourism IGTV channel in the MENA region, as well as inviting international bloggers and influencers to visit Egypt (Al-Mashat, 2018).

Audience strategies

The content analysis has shown that Egypt considers Gulf nations as a similar target audience due to proximity, religion, culture, and language. In 2017, an e-visa programme was announced to ease travel for residents of Gulf Arab nations as part of a broader strategy to revive tourism targets (Egypt Independent, April 26, 2017). Further, in September 2020, the Egyptian Minister of Tourism and Antiquities met with Saudi Arabia to discuss collaboration and mutual promotion of tourism (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, 2020). However, no official initiatives or campaigns targeting Gulf markets were noticed after the Covid-19 outbreak.

Another element of audience strategies includes changing the target audience by communicating a positive brand image to audiences neglected in the past (Avraham & Ketter, 2008). One former Tourism Minister set a goal to 'diversify revenue streams and increase the sector's resilience' by intensifying promotional efforts in high-potential source markets, including Asia and eastern Europe, specifically China and Ukraine (Al-Mashat, 2018, p. 44). Thus, through this strategy, Egyptian tourism authorities have attempted to intensify the reach of untapped source markets.

Egyptian DMOs use audience strategies such as promoting patriotism and nationalism through official campaigns targeting domestic tourism, utilizing influencers, and linking heritage and museum announcements to patriotic feelings, as seen in the digital campaign #BackHome. This strategy is a new practice, emerging as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Message strategies

Egypt attempted to send a 'back to business' message by hosting international sports events, such as the African Cup of Nations (AFCON) in 2019 and promoting sports tourism through events like 'The Pyramids Marathon' (Egypt Independent, February 15, 2019) to shift the media narrative from negative to positive. Hosting events is not meant to increase tourism, but to shift the media narrative to positive (Egypt Independent, October 4, 2021). According to Avraham and Ketter (2008),

changing stereotypes about a destination is a long and complex process that usually requires changing the reality of the place itself. In Egypt, MoTA has used interactive technology and digital platforms to showcase different facets of the country, such as adventure, backpacking, spiritual, heritage, and sports tourism, and contradict the stereotype of Egypt as just an ancient and cultural destination.

In February 2017, the Ministry of Tourism announced a collaboration with the Ministry of Health to launch the medical tourism programme 'Tour 'n' Cure' (France24, July 10, 2017). The programme offers environmental and natural treatments guided by trained medical tourism doctors (Egypt Independent, February 14, 2017) and turned Egypt into a world-known medical destination. Thus, by embracing the strategy of turning liabilities into assets, the Ministry of Tourism recognized the negative factor and spun it into a positive trait (Avraham & Ketter, 2008).

Another means for spinning negative to positive involves tackling a crisis straight on. In Egypt, various terrorist attacks occurred between 2015 and 2018, resulting in attributions of Egypt as an unsafe destination. Egyptian authorities assumed the responsibility of launching military campaigns to address the safety crisis. In a fact sheet published by the Egyptian Embassy following the attack on Coptic Christians in Minya in 2018, the Egyptian president asserted that 'the terrorist attack will not pass unnoticed' (Embassy of Egypt, Washington DC, 2018).

The second example of media communication is the tourism authorities' response to the Covid-19 outbreak in March 2021. The ministry launched various micro-film campaigns under the hashtag #VisitEgyptSoon (Fakhry, 2022; Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, 2020) to communicate their efforts to protect tourists. After an inspection of the implementation of the procedures, hotels granted the seal are allowed to operate under occupancy restrictions (Egypt Independent, May 5, 2020).

Sentiment analysis

Following the analysis of different social media UGC and international media coverage, this research utilized the Leximancer concept map function to visually present emerging themes and links between recurring themes and words (See Figures 3 and 4). In white boxes are the most common themes further studied regarding sentiment.
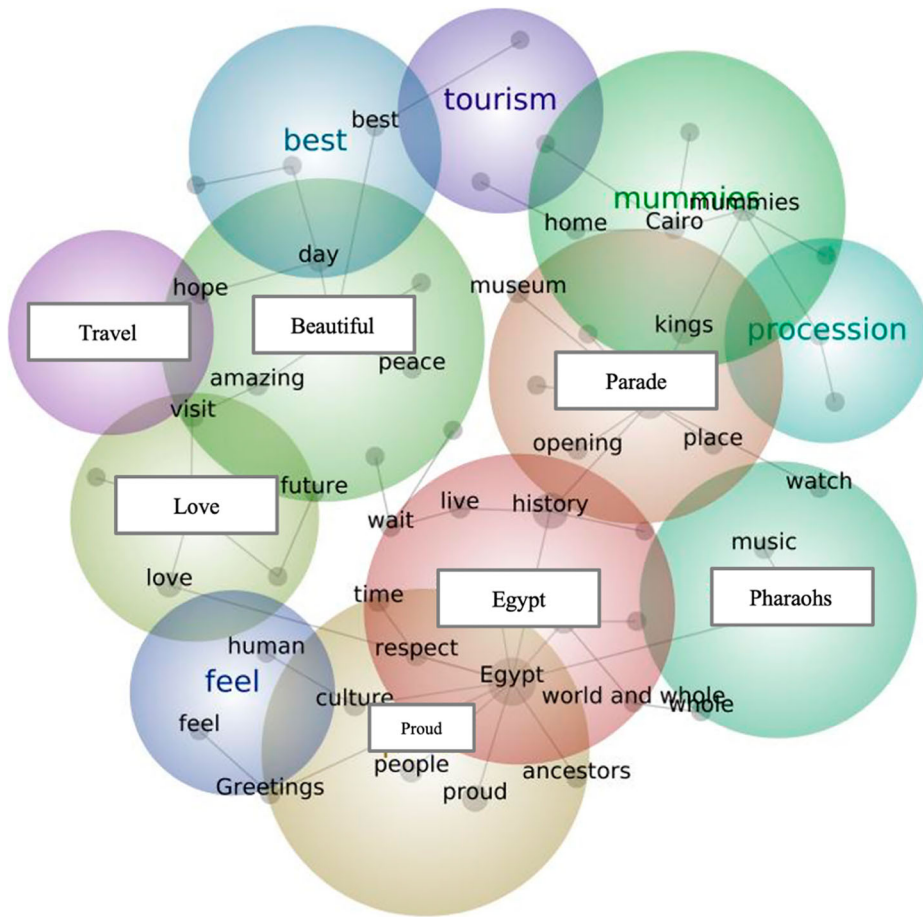
Leximancer Concept Maps are heat-mapped, with hot colours indicating prominent themes and cold colours indicating less important ones. The size of the Theme circle has no significant indication (Leximancer, 2021). In the first period, map colours reveal 'Egypt,' 'Visit,' 'Ancient, and 'Country' as the most important, with the highest number of linked concepts. When looking at the second period's concept map, different patterns are detected. While 'Egypt' remains the most predominant theme, new bubbles such as 'Proud' and 'Parade' are visualized in hot colours (red and orange). Moreover, themes such as 'Travel' and 'Tourism' remain relatively less recurrent (blue and purple). Nevertheless, new cold themes like 'Mummies,' 'Feel,' and 'best' are identified.

Table 2 displays the respective descriptive holistic concepts of Egypt's destination brand image for both periods. The concepts are listed in descending order according to the sentiment percentage of likelihood. The results in sample 2 compared to sample 1 are significantly different for all concepts apart from 'Egypt.' 'Egypt' remains the highest and only concept with a likelihood percentage above 50%. On average, likelihood percentages are relatively higher in the second period, with 'Proud' and 'Parade' having an average score of 63%.

Discussion

In addition to communication strategy identification, the content analysis has revealed positive recovery patterns in tourism inbound and occupancy numbers. Recent statistics show an upward trend with 118% increase in hotel nights between 2020 and 2021, and 63.6% increase in total

Figure 3. Leximancer concept map (data sample 1, 2017).

nights spent by tourists in 2022 compared to H1 2021 (CAPMAS, 2022). Considering the relative recovery of Egypt as a touristic destination, a specific discussion on the recovery communication strategies of the destination brand image and its effectiveness is presented in order to answer this study's central question: How did Egypt communicate its brand image through a comprehensive destination image restoration strategy?

Table 2. Likelihood scores of each Leximancer concept.

Data sample 1, 2017		Data sample 2, 2021	
Concept	Favourable likelihood	Concept	Favourable likelihood
Egypt	61%	Egypt	79%
Visit	19%	Proud	47%
Egyptian	14%	Parade	27%
People	10%	Pharaohs	24%
Experience	7%	Beautiful	14%
Culture	4%	Travel	3%

Figure 4. Leximancer concept map (data sample 2, 2021).

Strategies to alter a destination image

Egypt's policymakers focused on the message's source through international media collaborations and partnerships. They also accorded more importance to UGC, which has been relatively consistent throughout both crisis image recovery periods. UGC has been given higher importance during P2 which could be due to the virtual shift and innovations brought about by the Covid-19 crisis.

Different 'Audience' strategies highlighted collaborations on intersectoral, national, regional, and international levels. Egypt's authorities have collaborated with source market policymakers, introduced discounts and visa waivers during the COVID-19 pandemic and focused on promoting nationalism and patriotism, specifically addressing sentiments of pride post-Covid-19 as a recovery strategy for domestic tourism. They also aimed to expand a positive destination brand image by reaching new market segments such as adventurers, backpackers, and sports tourists.

Finally, the analysis of the findings shows extensive use of 'Message' strategies by Egyptian tourism policymakers. In most cases, authorities fully acknowledged the crisis. First, this is derived from taking 'reasonable coping measures' by hosting sports and cultural events (Avraham & Ketter, 2008). Egyptian DMOs also followed 'extreme coping measures' in communicating their messages by turning liabilities into assets (Avraham & Ketter, 2008). Anholt (2007) defined the strategy used by Egypt as nation-building, which aims to build on the strengths of a place to improve its reputation. In the case of Egypt, authorities focused on positive experiences during the Covid-19

pandemic to build reputational capital for medical and leisure tourism, instead of only communicating efforts to overcome reputational damage.

Throughout both crises, Egyptian authorities communicated that Egypt is both 'safe and beautiful' as a destination. They shifted the message narrative from emphasizing Egypt as an all-inclusive adventure destination to an invitation to discover the ancient Egyptian civilization and creating a sense of belongingness.

This study aimed to highlight the consistency of strategies implemented from 2016 to 2021. Even though Mair et al. (2014) posited that each crisis is unique and recovery strategies should be correspondingly different, the results support previous research's call for consistency in communication strategies (Balakrishnan, 2009). Egyptian DMOs applied the same strategies through both periods yet expressed different focus points. While the consistency of presence was essential in contributing to Egypt's projected brand image, results demonstrated that a defined brand image vision was lacking.

Impact on the perceived brand image

An alignment of projected and perceived destination brand image illustrates a strong destination brand image (Dinnie, 2008). Overall, Leximancer scores show an increasing positive sentiment throughout both periods, indicating that the efforts of Egyptian authorities have resulted in a favourable brand image perception of Egypt as a adestination from international news media and social media users.

In P1, an analysis must be made regarding the #ThisIsEgypt and #PeopletoPeople campaign goals of communicating Egypt's diversity of offerings, activities, and authenticity. In the first-period results, 'Egypt' was mainly linked to concepts such as 'People,' 'Experience,' and 'Backpack,' highlighting an aligned perception of the audiences regarding the campaign goals. Furthermore, concepts such as 'Visit' and 'Experience' were connected to the sea, sun, ancient food, local, and music, underlining a perceived diversity in offerings. The recurrence of city associations such as 'Luxor' displays the success of showcasing Egypt's different destinations. Finally, the concept of 'People,' featured in connection to 'Real,' 'Safe,' and 'Love,' denotes effectiveness in expanding Egypt's perception from only its history to its people.

P2 analysis focuses on online engagement around the Golden Parade media event held in April 2021. Through this communication initiative, research has shown MoTA's efforts to build positive reputational capital by reinforcing Egypt's image of a unique ancient civilization. As opposed to the first period, words such as 'History,' 'Past,' 'Unique,' and 'Pyramids' were associated with the concept of 'Egypt.' Thus, the DMOs strategies in reorienting the audience's attention towards the historical aspect of Egypt's brand image can be a success. Moreover, the concepts' Travel' and 'Visit' were, in this case, expressed as a plan.

Finally, unlike P1, sentiments of pride were listed as a clear concept, with the second-highest likelihood score of 47%. This accents the effectiveness of the unprecedented audience strategy of patriotism applied to engage and alter the image of Egypt. The analysis confirms that receivers' sentiment towards Egypt as a destination brand image aligns with official strategies and both 'Beautiful' and 'Safe' concepts were reported positively. Egypt has improved its brand image through communication strategies, but still lags behind destinations like South Korea which has a likelihood score of 97%. Persistent negative associations in the news may contribute to this gap. (Lee & Kim, 2020)

Implications for management

This study shows that a destination holistic brand image is complex; therefore, there is a need to re-evaluate this topic regarding long-term destination marketing strategy and its relationship with destination brand image resilience. To fill this gap, and based on all findings of this paper, the Adaptable Destination Strategies (ADS) Model was created (See Figure 5).
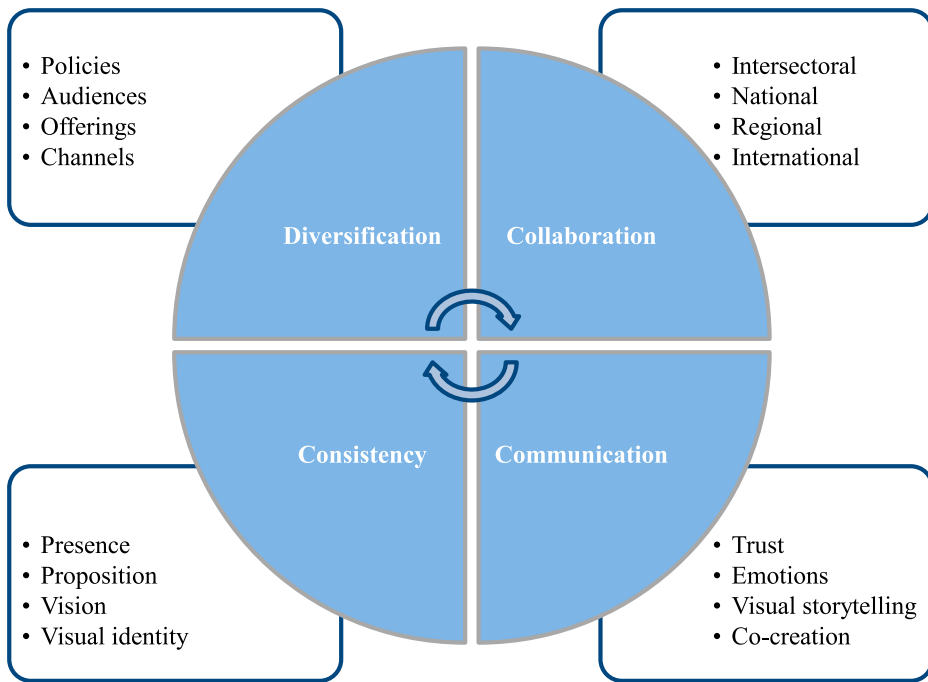
Figure 5. Normative Model of Adaptable Destination Strategies: Towards Destination Brand Image Resilience.

The ADS model integrates all the above-discussed results by generating four main communication categories (Diversification, Collaboration, Communication, and Consistency). Supporting Avraham's (2020b) call to reexamine elements that are significant in recovery image repair efficiency beyond the multistep model for altering a place image, the ADS addresses a research objective of providing a strategic model and deep insights on how to proactively manage destination brand image during crisis.

Diversification

Sheppard and Williams (2016) posited that 'diversification breeds resilience' (p. 27). The findings of this paper support diversification as a driver for destination brand image resilience. Strategy, audience, offer and channel diversification are areas of focus when examining the drivers of destination brand image resilience. During crises, diversification of strategies can improve preparedness and resilience. The results highlighted that audiences need to be strategically selected to overcome the negative image. While one attribute or characteristic of a destination may be negative, another audience might perceive a particular message positively. The results also showed that audience diversification can be demographic, geographic and behavioural.

The diversification of audience and target markets entails an extended diversification of offerings. Diversification of offerings also include the mediums and infrastructure and other details that impact accessibility, hence the importance of holistic experience evaluation.

Finally, communicating through different media channels accommodates the preferences of different target groups and increases the reach of the projected destination image. By building a diversified network of channels, DMOs can ensure credibility and strengthen image resilience to communicate the right message to the right target audience.

Collaboration

The diversity of offerings and target audiences in the tourism industry implies the need for diverse stakeholders in destination marketing during times of crisis, highlighting the importance of collaborations in communicating the brand image on various levels, including intersectoral, national, regional, and international.

Public-private and intersectoral collaborations have been found effective in creating campaigns, protocols, and measures for tourism during crises. Examples included hotel discounts, health and hygiene inspections, and funding collaborations. Vargas (2020) emphasizes the importance of local collaborations for adaptation and value generation during crises. The study emphasizes the need for communication strategies for both national and local populations during uncertain times caused by crises and their impact on inbound tourism.

Regional collaborations can be an alternative to competition between destinations of physical proximity. This case study shows that Egyptian DMOs focused on cultural, religious, and linguistic similarities to reach out to geographically proximate audiences and build relationships with regional DMOs. This helped create consistency in inbound tourism during severe crises.

Finally, international collaborations are critical for diplomacy and media. Engaging with ambassadors and international figures promotes shared resilient policies and international media collaborations helps in communicating a positive destination brand image to larger audiences.

Communication

As destinations recover from a crisis, DMOs should communicate safety information, especially during a pandemic like Covid-19. Authentic and transparent information is crucial for gaining audience trust towards the destination brand. (Fakhry, 2022; Hassan & Soliman, 2021; Ketter & Avraham, 2021; Maher & El Fkharany, 2022; Marzouk, 2022; Ryu et al., 2022; Selim et al., 2020). Visitors' perception of a destination's association with safety and care positively affects trust, leading to brand loyalty and repeat visit intentions (Hassan & Soliman, 2021). Destination policymakers should focus on strengthening their destination brand image by building trust among audiences.

Trust is linked to emotion. Communicating emotions can strengthen positive perceptions of a destination and targeting both international and local audiences through emotions of pride, hope, and attachment is important. This aligns with prior research on the affective dimension of a destination brand image (Del Bosque & Martín, 2008).

The other crucial elements in the communication category are digital storytelling and co-creation. In order to create content that emotionally resonates with an audience, this paper's results advocate digital and visual storytelling as a powerful communication medium. The power of stories is highlighted in their ability to catch the audience's attention and turn myths and or pre-formed destination images into unique consumer experiences. To position the destination brand image, DMOs should focus on authentic, unique stories and leverage consumer-controlled communication platforms by encouraging positive UGC on social media.

Consistency

Consistency in destination marketing is an evaluation criterion that allows understanding of the importance of consistency in presence, brand promise, long-term vision, and visual identity. In previous research, consistency in the communicated message was deemed essential for a consistent brand image (Balakrishnan, 2009). However, this practice was irrelevant in various crises, precisely following NPIs during the Covid-19 public health crisis. It is vital for DMOs to consistently be present in communicating their message; however, the message narrative can be adapted to various contexts.

On a larger scale, consistency must be guaranteed through the brand promise. A destination brand promise represents the functional and emotional values of the destination, as well as the 'experience' that the tourist is promised to receive as a result of visiting the destination (Chekalina et al., 2016). Flexibility is necessary to cope with crises, but promises like unforgettable experiences, safe, unique and beautiful destinations must remain constant to ensure a strong destination brand image.

The final areas of the ADS model entail the consistency of the vision and visual identity. A defined, consistent vision is necessary to ensure a coordinated and consistent reaction against unpredictable threats and crises. Consistency in representing key elements provides a clear and recognizable destination visual structure. Destination promoters should make the visual identity consistent across different promotional activities, materials, and platforms.

The ADS model emphasizes interconnected communication strategies in Diversification, Collaboration, Communication, and Consistency. DMOs should ensure resilient destination image governance by owning and strengthening the health of the brand image throughout various crises. When implemented successfully, a resilient destination brand image builds brand trust, loyalty, sustained awareness, recognition, and recommendation.

Conclusion

This paper analyzed the projected communication strategies for altering a destination image and examined their impact on Egypt's perceived destination brand image. The study was conducted on image recovery strategies after the political turmoil and through Covid-19 from 2016 to 2021. The results confirm a successful strategy in communicating a positive destination brand image throughout both crises.

The contribution to knowledge the paper's results make is three-fold.

First, the study responds to the call to reconsider destination crisis communication strategies in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Unlike previous public health crises, Covid-19 had an unprecedented national, regional, and global impact on the tourism industry. Nevertheless, this pandemic has allowed the reevaluation of destination marketing practices based on a destination in a sustained crisis case study to be more agile and resilient. Our analysis has highlighted that in addition to image restoration strategies, it is also necessary to examine other significant factors in building upon a positive reputation capital of the destination brand. In light of the relative recovery of Egyptian tourism destinations after each crisis, destination managers and marketers should proactively adopt destination communication strategies whether they are in or out of crisis. Second, this paper contributes insights into resilient destination brand communication effectiveness by measuring the sentiment analysis of the perceived destination brand image. Finally, the research provides a Normative Model of Adaptable Destination Strategies. This model was built based on a case study, affirming its potential value for academics, Egypt, and international destination marketing organizations.

Since the completion of the data collection phase of this study, Egyptian tourism has been steadily recovering from the pandemic. In an article published by Reuters on 27 September 2022, Egyptian official sources report an 85.4% increase in tourist arrivals in the first half of 2022 (Reuters, 2022). COP27, a United Nations climate conference, was held in Egypt in 2022 with 35,000 attendees. Egypt used the event to boost its international profile and position as a gateway for tourism and business in Africa and the Middle East.

This paper has argued that destination brand resilience can be considered a 'muscle' strengthened through consistent effort and training by improving perceptions of safety and trust, promoting unique attributes, and building reputational capital. This allows a destination to maintain a positive image and attract visitors while being flexible and agile in pursuing growth opportunities. Egypt's successful hosting of the Dior show at the Pyramids of Giza in December 2022 is an example of this, as it established Egypt as a hub for creativity and

design (Khadr, 2022). A resilient brand can help a destination survive and thrive in a competitive global market.

MoTA hopes for a recovery in 2022 through ETA's promotion of museums and archaeological finds to ensure media visibility and safety attributes from the latest events. Nonetheless, they face challenges such as the pandemic, high-energy prices, Saudi Arabia competition, and the Russia-Ukraine crisis, which affected tourism, as these two countries were important sources of tourists to Egypt.

Limitations and future research

This research has some limitations. First, this paper is solely focused on the case of Egypt. The absence of comparative analysis with other destinations presents a need for more information regarding the destination's brand image positioning. A comparative multi-case study can be considered for the future. Another suggestion would be to compare Egypt with emerging regional competitors such as Saudi Arabia. Second, regarding the sentiment analysis, online comments from media publications were limited to English posts and comments. The sentiment analysis only focused on portraying favourable concepts. Therefore, future research might investigate negative brand associations and their potential negative image, such as negative word-of-mouth on the destination brand. Other future research suggestions include testing the validity of the suggested ADS model. This could be done through an analysis of resilience categories regarding other destinations. Besides, this paper innovates the research method by combining sentiment and secondary content analysis.

Further research may consider other unstructured data types, such as visual campaigns and videos. A quantitative or mixed study approach might be considered on the impact of strategies in destination brand image communication and the intention to visit. Anholt's (2007) hexagon model highlights key components of a destination brand image; future research on Egypt can focus on investment and trade competencies and communication effectiveness in projecting Egypt as an investment destination.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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