

# **A NEW STRATEGIC APPROACH FOR TOURISM PLANNING AND MARKETING IN LIBYA**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Development of the tourism sector is a major contributor to improve infrastructure and other tourism related services in many developing countries. This paper is concerned with one important aspect of tourism marketing planning. Planning is designed to link an organisation's goals and resources to its marketing opportunities. This may result in making the best use of its resources. As the marketing environment is subject to constant change, the failure to develop a strategic marketing plan, which responds to that change, may result in collapse of an organisation. This approach focuses its attention on the development of a tourism marketing planning model, which might be very useful for tourism administrators in a country like Libya. The new strategic approach would be detailed in a framework or model consists of a number of important stages to be followed. However, the major consideration is that the plan designed should be comprehensive to assure that the basic objectives of the organisation are achieved.

## **KEYWORDS**

Tourism, Management, Development, Marketing, Planning, Strategies

## **INTRODUCTION**

Currently tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the whole world. For many countries such Libya, tourism represents a significant potential for future Growth and development as well as offering diversification for national economies. In addition, sections in society are affected in one way or another by this fast growing and important industry. Tourism may prove to be a valuable source of foreign exchange within a country as well as one of the main providers of employment. It plays an important role in providing jobs in places, where there are limited job opportunities [1]. Moreover, money generated from tourism can be used to improve the local infrastructure, which requires the active involvement of the construction industry and other related sectors. Investment in fixed assets provided by construction work cannot be removed from the country. For example, as cited by Eccles [2], tourism in southern Italy has been used as a development tool to improve the public infrastructure rather than manufacturing sector [3].

After considering tourism planning, the next issue relates to organizational participation in marketing and promotion. The purpose of this paper is to show the important elements, which should be included in a marketing planning stages model as shown in figure(2) later in the paper after covering each stage in the marketing plan, promotional activities could be commenced. Moreover, the marketing plan should be adapted as situations change and be constantly re-evaluated. Also, the marketing plan has to be comprehensive and integrated into the nation's socio-economic and political policies as well as the natural and built environment and socio-cultural traditions. In many developing countries like Libya, where infrastructure represents a major problem, many tourism market segments cannot be targeted unless the requisition for these kinds of market segments can be offered. As a result, the revenue generated from a specific market segment could be invested in tourism related services to target more market segments gradually [4]. This is return would improve the whole tourism sector.

## **JUSTIFICATION FOR TOURISM MARKETING PLANNING**

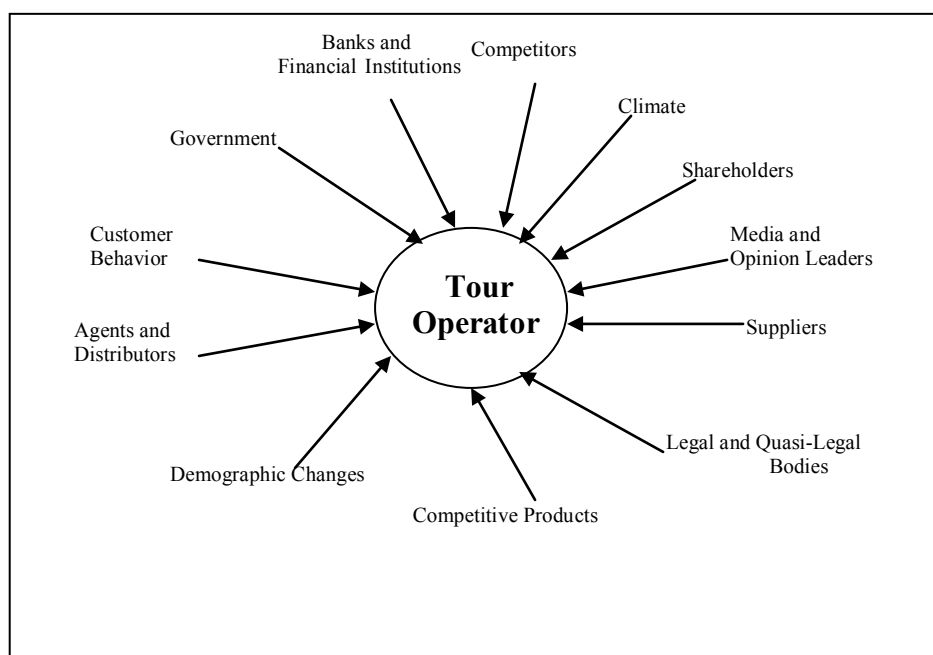
All kinds of tourism organisations need to be engaged in marketing activity. Planning is an essential process to identify goals, resources, and existing opportunities for the organisation. In addition, planning is needed to meet short and long-term objectives. In the short term, planning is required to identify where a company is now, and where it will be next month. The money, which will flow into the organisation, may not be easily predictable. Thus, it will be impossible to predict whether funds will be adequate to meet the organisation's running costs. The marketing plan

determines what needs to be sold in a given period, at a given price, and how this is to be achieved to meet operating costs. Beyond this, the organisation must plan to achieve its longer-term objectives. This may result in finding additional sources of capital or future investment. A marketing plan should not be isolated. It must be integrated and co-ordinate with the financial plans, organisational plans, purchasing plans and other aspects of the organisation's total activity, and marketing is simply a tool by which an organisation achieves its objectives. By the use of marketing activity, an organisation could be able to identify new product and marketing opportunities, evaluating them and taking action to develop for the benefit of the organization and the society at large.

Planning models have to be flexible to meet and adapt with the changing conditions. New opportunities would be missed by the organisation during the plan's implementation, if it sticks too rigidly to its pre-established plans. For example, the failure of a specialist tour operator to reach the target market may result in turning to a new market, which may have been considered before. In other words, drawing up another alternative in any plan may be considered to be very important to allow flexibility, especially, when the current plan has faced some unexpected circumstances during implementation stage. On the other hand, if an organisation were to avoid or even ignore its plan, it may result in a danger of heading off in a number of different directions, not only disrupting the organisation's overall planning, but also might be over-stretching its resources.

The applicability of the marketing planning model, in a dynamic market place depends on its flexibility and adaptability to market changes. Marketing decision-making activities must be compatible with the organisation's resources constraints and objectives [5]. According to Dibb & Simkin[6], marketing planning can enhance managers' understanding of marketing and markets, making them better equipped to make strategic and tactical decisions. However, there may be several alternative strategies from which, a marketing manager has to select when drawing up a marketing plan. For example, a tour operator, to achieve an increase in the return on capital invested, might choose to raise prices, to find ways to reduce costs, to seek higher productivity from present resources, to push for increased sales to present markets served or to introduce a product to new markets. Any of these will depend upon the analysis of the current market situation in which the organisation is operating. Moreover, an understanding of the current and future business environment is an essential prerequisite for planning. Figure (1) illustrates the various influences on the operator. According to Briggs [7], for a current situation an overview should be taken for three main areas: product, current markets and trends, which might affect the business. Most tourism products are made up of several components, which can be quite complicated. Selling experiences and benefits rather than features, is the key to success. In addition, for the future, customer research should be conducted to find out what kind of modifications will be needed for a product to meet customer needs and desires [8].

**FIGURE 1**  
**THE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT OF TOUR OPERATOR**



Source: Holloway and Robinson (1995)

According to Font & Ahjem [9], developing a new tourism related product or service, requires intensified efforts at the initial stages in order to gain a proportion of the market share and then to maintain this position in the medium to long run. For example, a country like Libya that views tourism as an economic alternative for gaining economic growth should make investment as easy as possible for prospective investors. Consequently, this could lead to an increase in the tourism market share and be an ability to compete more effectively. Typically, new destinations are needed to meet tourists' requirements and monitor changes in consumer motivations and satisfaction with the product in order to keep it up-to- date. For instance, Libya is one of the countries, which was bidding to host the 2010 Football World Cup, of which means that in order for Libya to compete more effectively, a huge budget has to be devoted to improving infrastructure and establishing a number of new hotels and other tourism related services to meet these specific market requirements. Therefore, the need for promotional and marketing activities becomes essential. The Commonwealth Games, which were hosted by Manchester city in the year 2002, generated considerable construction activity both in terms of new construction work and refurbishment of facilities. From that, it is obvious that tourism might be used as a tool for improving the infrastructure of a destination, which requires the involvement of various parties under government guidance. For current markets, it is very essential to have an idea about who comes to visit an area or attractions. Typically, it is easier to attract more of the same type of people than to reach completely new markets. This is due to their familiarity with the product, which they already know. Moreover, there are a number of general trends, which need to be considered in the context of their impact on the business. For instance: the state of the economy, economic and political changes overseas, published survey and research material on growing or diminishing markets, technological developments, changes in leisure activities and increasing tendencies towards independent travel, increases in the number of short break holiday takers or increased demand for special interest holidays, etc.

### OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES, AND TACTICS

According to Lumsdom [10], objectives refer to more specific goals or targets, which an organisation wishes to achieve within a given timescale. Where Holloway and Robinson [11] state that the objectives likely to be sought by any organisation will include:

- Achieving a certain level of sales growth within a given period of time.
- Increasing the profitability by a given percentage within an agreed time scale.
- Obtaining a given percentage market share within a given period of time.
- Reducing business risk by diversifying the product range.

*Obtaining a measured increase in the return on capital employed.* There are a number of strategic frameworks adopted by organisations in the tourism industry, which are summarised in Table (1) as follow:

**TABLE 1  
STRATEGIC FRAMEWORKS**

Strategy	Aim	Focus
<b>Market Leader</b>	New product offerings diversify services, innovation, wide distribution channels, market led, flexibility, and defensive.	Emphasis on market expansion and market share
<b>Market Follower</b>	Well resourced, competitive prices, service quality, flexibility, and innovative.	Building market share and strong brand.
<b>Market Challenger</b>	Low risk strategy, price follower, inadequate resource base to challenge, complementary offerings.	Maintain market share, some degree of differentiation, learning from market leaders.
<b>Niche Marketer</b>	Small-scale, specialist market offerings.	Segmented market specialist offering, niche marketing.

Source: (Lumsdom, 1997)

## **Marketing Leader Strategy**

In order for this strategy to be crafted, major skill and determination are required. To dominate in terms of volume and value of sales or bookings is not an easy job. Such power allows the organisation to establish benchmarks or standards in the market to make it difficult for competitors to remain in the market. A typical marketing audit reviews the company's products in comparison with competitors' volumes, appeal to market sectors and their contribution to the organisation's revenue and costs. Consequently, this may assist in decision-taking to allow for the organisation to construct the business plan over the next period. In addition, other factors may be considered to be significant, such as changes to relevant legislation, or new conditions in the economy. Diagnosis provides a detailed platform for prognosis of the fore-casting of future trends for each of the market sectors of interest to the organisation [12]. Regarding this strategy, the organisation can develop a policy of either leadership or product differentiation. In this way it may avoid the danger of trying to be the leader in everything but excelling in none.

Holloway and Robinson [11], observed that: *"As the operators in particular have moved more to mass market, low price strategies, so smaller operators have turned to specialisation, whether by geographical region, type of activity or market serve"*

Let us assume that, one of the tour operators decides to become specialists in developing package holidays for customers living in a particular region of the UK. The benefits of this group can be the convenience of local airport departures, free transport to the airport or free parking at the airport. Many customers will be satisfied to pay slightly higher prices for the convenience of a local departure and the additional benefits offered. When it appears to customers that this local tour operator or travel agency is supporting the economy of the region, and is active in local community events, so local residents will think of this particular organisation first when planning their holidays. In this strategy, diversification is particularly important, when the organisation spreads its risk across a number of markets, and sees the opportunity of purchasing a new brand name. The Bass purchase of the American Holiday Inn chain is an example of the diversification strategy [13].

Laws [12] emphasised that advertising is one of the most important ways of differentiating services and therefore creates and then reinforces significant barriers against new organisations entering a market. Any newcomer has to buy exposure to overcome established companies' awareness and brand loyalty.

## **Follower Strategy**

If the organisation did not achieve success in such a short term to become market leader, the company could use this framework, to allow it to maintain a strong position in the market close to the leader. Thus, the company will hold a large market share and will adopt, as a matter of course, a similar strategic direction to the market leader. The strategy is dependent on intensive competitor intelligence, flexibility and speedily executed tactical campaigns. The ultimate goal will be to become a challenger to the market leader when market conditions permit [11].

This kind of strategy can be adopted to specialise in certain kinds of products, which are not provided by its competitors. It can also focus on quality, justifying a higher price than the large competitors, by offering improved value. As an example of this strategy, major hotel chains have identified a steady rise in the number of business women to whom they are catering, they have responded by providing facilities to meet their needs including more feminine décor, cosmetic mirrors, hairdryers, etc. In 1994, Virgin Atlantic Airways introduced Arcadia, a personal in-flight entertainment centre featuring films, cartoons, computer games and a sky map depicting the route with graphical flight information.

## **Challenger Strategy**

This is a framework used when the organisation is not in a position to follow a market leader's strategy or follower strategy, due to resource limitations. The use of this strategy is to maintain a company's position in the market place by copying the strategy of the market leader in a diluted format. The organisation will be slower to respond to the market changes and not be innovative, where it might be capable of staying within an outer zone of competition. The emphasis of the strategy lies in copying the successful formula of market leaders in order to remain in the market. For example, Virgin airlines when started its marketing operations was trying to copy the strategy of other renowned airlines such as BA.

Holloway and Robinson [11], a popular exercise for marketing managers being adopted by travel is to agencies produce a product-positioning map, revealing the customers' image of existing organisation competing in

certain fields. This can be very helpful both to a company already operating in the market, or one contemplating launching a new product. Time and money can be saved, by keeping a keen eye on market leader's activities, learning by their success and failures. Finding a marketing leader's advantages means learning and competing more effectively. Whenever possible tour operators need to see the marketing leader's brochures and know what sort of products are on offer. Also it will be helpful, if conscious efforts can be made to carry out a fairly analysis every few months, jotting down findings to decide how the information can be used, analysing their prices, their visitors, facilities and promotional activities.

### **Niche Marketing Strategy**

This is adopted when an organisation appreciates that what it has to offer serves a limited number of market segments, or conversely that there is a limited market which can be readily served. The assumption lies in the fact that there will be limited competition. Concentrating on a particular market, understanding its needs and therefore developing products and promotions which are completely appropriate for those markets can be an effective strategy especially for smaller companies without massive resources but with an excellent understanding of their target markets. These companies can operate within niche markets, which are too small to attract market leaders. Briggs [7], suggested that a focused approach is particularly suitable for those who wish to develop closer and more direct relationships with their clients. As an example, Preserve Commercial Confidentiality Hotel in Scotland is a three-star hotel with a wide range of leisure facilities and has an excellent reputation. It is open for only part of the year, from April to the end of October. Although, the hotel is profitable, it wishes to maximise occupancy levels within a relatively short season. There is increased competition from other hotels in the area, including some of the newer budget-style operations.

A SWOT analysis showed that the hotel already had a unique sales proposition, which wasn't fully promoted. The hotel took three important steps for its niche market, developed a range of short breaks for children and adults, reprinted new brochures, which were aimed at children, focusing on the wide range of children's facilities, and developed a programme of public relations activities to the profile of the hotel. The hotel has been successful in promoting itself to a wide range of special-interest publications. Moreover, other activities have included using vouchers to stimulate word-of-mouth recommendations and to encourage guests to return at off-peak periods. Direct mail has been particularly effective marketing tool, especially with the introduction of the separate children's brochure.

## **IMPLICATIONS OF TOURISM MARKETING IN LIBYA**

Libya has an extensive and varied range of tourism resources that are spread widely throughout the country. These include attractive natural features and many different landscapes of the vast Libyan Desert, long and pure beach shores, human achievements in the form of buildings, art history and archaeological sites as well as modern manufactured attractions etc [14]. These unique attractions need the provision of additional facilities to improve the presentation and interpretation at the major sites as well as facilities to improve visitor comfort. Nevertheless, implications such as inefficient resource allocation, poor infrastructure, and frequent policy reversals, in addition to the UN international embargo are major reasons for the delay and observed slow tourism developments that lead to well-designed marketing strategies to promote the country. Despite the fact that Libya possesses a splendid variety of tourism products (natural, historical and cultural). The obstacles facing the tourism sector and the development of well-perceived tourism marketing activities in Libya are several and each needs to be considered carefully in order to formulate the right policy to tackle them. These obstacles can be summarised as follows:

### **(1) Lack of Services and Tourism-Related Facilities**

In fact, sufficient infrastructure necessary for the development of successful tourism marketing is lacking. Most important amongst these, is that there is a lack of available accommodation in terms of both quantity and quality close by the principal attractions such as, classical archaeological sites, selected coastal areas and convenient desert stopover points suitable for international tourists or arrivals.

In addition, despite the large number of restaurants, there are only a few that are of an acceptable standard to international tourists. The facilities regarding the presentation of some attractions is not wholly adequate for visitation by tourists, in aspects such as: lack of road signposting and informative signposting at places of interest that are in a language other than Arabic, inadequate road maps of Libya as well as detailed ones for the essential or large towns and cities. Also there is a need to improve the existing tourism information centres at the site areas and establish some more all over the country. Besides that, there is little or no entertainment or cultural activities organized for presentation to tourists or visitors. Consequently, the shortages of these marketing facilities will definitely have its impact on the level of tourists visiting Libya. Moreover, the visa entrance system might be another deterrent for international tourists, as well

as the fact that the official currency exchange rate for the Libyan diner is at a high level, which results in uncompetitive prices for tourist-related services such as accommodation and transportation, in contrast with neighbouring countries. Furthermore, the Libyan International Airport, Ports and other facilities are not up to standard to meet international tourist market requirements. Additionally, the poor communications between organisations (tour operators, travel agencies, etc) in the international tourism markets and the local Libyan organisations has resulted in an absence of awareness and knowledge of Libya's tourism resources and attractions.

## (2) Lack of Awareness and Image

Beside the severe lack of tourism infrastructure, there is a lack of awareness and image of Libya as a new attractive destination among international tourism markets, along with using appropriate marketing promotional tools [15]. Therefore, the need for a more effective promotional campaign has become essential in order to change the negative image of the county as a tourism destination that has been held in the outside world and particularly European tourist markets resulting from western media in the last five years. Moreover, this helps in providing adequate awareness and image about Libya's tourist products to the international tourism markets. Furthermore, at present, Libya is viewed as a cultural destination to be visited mainly for desert and adventure together with historical attractions and good weather. In fact, there are many other tourism attractions in the country, which presently are not fully exploited, such as pure beaches which laves potential for further developments.

## (3) Lack of Competent and Efficient Human Resources

The tourism industry is a labour-intensive service industry dependent for survival and competitive advantage on the availability of good quality personnel to deliver, operate, manage, and market the tourism products. The interaction between the tourist and tourism industry personnel is an integral part of the total tourist experience. Tourism has one of the highest levels of labour skill shortages and Libya is no exception. However, in Libya, tourism related services have a lack of good quality personnel both in tourism planning and marketing. Therefore, there is an urgent need to develop human resources, particularly indigenous personnel, for delivering quality services for tourists, as well as enhancing the general skills of the local workforce. All hotels and beach resorts should be staffed with skilled managers and tourism marketing personnel to be more familiar with customers' needs and wants, help them to handle their enquiries and complaints as well as to meet an international standard of skills. As the industry continues to develop and managerial roles and companies become more complex, the nature of the unit management role will increasingly require the skills and knowledge that training bring to tourism.

## (4) Lack of Marketing Research and Effective Marketing Activities

The need for well-perceived marketing activities by the international tourists, which Libya is currently lacking, represents a key element for achieving an effective tourism strategy in the country. In addition to awareness and knowledge about the tourist products and improving the image of Libya as tourism destination among international tourism markets depends heavily on a good designed marketing research and Libya far behind comparing to other competing destinations in the region [15].

It is essential for responding quickly to international tourism markets and changing conditions, offering the country's tourism products in a more attractive way than its competitors as well as portraying the diversity of the Libyan tourist products in terms of society and culture, history and heritage while targeting specific segments related to individual types of activity or pursuit. As a result, regular marketing research becomes essential, particularly in a strongly competitive and fickle tourism market. Where in a country like Libya, which entered the international tourism market only recently with less experience in the field, there is a crucial need for an effective tourism marketing research. This helps in understanding the attitudes of actual and prospective tourists and keeping up-to-date with their needs and desires [16].

## **THE PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR TOURISM MAREKTING IN LIBYA**

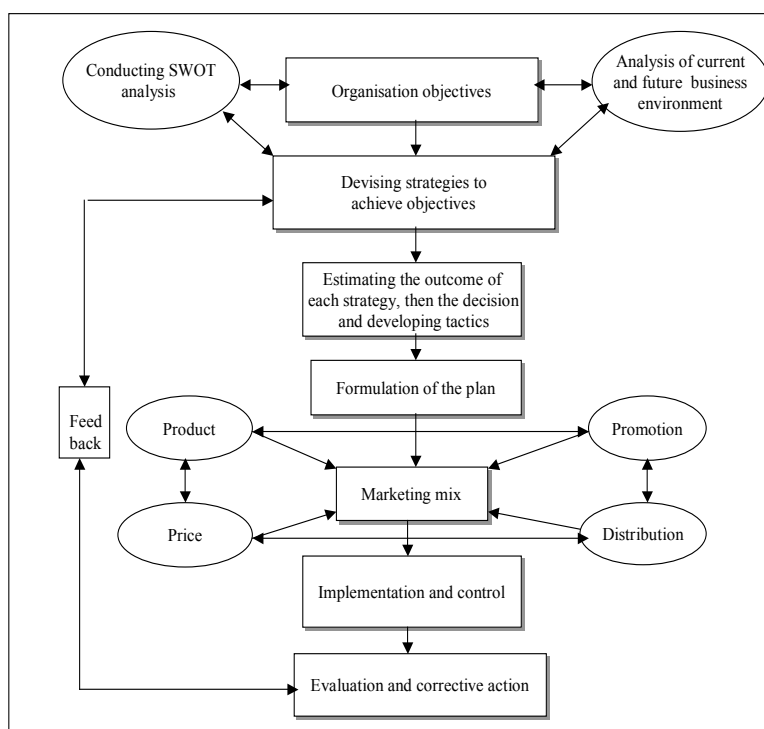
As explained in the previous sections of this research paper, tourism planning has been proved to be an essential element for any tourism marketing approach or strategy. Therefore, after considering tourism planning, the next issue relates to organizational participation in tourism marketing and promotion. The marketing strategy should be adapted as situations change and be constantly re-evaluated. In addition, the strategic marketing framework has to be comprehensive and integrated into the nation's socio-economic and political policies as well as the natural and built environment and socio-cultural traditions. Where, all kinds of tourism organisations (tour operators, travel agents, etc) and general and regional tourism boards need to be engaged in developing a well- designed marketing strategy. A new

approach to marketing strategy in countries like Libya is an essential process to identify tourism goals, resources, and existing opportunities for the country. Moreover, a new developed marketing strategy is needed to meet short and long-term objectives. In the short-term, strategic marketing approach is required to identify where tourism organisation (e.g. tour operator, travel agent, hotel, general or regional tourism board, etc.) is now, and where it will be next week. The funds, which will flow into the organisation, may not be easily predictable in the early stages of the strategic plan.

However, any tourism marketing strategy determines what needs to be offered in a given period, at a given price, and how this is to be achieved in order to meet operating costs. Beyond this, the organisation must plan to achieve its longer-term objectives. This may result in finding additional sources of capital or future investment. A marketing strategy should not be isolated. It must be integrated and co-ordinated with the financial plans, organisational plans, purchasing plans and other aspects of the organisation's total activity. As illustrated in figure (2), the researcher has approached tourism marketing in Libya as simple tool by which any tourism organisation achieves its objectives. By following such proposed marketing framework, the country, would be able to identify new tourism products attractive to international tourists and marketing opportunities, evaluating them and taking action to develop them. In case of Libya, an overview should be taken for three main areas: products, current markets and trends, which might affect tourism marketing.

Furthermore, most tourism products are made up of several components, which can be quite complicated. Selling experiences and benefits rather than features is the key to succeed in marketing Libya's touristic products. In addition, well-trained personnel should conduct marketing research in Libya beforehand in order to find out what kind of modifications or related services or facilities that are needed in order to meet the international tourists' wants and desires. Then position their tourism marketing strategy locally or internationally through the marketing mix tools before the implementation stage take place (see figure 2 below for more details).

**FIGURE 2**  
**THE PROPOSED TOURISM MARKETING PLANNING FRAMEWORK**



Source: Prepared by the Researcher

Typically, new tourism destinations to meet tourists' requirements and monitor changes in consumer motivations and satisfaction with the tourism products in order to keep it up-to-date. For Libya to compete more effectively in the North African tourism market, a huge budget has to be devoted to improving infrastructure and establishing a number of new hotels and other tourism related services to meet these specific market requirements. Therefore the need for promotional and marketing activities becomes essential, where it is obvious that tourism might be used as a

tool for improving the infrastructure of a destination, which requires the involvement of various parties under government guidance. For tourism markets, it is very essential to have an idea about who comes to visit so it is easier to attract more of the same type of people than to reach completely new markets. There are a number of general trends, which need to be considered in the context of their impact on developing a strategic tourism marketing approach. Such as; economic and political changes overseas, published researched materials on growing or diminishing markets, technological developments, changes in leisure activities, increases in the number of short break holiday takers or increased demand for special (value-added) destinations.

## CONCLUSION

As been discussed within this research paper, the new strategic approach for tourism planning and marketing in Libya has to be comprehensive and integrated into the nation's socio-economic and political policies as well as the natural and built environment and socio-cultural traditions. A country like Libya, which entered the tourism market only recently in the last few years, should invest heavily in infrastructure and other tourism related services in order to be prepared and meet the international tourist market requirements. For Libya as a new tourist destination to be competitive and remain in the market place, appropriate strategy should be adopted to specialise and be distinctive in certain kinds of products and services, which are not provided by its competitors. Planning within tourism marketing is the only possible way to assist achieving organisational objectives and growth as well as improving performance in a fast and ongoing changing market. A need, therefore, exists to analyse carefully the many variables affecting tourism marketing. Strategic marketing plans should not be isolated, where modifications and flexibility are essential to meet and adapt the rapid change of the tourism market conditions.

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