

Evaluating Tourists' Brand Awareness Towards Socotra Island(Yemen) Tourism Products

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Abstract

A tourist's destination brand awareness is a significant reflection of how consumers recognize a brand and involves the strength of the brand presence in the mind of consumers and the means whereby this knowledge can be easily retrieved from the mind or memory. This research study evaluates tourists' brand awareness towards Socotra Island tourism products. This study was conducted in Socotra Island in Yemen and is exploratory in nature. A constructed questionnaire survey of 320 international tourists provided data for descriptive and inferential analysis. The results indicate that tourists are not significantly aware of historical and cultural tourism products; however, they have shown a slight awareness of adventure tourism products. The results also showed that tourists are significantly aware of nature-based tourism products. The study suggests that the historical, cultural, and adventure products should be promoted intensively so that Socotra will have a variety of products that can be experienced by potential tourists and will make Socotra distinguish itself from other competitive destinations.

Key Words: Brand awareness, Tourism products, Socotra Island, Destination branding

1- Introduction

Destinations are considered to be "amalgams of tourism products, offering an integrated experience to consumer travelers" (Bregoli, 2013). Strategic marketing activity in a destination has been increased significantly in many destinations since it triggers and increases a positive economic multiplier effect on the community and gains a competitive advantage in an increasingly saturated tourism market. This activity affects the destination's brand, which is one of a state's most valuable assets. The concept of destination branding is critical for a destination to be identified and differentiated from alternatives in the target market's minds (Qu, H., Kim, L.H. and Im, 2011). In recent years, there have been emerging studies about destination brands,

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images, identities, and brand equity (Chieng & Lee, 2011; Kamble & Sawant, 2020; Oliveira, 2015). The brand plays a pivotal role as it influences customer tourists' choices on the destination (Kamble & Sawant, 2021). As destination branding becomes a relatively active area of destination marketing organizations (DMO), the question remains as to whether there is any congruence between the DMO's marketing activity on the brand image and identity and the recognition of tourist-based brand equity (Chigora & Ndlovu, 2019; Pike & Bianchi, 2010).

Understanding and measuring tourist destination awareness has a long history in tourism-related academic research, and it has been an increasing concern for destination management organizations (Dedeoğlu et al., 2020; Wheeler et al., 2011). It is a crucial concern for destination marketing, specifically for market segmentation and developing new tourist products and services for specific market segments (D. Buhalis, 2000). Brand awareness significantly impacts consumer decision-making as consumers generally use brand awareness as a decision heuristic (Zvavahera & Chigora, 2015). A known brand has a much better chance of being chosen by consumers over an unknown brand (Manuel & Veríssimo, 2017).

Additionally, brand awareness is argued by as it is a combination of whether a specific brand is stored in the memory of consumers and their ability to recall a particular brand within a product category (Kim & Lee, 2018). Brand awareness is created by increasing brand familiarity through strong association and repetitive positive exposure (Amelia, 2018).

Socotra Island, the area of the study, lies in the north-western corner of the Western Indian Ocean, at the junction between the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea at 12°30'N 54°00'E, some 380 km south-east of Ras Fartak on the Gulf of Aden coastline of Yemen and about 250 km east of Cape Guardafui, the tip of the Horn of Africa (Al-okaishi, 2020; Van Damme, 2022). The island is approximately 110 km long and about 40 km wide, with a total surface area of 3625 km². Its highest elevation is at Jabal Dryet (1526 m) in the central Haghier Massif (Van Damme & Banfield, 2011). Socotra Island is a globally significant centre of biodiversity, featuring almost 300 endemic plants (34% of the total), over 30 endemic vertebrates, and more than 300 species of endemic invertebrates (among those described) (Alashwal, 2016). Botanists rank it among the top ten islands in the world in terms of botanical diversity (Miller & Morris, 2004). The WWF: (the island of Socotra is listed in the Global 200 Ecoregions). The IUCN also recognizes Socotra as an important center of endemism and hosting hundreds of rare

plant species. The Island contains Important Bird Areas (Birdlife International, "Important Bird Areas in the Middle East", 1994) and has been recognized as a Man and Biosphere Reserve (UNESCO, 2003). The Archipelago is also included in the regional network of Important Marine Protected Areas (PERSGA, 2000).

2- Review of Literature:-

2.1 Destination Brand Awareness

Brand awareness refers to the cognitive capacity of a prospective consumer to identify and remember that a particular brand belongs to a specific product category (Aaker, 1991). Brand awareness encompasses three distinct levels: brand recognition, brand recall, and top-of-mind awareness (Aaker, 1996). Brand recognition, the lowest level of brand awareness, is determined by aided recall (Chellan et al., 2017). On the other hand, brand recall is assessed by unaided recall, where individuals are not provided with any prompts or cues (Perić & Mandarić, 2020). In this context, the brand that is spontaneously mentioned first during an unaided recall test is considered to have reached top-of-mind awareness (Aaker, 1991).

Establishing brand recognition and cultivating a sense of familiarity among consumers are crucial aspects of destination branding (Sallam, 2016). The possibility of consumers considering the purchase of further items and services linked with a specific brand is higher when they possess familiarity with that brand (Vukasovič, 2013). This can be attributed to prior favourable encounters, as individuals are not confronted with unfamiliar circumstances. They are reluctant to show trust in the consumer goods product image. The same principle applies to travel destinations, as individuals are inclined to choose locations where they can experience both comfort and safety while simultaneously deriving enjoyment from their visit (Alhadid, 2015; Wagner & Peters, 2019).

2-2 Brand awareness of Socotra Island Tourism:

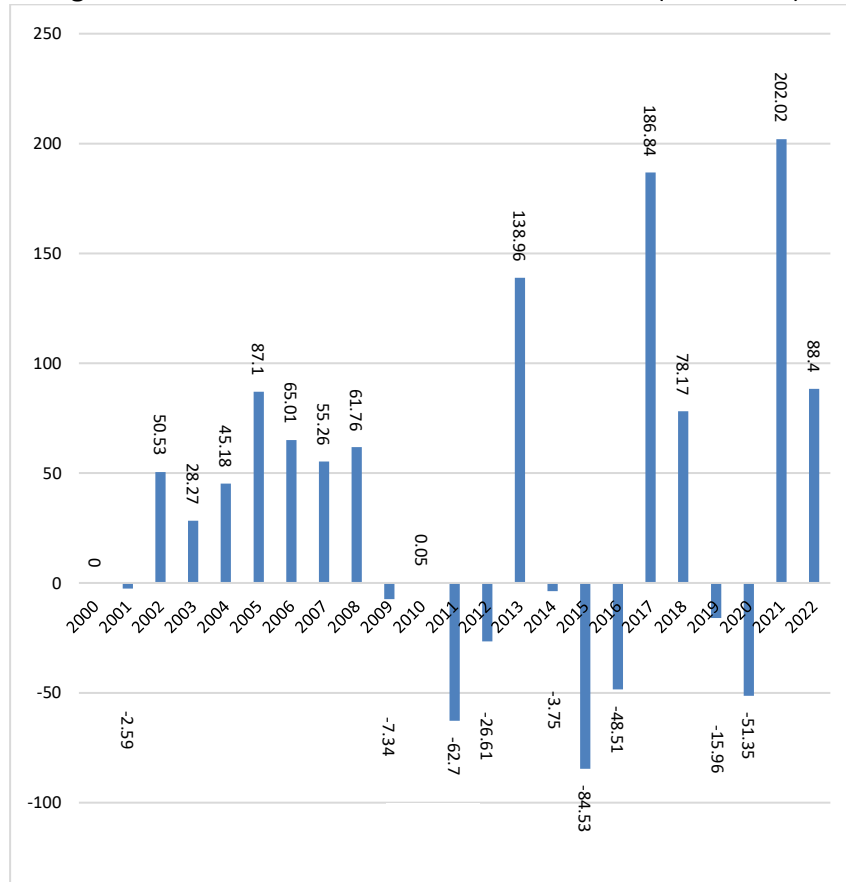
There is no disputing that Socotra's tourism strength in its unique island biodiversity land seascapes (JESSAMINE, 2005). However, Socotra has much more to offer and potentially broader market appeal than the relatively narrow market for 'ecotourism' products. Socotra's competitive advantage in tourism lies not only in its unique ecotourism appeal as the 'Galapagos of the Indian Ocean' but also in its ability to provide distinctive and varied products not found or in limited supply in other parts of the region (Hilary & Janice, 2020).

Since the declaration of Socotra Island as a "protected Area" based on presidential decree No.275 2000, Socotra Islands has become the country's first ecotourism destination, attracting many international tourists coming to Yemen (Al-Agwan, 2015). This has helped provide and facilitate access to the Island by sea and air, in addition to a large number of Services that were not available in the distant past because of its remoteness and inaccessibility that has kept the islands shrouded in an aura of mystery until recent times. Table 1 and Figure 2 demonstrate tourist arrivals to Socotra from 2000 to 2022, which explains tourism development on the Island.

Table no.1 Number and Percentage of Change for Tourists' Arrivals to Socotra

Island from (2000-2022).		
Years	Arrivals	%
2000	193	0
2001	188	-2.59
2002	283	50.53
2003	363	28.27
2004	527	45.18
2005	986	87.10
2006	1,627	65.01
2007	2,526	55.26
2008	4,086	61.76
2009	3,786	-7.34
2010	3,788	0.05
2011	1,413	-62.70
2012	1,037	-26.61
2013	2,478	138.96
2014	2,385	-3.75
2015	369	-84.53
2016	190	-48.51
2017	545	186.84
2018	971	78.17
2019	816	-15.96
2020	397	-51.35
2021	1199	202.02
2022	2259	88.40

Source: Compiled by researcher based on the Tourists Statistics report of Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of Yemen from 2000 to 2022.

Figure No. 1 Number of Tourists Arrival to Socotra (2000-2022)

Source: Source: Researcher Development based on Table no. 1

It can be noted and observed from Table (3.8) and Figure (3.4) above that the fluctuation in the number of tourists inflow to Socotra Island varies from 2000 to 2022, where the number reached (193) in 2000 and then decreased in 2001 to (188) with a decrease of (2.59%). Then it increased continuously during the period (2002-2008) to reach (4,086). The years from 2000 - 2008 -were seen as stable years. Additionally, a number of international INGOs have played a significant role in introducing the Island globally. After that, the number decreased significantly during the period (2009-2012) due to exceptional situations attributed to recent political and security unrest in the country. In 2013, there was a relative increase (138.96%). 2015 and 2016 were considered the worst years for tourism in Yemen in general and Socotra, mainly due to the No Air fly zone launched by the ten-country Saudi-led coalition offensive against the Ansar Allah Houthis group, which began on March 25, 2015. Hence, the number of tourists decreased in 2015 and 2016 to reach 190, with a decrease of (48.51%) in 2016 compared to 2015. It also noted the increase during

the period (2017-2018) with a rise of (78.17) in 2018, then the number decreased in the year 2020 to (397), with a decrease of (35.51%) due to the coronavirus. In 2021, tourism resumed on the Island as there was a direct flight by Air Arabia from Abu-Dubai to Socotra. So, the number of arrivals reached (1199) in 2021, and the number of tourist arrivals in 2022 reached 2259.

To summaries, tourist arrivals to Socotra increased from 193 in 2000 to 2259 in 2022, with an increase of (521%) from 2000 to 2022, with a total number of (32,412) tourists during the last two decades.

3- Research Question of the study :

- To What extent are international tourists aware of the tourism products on Socotra Island?

4- Research Method and Design

Data was collected from tourists visiting Socotra Island. Tourists were approached at famous tourist locations like Dihamari Marine Protected Area, Fermhin Forest, Dewtah Lagoon, Arher Beach, and Omaq Beach. In total, 320 questionnaires were distributed, of which 305 usable responses were collected with the help of a structured questionnaire. The Initial part of the questionnaire consists of the respondent's demographic profile and travel-related behavior. The second part covers dimensions related to Historical and cultural tourism products, nature-based tourism products, and Adventure tourism products. SPSS (Software Package for Social Sciences) was used to analyze and process the data. One simple T-test was used to test the hypothesis.

5- Results and Discussions

5.1 Descriptive analysis of the Demographic profile and Travel-related behaviour of the respondents

Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the respondents' demographic profile and travel-related behaviour. Questionnaire survey results in Table No. 1 indicated that more Male tourists than females responded to the study. More than 72% of the respondents are relatively young (not more than 40 years of age). The continent of origin, the majority of the sample belongs to the European category, which forms (70.1%) of the total sample. The analysis of the study showed that most tourists get their source of information about the area of study through Social Media sites, with a percentage of 32.4 % followed by 31.7 words of mouth. 84.7% of the respondents visited

Socotra Island for Tourism (leisure and travel).Additionally, The results showed that Most of the respondents surveyed, 91.9 %, indicated they were visiting Socotra for the first time. The relatively high number of first-time visitors implies that the study area is attractive and competitive as it is associated with market growth. Repeat visitation for Socotra forms 8.1 %. The last question in travel-related behaviour and information is the Length of stay. The average trip duration on Socotra was measured as weeks for the sample. Most tourists stayed from 1- 7 days, which forms one week with a percentage of 61.9%. This is due to flight availability, which comes once a week to the Socotra. Staying one week on the island is fair enough to explore most of the major tourist destinations. The second largest group forms stay from 8- 14 days with 33.1%. The last group is more than 14 days, forming the least group with a percentage of 5.0. Those who stay more than two weeks come for official work mostly.

Table no.2 Demographic profile and Travel-Related Behaviour of the Respondents

Variable	Category	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	54.5
	Female	45.5
Age group	Less than 20	11.7
	21-30	37.2
	31-40	23.4
	41-50	15.3
	51-60	8.8
	More than 60	3.6
Continent of origin	Europe	70.1
	Asia	14.3
	Africa	3.2
	North America	4.9
	South America	4.1
	Australia	3.4
Source of Information	Social Media sites	32.4
	Travel Agency/ Tour Operator	25.6
	Media (travel magazines and books, TV)	6.8
	Word of Mouth	31.7
	Other Literature	3.4
Purpose of visit t	Business/Official	9.3
	Research	4.0
	Tourism	84.7
	Other	2.1
Frequency of Visits	First-time visitor	91.9
	Repeat visitor	8.1
Length of Stay	1-7	69.1
	8-14	33.1
	More than 15 days	5.0

Source: Field Survey

5.2 Destination Brand Awareness “Tourism Products”

Brand recall or brand awareness is concerned with how well a brand is remembered by a customer, as evidenced by their capacity to recognize the brand in a variety of circumstances (Keller, 2012; Vladimirova, 2011). Using advertising, direct marketing, sales promotion, sponsorship, the Internet, and integrated brand communication are the main methods for raising brand awareness (Karmokar, 2014). Hence, the researcher divided this part into three dimensions to determine which tourism products are most acknowledged by potential tourists. The dimensions of tourism products were categorized as Historical, nature-based, and adventure tourism.

5.2.1 Descriptive Analysis of the Historical and Cultural Tourism Products

A total of 4 items related to tourists' awareness of historical and cultural tourism products are loaded with this factor. These variables are “Folk art and dance, handicrafts/souvenirs, Local cuisine (food), and Ancient scripts.” It reveals that the variable “Local cuisine (food)” has obtained the highest rank among the other items with a mean of 3.10 and a standard deviation of 1.13. It is followed by “handicrafts/souvenirs,” with a mean of 2.78 and a standard deviation of 1.09. Folk art and dance” obtained the 3rd with a mean of 2.68 and a standard deviation of 0.99. Finally, “Ancient scripts” with a mean of 2.62 and a standard deviation of 1.04.

Table No. 3 Descriptive Statistics of the Sample Responses on the Historical and Cultural Tourism Products.

The first dimension Historical and cultural tourism products		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Std. Deviation	RANK	General trend
Folk art and dance	N	80	156	230	99	15	2.68	0.99	3	Neutral
	%	13.8	26.9	39.7	17.1	2.6				
handicrafts/souvenirs	N	86	143	189	138	24	2.78	1.09	2	Neutral
	%	14.8	24.7	32.6	23.8	4.1				
Local cuisine(food)	N	52	123	189	149	67	3.10	1.13	1	Neutral
	%	9.0	21.2	32.6	25.7	11.6				
Ancient scripts	N	118	132	220	90	20	2.62	1.04	4	Neutral
	%	20.3	22.8	37.9	15.5	3.5				
Historical and cultural tourism products							2.80	0.80	Neutral	

Source: Field Survey

5.2.2 Descriptive Analysis of Nature-Based Tourism Products

This factor carries eight items related to tourists' awareness of nature-based tourism products. Those items are “Wildlife sanctuaries and national parks, Wild Camping, Marine life, Beaches (long and white

sandy beaches, sand dunes), Flora and fauna, and Lagoons (e.g., Detwah Lagoon, Qariayh Lagoon, etc.). The variable “Beaches(e.g., long and white sandy beaches, sand dunes) has obtained the highest ranks with a mean of 4.77 and a standard deviation of 0.52.

The variable “Mountains, valleys, canyons” received the 2nd rank with an average of 4.75 and a standard deviation of 0.56. In the third place, “Flora and fauna” with a mean score of 4.72 and a standard deviation of 0.63. In the last rank, the variable states, “Wildlife sanctuaries and national parks,” with a mean score of 4.15 and a standard deviation of 1.04.

Table No. 4 Descriptive Statistics of the Sample Responses based on Nature-Based Tourism Products

The second dimension		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Std. Deviation	RANK	General trend
Wildlife sanctuaries and national parks	N	18	31	76	178	277	4.15	1.04	8	Agree
	%	3.1	5.3	13.1	30.7	47.8				
Wild Camping	N	0	12	41	132	395	4.57	0.71	6	Strongly agree
	%	0	2.1	7.1	22.8	68.1				
Marine life	N	3	6	47	185	339	4.47	0.73	7	Strongly agree
	%	0.5	1.0	8.1	31.9	58.4				
Beaches(long and white sandy beaches, sand dunes)	N	0	6	9	108	457	4.77	0.52	1	Strongly agree
	%	0	1.0	1.6	18.6	78.8				
Flora and fauna.	N	3	6	20	95	456	4.72	0.63	3	Strongly agree
	%	0.5	1.0	3.4	16.4	78.6				
Lagoons (e.g., Detwah lagoon, Qariayh lagoon, etc.)	N	6	0	15	117	442	4.71	0.62	4	Strongly agree
	%	1.0	0	2.6	20.2	76.2				
Mountains, valleys, canyons.	N	3	3	12	101	461	4.75	0.56	2	Strongly agree
	%	0.5	0.5	2.1	17.4	79.5				
Natural caves (e.g., Hoq caves, Digub Cave, etc.)	N	3	3	50	75	449	4.66	0.70	5	Strongly agree
	%	0.5	0.5	8.6	12.9	77.4				
Nature-based tourism products							4.59	0.45	Strongly agree	

Source: Field Survey

5.2.3 Descriptive Analysis of Adventure Tourism Products

The third dimension consists of 3 items. This factor includes variables like “Aerial adventure sports’. Parachuting, paragliding”, “Water

adventure sports, e.g., Scuba diving, snorkeling, natural swimming pools, boating, etc.” and “Land-based adventure sports, e.g., trekking, climbing, hiking, etc.”. Among these variables, the highest one experienced mainly by the potential tourists who visited the area of the study is “Land-based adventure sports, e.g., trekking, climbing, hiking, etc.” with a mean score of 4.51 and a standard deviation of 0.77 followed by “Water adventure sports, e.g., scuba diving, snorkeling, natural swimming pools, boating, etc.” with a mean of 3.96 and a standard deviation 0.86. The last variable ranked as the least products experienced by tourists is “Aerial adventure sports, e.g., parachuting, paragliding”, with a mean of 2.62 and a standard deviation of 1.23.

Table No. 5 Descriptive Statistics of the Sample Responses on Adventure Tourism Products

The third dimension		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Std. Deviation	RANK	General trend
Aerial adventure sports (e.g. parachuting, paragliding)	N	141	111	209	63	56	2.62	1.23	3	Neutral
	%	24.3	19.1	36.0	10.9	9.7				
Water adventure sports (e.g., scuba diving, snorkelling, natural swimming pools, boating, etc.)	N	6	21	131	256	166	3.96	0.86	2	Agree
	%	1.0	3.6	22.6	44.1	28.6				
Land-based adventure sports (e.g., trekking, climbing, hiking, etc.)	N	9	3	36	165	367	4.51	0.77	1	Strongly agree
	%	1.6	0.5	6.2	28.4	63.3				
Adventure tourism products							3.70	0.66	Agree	

Source: Field Survey

6- Hypothesis Testing:

The Main Hypothesis” International tourists are significantly aware of tourism products on Socotra Island”

From the first main hypothesis, the following sub-hypotheses have emerged to measure the awareness of international tourists of each dimension separately.

H1: International Tourists are significantly aware of the historical and cultural tourism products on Socotra Island.

One-sample t-test was used to test this sub-hypothesis. The result is shown in the Table below:

Table No 6 One-Sample T-Test results to determine the level of awareness of international tourists Regarding the historical and cultural tourism products on Socotra Island

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation	Test Value = 3 df=579		Trend of Agreement	The decision
			T-Test	Sig.		
Historical and Cultural Tourism Products	2.95	0.744	-1.619	0.053	Neutral	Rejected

Source: Field Survey

The mean of the dimension "Historical and Cultural tourism products" is (2.95) which is approaching the hypothetical mean of the study (3). According to the One Samples T-Test, the differences between this mean and the study's hypothetical mean is not statistically significant at a significance level of 5% or less ($t = -1.619$, $P\text{-Value} = 0.053 > 0.05$), confirming that International tourists are not significantly aware of this product. Hence, the first hypothesis is rejected.

H1: International Tourists are significantly aware of nature-based tourism products on Socotra Island.

One-sample t-test was used to test this sub-hypothesis. Its result is shown in the Table below:

Table No 7 One-Sample T-Test results to determine the level of awareness of international tourists of Nature-based tourism products on Socotra Island

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation	Test Value = 3 df=579		Trend of Agreement	The decision
			T-Test	Sig.		
Nature-based tourism products	4.60	0.456	84.237	0.000	Very High	Accepted

Source: Field Survey

The result is shown in Table No. (7) showed that the mean of the dimension "Nature-based tourism products" is 4.60, which is higher than the hypothetical mean of the study (3). According to the One Samples T-Test, the differences between this mean and the study's hypothetical mean was statistically significant at a significance level of 5% or less ($t = 84.237$, $P\text{-Value} = 0.000 < 0.05$), confirming that International tourists are significantly aware of the nature-based tourism products on the island. Hence, the second sub-hypothesis, which emerged from the first main hypothesis, is accepted.

H1: International Tourists are significantly aware of the adventure tourism products on Socotra Island.

One-sample t-test was used to test this sub-hypothesis. Its result is shown in the Table below:

Table No 8 One-Sample T-Test results to determine the level of awareness of international tourists regarding adventure tourism products on Socotra Island.

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation	Test Value = 3 df=579		Trend of Agreement	The decision
			T-Test	Sig.		
Adventure tourism products	3.70	0.664	25.325	0.000	High	Accepted

Source: Field Survey

The result shown in Table No (8) showed that the mean of the dimension "Adventure tourism products" is (3.70), which is higher than the hypothetical mean of the study (3). According to the One Samples T-Test, the differences between this mean and the study's hypothetical mean was statistically significant at a significance level of 5% or less($t = 25.325$, $P\text{-Value} = 0.000 < 0.05$), confirming that the degree of awareness of international tourists of adventure tourism products on Socotra Island was high. Hence, the third sub-hypothesis, which emerged from the first main hypothesis, is accepted.

Based on the testing applied to the sub-hypotheses that were emerged from the first main hypothesis reflects that the international tourists who have surveyed in the area of study have a strong awareness of nature tourism products and adventure tourism products; however, their awareness of the historical and cultural products are not up to the mark. As a result, stakeholders, tourism players, and local authorities should give more attention to the historical and cultural product aspects, re-brand the image of Socotra as a tourist destination, and make it a competitive destination among international destinations.

7- Summary and Conclusion

In the present paper, Tourism awareness of the Socotra Island tourism product was studied from the tourists' perspective. Based on the thorough literature review, three sub-hypothesis that emerged from the main hypothesis were determined. The study results have reflected that though socotra is rich in cultural and traditional heritage

such as the folklore arts, folklore songs, chants, dances, social traditions and customs, handicrafts/souvenirs, Local cuisine(food), and Ancient scripts are not yet well experienced by tourists. Additionally, Socotra Island is rich in adventure activities, such as Aerial adventure sports (e.g., parachuting, paragliding), Water adventure sports (e.g., scuba diving, snorkeling, natural swimming pools, boating, etc.), and Land-based adventure sports (e.g., trekking, climbing, hiking, etc.) however these products are not yet well explored by the tourists who visited Socotra Island since the last decades. The good news is that tourists who visited Socotra have shown a significant awareness towards nature-based tourism products such as Wildlife sanctuaries and national parks, Wild Camping, Marine life, Beaches(long and white sandy beaches, sand dunes), Lagoons (e.g., Detwah lagoon, Qariayh lagoon, etc.), Mountains, valleys, canyons and Natural caves (e.g., Hoq caves, Digub Cave, etc.). Thus, the authors suggest that The tourism planners on the island, such as destination marketing organizations, tours and travel companies, and tourist guides, should focus on marketing and involve the potential tourists to experience the cultural, historical, and adventure tourism activities well. With this, tourists will easily recall and retrieve the Socotra brand awareness. In other words, having a positive perception towards brand awareness of the tourism products on the island is considered a crucial element for building a strong destination image, positive perception of quality, and destination loyalty.

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