

BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL TOURISM BRAND FOR THE PHILIPPINES AND THE STRUGGLE WITH DESTINATION IMAGE AND TOURISM SLOGANS

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ABSTRACT

Brands, images and slogans have been interchangeably used for marketing destinations of all sizes. However, there is a need to understand the destination branding process and what it entails, how identities and images play a crucial part and the way tourism taglines are able to summarize all of the destination's value in a string of words. Two destinations were taken as case study areas to determine the success factors for a destination brand and the effect of perceived images to visitor intention through qualitative and quantitative methods.

Keywords: *Destination brand, Destination image, Tourism slogan, Intramuros, Capiz*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of tourism worldwide has caught the attention of numerous nations and international organizations. Looking back to seven years ago, Yigitcanlar (2009) stated that many countries around the world look at tourism as a powerful engine to push for positive economic benefits and sustain local economies. However, this is not a free and easy ride for tourism destinations especially with the increasing growth of international tourism and the continued emergence of new destinations. As new tourism destinations emerge in the global market, there is a greater demand for country brands to stand out among other nations competing with the emerging markets (Daye, 2010). Places with distinct identity tend to stand out and establish leverage through their unique brand position and competitive proposition, which is almost always linked to the ability of the local service providers in a certain destination to deliver services and communicate

perceived and promised experiences far better than the rest of the service providers in the market (Buhalis & Spada, 2000; Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Govers & Go, 2009).

The success of a tourism destination brand is not merely made by the wonders of innovative promotional materials. It also entails the image perceived and received by the visitors coupled with actual share-worthy experiences that embrace the truth about the pull factors claimed by a destination. However, there are still destinations that cannot seem to find its competitive position in the place branding index and within the greater geography of destination images and tourism slogans.

The Philippines is an example of a country that can be branded using many techniques, perceived in more means and experienced in much more ways. From the advent of the “Wow Philippines” campaign in 2002, to “It’s More Fun in the Philippines” launched in 2012. The 10-year period of the Philippines has always been compared to what started as a promotion campaign of Malaysia, the Visit Malaysia Year’s Theme: Malaysia Truly Asia circa 1990. The taglines are reworded from time to time, but the elements of consistently communicating the brand name of Malaysia per se has remained.

Can the same be said about the Philippines? In 2016, there was a declaration from the Department of Tourism (DOT) that the tagline “It’s More Fun in the Philippines” will no longer be carried by DOT and its attached agencies. This declaration raised concerns and questions from different stakeholder groups in the tourism industry. The question of how exactly do slogans affect a destination’s image and branding position arose. The question can be answered by taking a step back into understanding what exactly are the core elements for a successful tourism destination brand, exploring the challenges destinations face and the strategic directions that can be taken. Through a study of two destinations in the Philippines, the paper concludes with inputs on the Philippines’ tourism brand building, possible impacts of a slogan change and the importance of a strong destination imagery for Philippine tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Challenges Posted to Tourism Destinations

Previous studies contend that destination competitiveness can be achieved by going through a destination branding process wherein the unique selling point (USP) of destinations are identified and appropriate strategies are built around the USP. Not far from this is the recognition that destination branding is a continuous strategic process rather than just an end result. The study of Blain, Levy, and Ritchie (2005), faced the challenge that knowledge of destination branding remains poorly understood which led to the suggestion that destination branding can be treated as a set of marketing activities that – creates a name, symbol or logo that consistently conveys a memorable travel experience. However, in reality, destination branding goes far beyond the creation of icons and symbols. This has been reflected earlier in a study of Pritchard and Morgan (1998) where the authors stated that the necessity of activities related to destination branding need to be plausible, durable, deliverable and credible enough to meet tourist expectations, the core brand values are researched, developed and delivered in partnership with the destination's population and in partnership with key agencies and organizations. Travel is a relatively expensive undertaking and destinations with novelty are able to flourish and maximize the equity of their brand elements (Gartner, 2009). In a related perspective, that brand recall is not the only crux of a wholesome experience of the tourist. In essence, the perceptions of a destination are not merely made by the wonders of advertisement but it entails the necessary step of ensuring to provide visitors with experiences that embrace the truth about the “come-on” promise of the destination and fulfilling this promise in every encounter the visitors have when they visit the destination. This makes up for a strong brand, anchored at the core identity of the product or destination.

Destinations cannot afford to ignore branding because successful branding brings enormous rewards as its overall objective is to create a unique, value-added product and offer an innovative and effective tool by which managers can establish emotional links with

the consumer and encourage consumer loyalty and enable destinations to appeal to the vacationer's self-images and lifestyles (Pritchard & Morgan, 1998).

The foundation of all destination branding is establishing what makes a destination different thereby endowing it with a competitive advantage which is reflected in the brand image as seen from the eyes of its main markets (UNWTO & ETC, 2009). Images are often interchanged and at the same time used in conjunction with brands. This is because of the high relevance of brands and images. Wagner and Peters (2009) explain that in the tourism destination context, a brand can be considered as representing an identity for the destination stakeholder (producer) and the image for the tourist (consumer).

Critical to the creation of a durable destination brand is the identification of the brand's values and translating them to suitable and emotionally appealing personality along with the targeted and efficient delivery of that message (Kozak & Baloglu, 2011). In which case, tourism slogans ought to carry out its role. When effectively crafted, a slogan can enhance brand awareness and brand image; however, slogan development has been mainly a hit or miss process within the last few decades mainly because of the lack of a comprehensive guiding framework (Kohli, Leuthesser, & Suri, 2007)

Brand, Image, and Tourism Slogans

The effect of a national brand image is clearly understandable to the point that places lucky enough to have acquired a positive reputation, find more ease in doing things even at the global stage: their brand goes before them, opening doors, creating trust and respect, and raising the expectation of quality, competence and integrity (Anholt, 2009). Destinations pose far more challenges in image and brand building due to its multidimensional characteristic which can be seen in the development of a slogan that encapsulates a destination's diverse and often eclectic range of natural resources, built attractions, culture, activities, amenities and accommodation (Steven Pike, 2005). How exactly do these elements affect the development of images perceived by the market? From a consumer's point of view, Beerli and Martin (2004) proposed that two information sources and personal factors affect the development of a perceived destination image wherein cognitive and affective attributes affect the overall image of a destination. Being able to measure and operationalize the attributes of destination images have long been a study of many authors because being able to do so is practically beneficial since images

provide information that can be useful for the positioning and promotional strategies such as slogan development employed by tourism destinations (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993).

Kohli et al. (2007) discussed that a brand is comprised of elements such as the brand name, logo and slogan; the brand name gives a product its core identity, which serves as an anchor of the image being carried; logos on the other hand are creative representations of brand names and are more concerned on the design, aesthetics and visual appeal; a slogan is an important support element because it serves as the link to bridge the gap of what abstract images mean as it communicates what the product is about and how the brand is able to define differentiation. Slogans are declarations of intentions and are tools to present what a destination is or what it would like to be – whether they are supply oriented (destination characteristics are given focus) or demand oriented which asks prospective visitors to take action (Galí, Camprubí, & Donaire, 2016).

Destination Branding as a Strategic Action

Consequently, destination branding is treated as an essential strategy in positioning and differentiating a destination (Kemp, Williams, & Bordelon, 2012). Nevertheless, a mix of attractive words that make up a good slogan is necessary as seen by some destinations because the articulation of a destination's brand positioning strategy is necessary as it provides the link between the core identity of the destination and the actual brand image the destination holds in the market (Steven Pike, 2005). Destination image contributes to forming a destination brand and its success in the market. So long as the image is positive, the brand would have a strong position in the market. At every level of the complicated process of gaining an edge over competitors and winning visitors, there should be carefully planned marketing communication strategies. These actions aim not only to create awareness, inform, educate and initiate action. However, given the modern day's connectivity and access to information, these strategies also aim to build and maintain a positive reputation and initiate personal connectivity to the audience and potential clients which is taken as an approach towards strategically implementing Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC). In IMC, the main principle is to avoid the usage of one promotional tool and a singular direction of marketing channel. The approach rather, is to stay coordinated through consistent and strong measures that result to more efficient

selection of promotional tools and more effective communication of the brand message (Middleton, Fyall, & Morgan, 2009).

Recent technological developments have led approaches to IMC briskly, such that most promotional strategies are launched in a digital platform. It is considerably suitable that the treatment of destination branding as a process to develop ownable, trustworthy, unique, relevant and distinct brand equity (Kouris, 2009) and the enablement and development of the ability to communicate the brand values to the inner and outer limits of the destination.

METHODOLOGY

This study made use of combined approaches of qualitative and quantitative methods of research. The use of case studies has been employed in order to sample the unique characteristics within the destinations being studied.

Qualitative interviews were conducted with twenty five key (25) informants in the selected destination: Intramuros, Manila. The sample consists of internal stakeholder groups who are leaders and representatives that hold key positions in decision making or policy implementation within their respective groups. The experts have been practitioners in their field for at least five years. A total of twenty four (24) organizations and coalitions of organizations were studied to exhaustively represent the stakeholder profile of the study area which covers the government sector, private individuals and business sector, arts and culture, people's organization, religious organizations and educational institutions.

Conducting a study with stakeholders is important especially if the context of the study is a destination or a certain society. Stakeholders are groups or individuals who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm's objectives or accomplishment of organizational purpose and each of these groups play a vital role in the success of the business enterprise in today's environment since each of these groups have a "stake" in the modern corporation (Freeman, 2010). In the context of this study and of tourism, stakeholders can be generally categorized as the Management Organization (such as the Intramuros Administration) National Organizations (such as the Department of Tourism

and the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority), Public-Private Organizations (such as the National Parks and Development Committee, National Commission for Culture and the Arts, National Historical Commission of the Philippines, Manila Tourism and Cultural Affairs Bureau, Tourist Police Unit of the City of Manila), Community Groups (such as the Barangay Councils, religious and education groups) and the Business Sector (such as the different business groups, operators and attractions in Intramuros). This categorization is garnered from the studies of Gilmore (2002), Sheehan & Ritchie (2005), Rodriguez-Diaz, & Espino-Rodriguez (2007), UNWTO & ETC (2009), Wagner & Peters (2009), Kozak & Baloglu (2011), Bregoli, (2012), Garcia et al. (2012) and Waligo et al. (2013). The informants were asked to discuss their perspective on the important factors for a destination brand to succeed.

The second case study made use of a survey formulated with structured questions. The aim of the survey is to quantify the destination image from the viewpoint of the survey participants, who are essentially potential visitors of another destination. The respondents were randomly sampled in different areas within Metro Manila.

The results of the qualitative interviews were processed through thematic analysis while the quantitative data were processed using basic statistical procedures. Combining the use of qualitative and quantitative measures is necessary because the use of a single type of method poses limitation to capture the attributes of the projected and perceived images; furthermore, studying the perspective of the stakeholders as well as the consumers have proven its importance in the studies of brand and image building (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Kong, Cros, & Ong, 2015; Steve Pike, 2002)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Case of Intramuros, Manila

The respondents on the first case study conducted were stakeholders from Intramuros, Manila. The general themes which emerged from their responses can be enumerated as those related to marketing and brand management, destination infrastructure, leadership at the national and local level, governance and organizations,

involvement, attitude and understanding of the destination stakeholders. The themes were further grouped and re-organized to become concise statements.

A total of seventeen statements were formulated based on the response of the key informants. The succeeding portion presents an enumeration of these statements:

1. Good understanding, knowledge and information about the target market's expectations, needs and motivation to travel
2. Provision of tourist facilities like information centers, transportation, accommodation, public restrooms, etc.
3. Organized and properly trained tourism service providers like tour guides, receptionists, drivers of tour vans including pedicabs and tricycle drivers.
4. Strengthen the partnership of the Intramuros Administration (IA) and the City Government of Manila in enforcing cleanliness, safety and security
5. Constant monitoring of a brand's impact and relevance among key target markets using a management system with a brand manager, champions and advocates
6. An inspiring internal communications program reflective of the brand values among the employees and officials of the Department of Tourism (DOT), IA and other attached agencies
7. In order for the brand to gain traction in the marketplace, there should be long term commitment and shared vision among the key officials and leaders of the DOT and IA.
8. Clear understanding, knowledge and proper information on the destination's competitive position and negative points.
9. Visible leadership and support from high ranking officials in DOT, IA and the City of Manila who have the skills, attitude and mindset to persistently seek opportunities for destination improvement and competitiveness
10. Political will from DOT, IA and the City of Manila to ensure continuum of actions, delivery of output and the destination's holistic sustainability
11. To increase the financial equity of the destination, leadership skills from the IA should encourage discipline, stakeholders' cooperation and participation,

collaboration with other public organizations and partnership with private sectors.

12. A mindset within DOT and IA that positions the brand at the center of all marketing communications and the implementation of an action plan that aims for the improvement of the destination as well as the sustainability of the developments
13. Stakeholder buy-in, harmony, regular communication, cooperation and participation right from the start of the brand development
14. Regular communication with stakeholders and involvement activities to provide discipline, positive values and information
15. The officials and employees of the DOT and IA must have the mindset to maintain a positive attitude, willingness to learn and be trained and support the development plans for the destination
16. Consistency in communicating an overall holistic theme that extends to the tour programs, tourism services, marketing materials, taglines, themes, events and activities
17. Maintaining relevance to the market through innovative media communications wherein the taglines and slogans should be catchy and easily remembered by people

A unique feature of Intramuros is that it is the only structure of such significance in the Philippines which makes it a declared heritage destination and historical landmark of the country as prescribed by Philippine laws. Presidential Decree 1616 enacted in 1987 ordered for the creation of the Intramuros Administration. Apart from the surrounding antique wall structure Intramuros is home to the San Agustin Church, a UNESCO world heritage site inscribed in 1993. Tourism is clearly a major trade in Intramuros. Despite the modern developments being offered by other tourism destinations, the continued patronage of people to Intramuros spurs from a deeper fact that Intramuros is itself a brand and has become a distinguished destination in the Philippines. Despite the characteristics found only in Intramuros, the destination experiences difficulty in building brand equity which includes its brand identity and communication links such as taglines or tourism slogans. Even though the historical significance of the place is unique, this

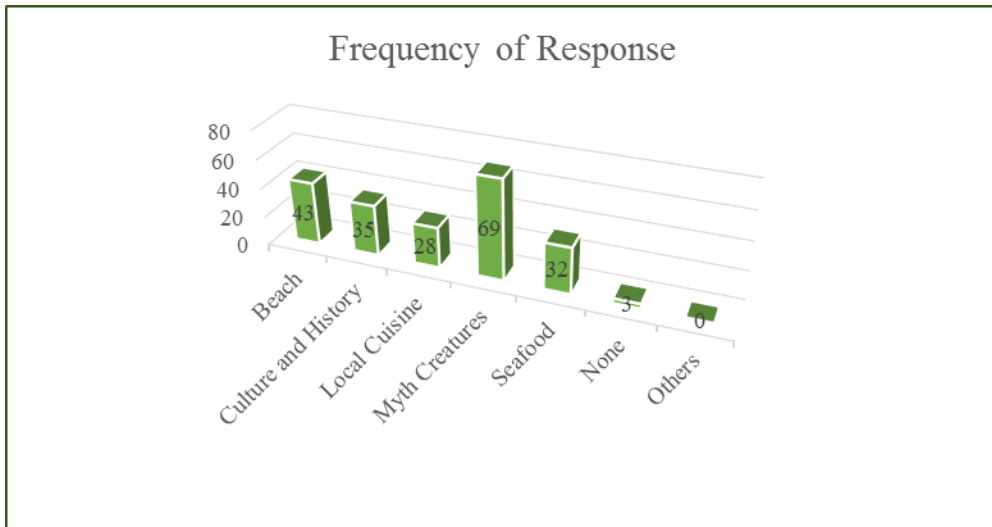
characteristic is hard to grasp and appreciate if there are no visual representations or communication materials that support the significance.

Although physical evidences are present, the continued rapid development in the area and within its approximate location continuously pushes development, preservation and conservation at a difficult meeting point.

There is only one Intramuros in the Philippines and perhaps even in the world. This brings about benefits and challenges as it makes the location a good case to study because of the political and governance structure it possesses. Apart from having its own Destination Management Organization (DMO) which is the Intramuros Administration, the Department of Tourism (as the National Tourism Organization) at some level also has a say on Intramuros. As if not merely enough, the unexpected complexity brought about by implementation problems of the Local Government Code of the Philippines puts the City Government of Manila in power in some instances but powerless in most instances. These difficulties are reflected on the response of the key stakeholders especially on their desire to have consistency in branding and marketing activities. Something which is also similar to the experiences of the Philippines when taken as a whole. An important aspect as well would be the shared opinion of how political will, leadership and good governance can influence progress and tourism development in the destination. Development moves progressively and this should show how brands keep their relevance and appeal. Furthermore, destination branding is a continuous development of the brand because brands should be evaluated and refreshed as needed (Baker & Cameron, 2008; Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2004). This development encompasses not just physical attributes and infrastructure but it involves as well an integration of innovative tools and techniques that communicate appealing tourism slogans that help build a stronger pull factor for the destination.

The Case of Capiz Province

In studying the province of Capiz, eighty respondents were surveyed to examine their perceived image of Capiz. These respondents are within the segment of the usual population who travel to Capiz but have never been to the province. They survey inquired about the image that comes to their mind when asked about Capiz, the different sources



where they get information, important elements they would consider and the factors that might discourage them from travelling to Capiz.

More than half of the respondents, sixty nine people representing eighty six percent (86%) chose Philippine mythological creatures or Aswang in local terms as the first image that comes to their mind while only thirty two people chose “Seafood” as the image of Capiz that dominates in their mind. Interestingly, Roxas City, the capital of Capiz has been known as the prime source for seafood supply for Metro Manila as well as in nearby provinces. Due to the abundance and variety of seafood and its accessibility to important hubs of commerce, Capiz has been carrying the name of the Seafood Capital of the Philippines for decades. A quick Google search will return close to 523,000 results of blogs, news video clips, traveler reviews and event features. The search result could be conservative but not surprising to think that the Philippines through the seafood products of Capiz has gained international recognition to as far as Moscow, Russia. Nevertheless, the study results support the reality that it is not the same perception and image held by domestic travelers.

Figure 1 Image that comes to mind when asked about Capiz

The societal belief or even just the recognition of Philippine mythological creatures (commonly known in local language as aswang, manananggal, tikbalang, etc.) as factors that affect a destination’s brand is a clear contribution to the image perceived by the

market. Even though this is far from the image that the destination managers wish to project, it is a factor worth looking into.

When Filipinos talk about an aswang they generally refer to the physical traits, habitat or activities of mythical beings identifiable to European tradition such as the vampire, self-segmenting viscera sucker, man-eating werewolf, vindictive witch and carrion-eating ghoul and in addition, beings like dwarfs, elves and demons (Ramos, 1969).

Relatives and friends are among the top sources of information for potential travelers. This is because the positive image developed by a previous visitor increases the likelihood of repeat visitation making the image from consumers very significant in travel purchase decisions (Kong et al., 2015). This can be related to how the Philippine mythological creatures and supernatural beings are still prevalent despite being in a modern environment. The belief of such creatures is usually shared among personal networks as stories or personal anecdotes passed on to different generations as a family belief or superstition. Community folklore has long been a part of the Filipino culture and community folklore. It encompasses rituals and traditions being performed in provinces and far flung towns in the Philippines and most accounts documented in the studies of Ramos (1968) are situated in the Visayan Islands.

Table 1
information for

Sources of Information	Frequency of Response
Mobile Applications	2
Travel Agencies	5
Newspapers, magazines	9
Brochures	20
School, college, university	22
Television, radio	37
Internet	60
Social Media	63
Friends, relatives, word of mouth	71

Sources of travelers

Safety and security is the top concern that will encourage and possibly discourage a traveler to visit Capiz. Given this perspective, it is interesting to note that at least 60% of the sampled population are still interested of Capiz as their future travel destination, only about 3% would not consider Capiz and the remaining are leaning towards traveling to Capiz if given a change. Travel and tourism information available in the internet through various media have none the less proven it is worth as an information source. More specifically, social media through different social networking sites and user generated content sharing sites have been the second choice of the survey respondents in terms of sourcing travel and tourism related information. The possibility that the image of mythological creatures and supernatural beings do not necessarily deter the possibility of attracting visitors is what can be drawn from these results. Rather, it can be considered as one of the considerations for a destination's pull factor. The effect and extent of that supposition is however beyond the scope of this study.

Despite the darkness that the perceived image of aswang brings to Capiz, the province experienced steady growth since 2005 with the highest record so far at 146,559 overall visitors in 2014. There are also at least twenty accommodation establishments within the city and nearby towns ready to accommodate visitors. This number is considerably sufficient and growing compared to other destinations that have limited supply of tourism services.

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented two case studies of Philippine destinations that are currently welcoming visitors both foreign and local. Both destinations have innate tourism values worthy as case study destinations in order to understand better what destination branding really entails. Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, the study areas were good cases to test what previous studies have highlighted: brand names,

images and slogans need to have a strong link with each other in order for them to make sense and achieve its goal of communicating what the destination is all about.

The first case presented limitations, challenges and difficulties in managing a destination and moreso brand management. It appears that governance functions cannot be whole fulfilled with constraining bureaucratic conditions present and the typical lack of consistency among the governing bodies. The lack of understanding of organizational leaders on destination marketing itself poses a big speed bump, perhaps second only to the challenges of physical infrastructure and human resource availability and capability. The second case on the other hand presented a destination with a lot of tourism potential but is shaded by a dark image based on Philippine mythical creatures and superstitious beliefs. The case of Capiz demonstrated that indeed the information passed on and sourced from personal networks are influential to a traveler's decision making process. The study results validate the model proposed by Beerli & Martin (2004) wherein the overall perceived image is made up of sources of information that affect the cognitive and affective dimensions towards the overall perceived image. In addition, the study also captured a positive visitor intention despite a misaligned projected image by the destination managers and the perceived image of the potential consumers.

In the past fourteen years and not to mention the years prior to 2002, the Department of Tourism has had six different logos and tourism slogans under five Secretaries within two Presidential administrations. Quite important to take note is that the six different logos and slogans all have different color pallets, length of words and general visual appeal while maintaining the name of the Philippines. However, the different slogan key words used, interchanged with the logos have made it difficult to retain durability and traction among the end users, the Philippine population and even to the target segments. At the same time, the slogans have not succeeded in communicating impactful and ingenious positioning that the country so hoped to occupy. This is evidenced by the continuous change and search for witty and creative slogans alongside changes in the administration and political arena. With the current slogan "It's More Fun in the

Philippines”, the campaign of the Department of Tourism was to involve the audience and participate in defining what the slogan means. Indeed, the word “fun” was interpreted in different ways even to the extent of inducing sarcastic and implied negative messages through memes and media-shared content.

The ambiguity of fun linked to the reality faced by the Philippine society posed challenges to the tourism industry and the Filipino people in general. Anholt (2009) laid down the question of whether places benefit from having a clear and simple image as against rich, complex and contradictory images. Ambiguous slogans try to sell everything and are not able to show anything representative of the destination; they end up being excessively generic and unoriginal (Galí et al., 2016). Similarly, hyperbolic tourism slogans are prone to risk as it sets an unrealistic environment to reach and sustain, ultimately sacrificing the country’s reputation and integrity (Desmarais, 2015).

Overall, the case studies have presented that essential to brand building are the key success factors that destination stakeholders should look into before even bothering about the marketing communication tools to be used in promoting a destination. The DMO and in the case of the Philippines the DOT (as the NTO) has a very crucial role in discovering, practicing and emanating the brand values of Philippine tourism. Buhalis (2000) explains that with a political and legislative framework for tourism marketing and planning, DMOs are enabled to be accountable for the planning and marketing of the region and to have the power and resources to undertake action towards achieving its strategic objectives. Similarly, important is looking into the perceived image of the existing and potential market because the goal is to have all of these elements aligned in order to effectively craft a tourism slogan that would encapsulate all of the destination values.

The implication of this study to future tourism researchers is to look into operationalizing the success factors into concrete categories and values and trace these matters back to the study of imagery in order to relate the effect of information sources and personal factors into the perceived destination image as postulated by Beerli & Martin (2004). More than budget and financial constraints, perhaps the biggest limitation faced by destination managers in the struggle of brands, images and slogans is the lack of understanding and strategic approach to integrating the brand identity to the

communication tools commonly used in tourism. As successful brand building entails the participation of all stakeholders, the study also leads to a strong recommendation that destination managers should consider the brand values and actual capacity of tourism destinations to fulfill a branding promise.

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