# Ahead of a crucial juncture model for managing brands
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## Abstract

In order to help managers adopt a comprehensive strategy for place brand management, this article builds on previous research into models of place branding-management processes to create a multi-level conceptual model. Place brand assessment, stakeholders engagement management, place brand articulation, and brand communications are the identified components for attention and action according to the model. Brand infrastructure linkages include regeneration of infrastructure and brand infrastructure. The model delineates the interplay and causal relationships among these elements, which impact the brand experience; these elements include the brand's architecture and identity. The current models of place branding focus on relationship management, communications, and strategic planning, but none of them provide a holistic view of the branding process, and even fewer have been put to the test. With a foundation in the broader study on branding and place branding concepts and processes, this article presents an integrative model that expands upon and incorporates these previous models.

## Introduction

Destination branding, place branding, and place image development are some of the related fields that are gaining more and more attention. It may be said that place branding originated in the tourist marketing sector, but nowadays, locations are required to think about branding in many other ways, especially when it comes to managing the perception and experience of their brand among many stakeholders. This means that places other than those with a strong reputation as tourism hotspots are also interested in place branding and image. The world is becoming a more competitive place due to the free flow of goods and people and the improvement of public transportation. As a result, places need to create an environment that attracts new resources, investors, residents, and tourists while also satisfying the needs of existing businesses, homes, and economic activities. According to some observers, many areas are fighting for existence as their economic foundations crumble (Kerr, 2006; Olins,

2002). The issue now appears to be how to brand rather than whether to brand it all.

Place branding is becoming more and more of an area of study and practice. Recurrent themes within the various disciplines that discuss place branding include: comparisons between branding a product/service and destinations/cities (Cai, 2002; Gnoth, 2002; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005; Parkerson & Saunders, 2005); comparisons between corporate branding and city brands (Kavaratzis, 2004; Olins, 2003; Trueman, Klemm, & Giroud, 2004) and similarity to corporate umbrella branding (Gnoth, 2002; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002); impressions between place branding and (re)positioning (Gilmore, 2002a, 2002b); image building and reconstruction (Curtis, 2001; Hall, 2004); the importance of unique identity and use of branding elements (Cai, 2002; Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2004); and the role of emotional links with consumers (Gilmore, 2002b; Hall, 2004).

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Still, there seems to be a dearth of empirical research in this area, despite the fact that it is a young one (Caldwell & Freire, 2004). A more thorough examination of similarities and differences using methods from experience, theory, or expert recommendations is required, according to Kavaratzis (2004). Hankinson agrees with this sentiment and argues that the topic needs further theoretical work (2009).

Embedded in the literature are a wide range of insights into aspects of the place branding process. However, typically such insights are specific to aspects of the process, such as stakeholders, image building, communication, and repositioning, and are often discussed in specific case-study contexts. Only six researchers have specifically proposed broader models of the place branding process, or explicitly offered place branding-management models. These models take different perspectives on the branding process; respectively, relationship management, communications, and strategic planning. None of these models have been widely cited, adopted, or adapted, and most are relatively new. Whilst such models are extremely useful in identifying the different perspectives it is possible to take on place branding, and are an important basis for further research and practice, none are holistic as they are limited to the context of the perspectives that they reflect. The aim of this article is, then, to propose a strategic place brand- management (SPBM) model. This model is intended to act both as a framework for contextualising various streams of research in place branding, and to inform and support place marketing and brand managers.

The article commences with a review of the place branding concept, and an overview of existing place branding models. Next, the proposed brand-management model is offered and described. The following section argues the case for the inclusion of each of the components in the place brand-management model, drawing on the earlier models and other relevant literature. Conclusions and recommendations are offered to inform further research and practice in the area of strategic brand management. Place branding concepts and models Place branding is defined as the practice of applying brand strategy and other marketing techniques to the economic and sociopolitical developments of towns, cities, regions, and countries (Anholt, 2004). More specifically, Lodge (2006) suggests

that holistic place branding 'encompasses everything a place wishes to sell' and that the 'understandings and experiences of places are mediated by a range of everyday texts through which landscapes are presented' (Gibson & Davidson, 2004), affirming that place brands have transcended into a composite construct (Gnoth, 2002; van Ham, 2001; Olins, 2002; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002). Hankinson (2009) emphasises the need for place branding to extend beyond a focus on the creation of images to an understanding of the execution of the promised experience. Whilst a number of authors comment on the process of place brand management, often in the context of a specific case study, most previous research does not attempt to offer a holistic model of brand management that can inform practice and theory development in this field. There is a pressing need for these assorted insights to be collected and analysed towards another generation of an overarching framework. Further, whilst there are few more explicit models of place branding in the literature, none are holistic, and the extent to which they are either grounded in previous theory or transferrable to contexts other than those in which they were developed has yet to be established. This article draws on both these previous explicit models, and other insights into the place branding process to propose the SPBM model.

Previous models of place branding that have played a central role in developing the model in this paper are: the relational network brand (Hankinson, 2004a), city image communication (Kavaratzis, 2004), a model of destination branding (Cai, 2002), destination branding process (Laws, 2002), the 7A destination branding model (Baker, 2007) and city brand management (Gaggiotti, Cheng, & Yunak, 2008). As is evident from these labels, between them these models take different perspectives on the branding process.

The relational network brand (Hankinson, 2004a) considers the process of brand management in terms of stakeholder relationships and as a progressive ripple effect relational exchange between the brand and stakeholder groups. It identifies the following relationships: consumer, brand infrastructure, media, and primary service. In the centre of the model is the 'core brand', with its personality, positioning, and reality, which is developed and extended through a process of progressive

interaction between the stakeholders each reinforcing the reality of the core brand through consistent communication and delivery of services. The model identifies the influencers in brand development and embraces both the brand communication and the brand experience aspects of brand development.

City image communications (Kavaratzis, 2004), as its name suggests, focuses on city image and how this is communicated, arguing that 'the beginning lies in the realisation that all encounters with the city take place through perceptions and image'. The model identifies three types of communication: primary communication (subsuming landscape, infrastructure, structure, and behaviour elements), secondary communication, and tertiary communication. Primary communication relates to the communicative effects of a city's actions when communication is not the main goal of the actions, while secondary communication is the formal intentional marketing communications such as advertising and public relations, and tertiary communication refers to the word of mouth reinforced by media and competitors' communication. The process of place brand management is considered from the perspective of communicating a unified image, with primary and secondary communications evoking and reinforcing positive tertiary communications. The word 'brand' does not appear in this model, although the notion of 'image' is central. Components in this model are linked by a dotted line when the link is not controlled by marketers and by a full line when marketers can be expected to control a link (Kavaratzis, 2004).

A model of destination branding (Cai, 2002) has as its focus the building of brand identity and image, and is founded on the recognition that destination branding is a cooperative process, but the model makes little direct reference to stakeholder groups. Rather, in common with the relational network brand model, this model depicts brand
– in this case, brand identity – at the heart of the model. Of the models considered here, this model is most strongly grounded in branding theory. With brand identity at its core, it shows a relationship between band image building and brand element mix. On the one side, the components of a brand – attributes, affective, and attitude (3As) – are identified, and on the other side, the processes for brand building – such as marketing programmes, marketing communication, and managing secondary associations – are identified. In applying the

model to the Old West Country (New Mexico), Cai, (2002) established that cooperative branding between rural destinations ensured attribute-based images with a stronger link to brand identity. The model is, however, complex, and it is difficult to interpret how it might be applied in practice.

The destination branding process model (Laws, 2002) and the 7A destination branding model (Baker, 2007) are similar, although the latter is extended to embrace adoption and attitudes. Both models focus on destination branding and offer a step-by-step process reminiscent of many other marketing strategic planning models. Indeed, Laws (2002) in particular has relatively generic steps, and nowhere in the model is the word 'brand' mentioned. The mnemonics of the 7A destination branding model are appealing, but it also avoids the use of the word brand, although steps such as 'articulate' and, 'adoption and attitudes' hints at the notion of brand behind a number of stages in the model. Table 1 compares these two models and indicates that both frameworks depict the similar components and stages, and that it is therefore reasonable to argue that the 7A destination branding model supersedes the destination branding process model. Accordingly, in this paper, we discard the destination branding process model from further consideration.

# The strategic place brand-management model

The previous section reviewed the conceptual models relating to place brand management. Together they serve to identify some of the components of a more holistic place brand-management model, although none are comprehensive, with each taking a different perspective on place branding. There is, therefore, a need for a new model of the place brand-management processes to support the development of both practice and research in the place branding field. Founded on these earlier models, and informed by wider reviews of the literature, this article proposes such a model. Table 2 highlights the various components of the proposed place brand-management model in comparison to the existing models discussed in the previous section. This table demonstrates the extent to which the SPBM model offers a more all-embracing and integrative perspective on place brand management. The SPBM model is shown in Figures 1 and 2. The key components of the model are: brand evaluation, stakeholder engagement

(management), infrastructure (regeneration), brand identity, brand architecture, brand articulation, marketing communications, brand experience, and word of mouth. Figure 2 shows the sub-components of infrastructure (regeneration). Within each component a number of processes and activities take place. Depending on the specific components, these processes and activities may involve marketing professionals, citizens, visitors, and a range of other stakeholders. It is important to acknowledge that the processes in these components occur, whether or not any agency takes an active and strategic approach to brand management. However, without such proactive interventions, the outworking of the process may be a disappointing brand experience, negative word of mouth, and ineffective marketing communications. A clear view of the components in the place brand-management process is a firm platform for achieving a coherent brand identity, creating satisfying brand experiences, and driving positive word of mouth. The arrows on the model indicate influence relationships between components. For example, the model shows that the 'brand communications' component influences and is influenced by the 'brand experience' component.

## Place brand-management components

This section defines and describes the components of the model. It also argues the case for the inclusion of each of the components, and summarises key insights on activities associated with the components as identified in earlier research.

Prior to discussing the individual components of the model, however, it may be useful to explain the central significance of the space denoted in Figure 1 by the term 'brand infrastructure relationships and leadership'. This arena is where the brand identity is created, and the complex dynamics between stakeholders, their engagement, and interests and infrastructure are worked through. Developing brand identity is dependent on the effectiveness of brand leadership in engaging and managing stakeholders on the basis of shared objectives. It is the responsibility of management to engage all levels of stakeholders in capital development (Rainisto, 2003). The multifaceted nature of places requires leadership to permeate; the process of place brand management requires cooperation negating any form of coercion. Infrastructure strategies must consider the diversity of stakeholder needs and the limitations of the place brand with regard to its infrastructure and environment (Balakrishnan,

2008; Gaggiotti et al., 2008). Therefore, the role of leadership should be supporting the establishment of partnerships and networks by providing focus and fostering commitment.

As Figure 2 shows, and as will be discussed in further detail below, the infrastructure component is concerned with both the tangible and intangible attributes of the brand. Physical and environmental infrastructure strategies such as those associated with regeneration are important in driving the functional attributes of the place brand. On the other hand, there is also a need to establish the symbolic traits of place in order to deliver on the experiential attributes of the brand. Implicit in this model then are:
(a) the importance of conceptualising the place brand as being about both image and experience;
(b) the central significance of the physical environment on the brand experience; and (c) the complex but pivotal role of stakeholders in the brand-building process.

The components are discussed below in the order that they appear in the model in Figure 1, working from left to right. The only exception is brand evaluation. This is discussed first for two reasons. First, the model recognises that places do not create their own brands but rather that they are created by multifaceted place interactions that occur irrespective of whether they are recognised. It is important to recognise that all places have a 'brand' or at the very least a label, in other words, a place name. Therefore, brand evaluation, including audit and assessment, is often the first stage in an identified place branding project. Second, and arguably more importantly, brand evaluation should be a continual process. It completes the feedback loop that supports the dynamic development and evolution of the brand over time.

### Conclusions

Place brands are complex constructs, and it is therefore not easy to construct a model of place-branding processes. However, in the interest of effective theory building and the benchmarking of practice, it is important to seek to make progress towards a generic and holistic model of place brand management. On the basis of earlier models and assorted insights into place brand management and place branding, this article proposes a SPBM model. This holistic model is intended to act both as a framework for contextualising various streams of research in place branding, and to inform and support place marketing and brand managers.

The components of the SPBM model include: brand evaluation; brand infrastructure

relationship, including infrastructure (regeneration) and stakeholder engagement (management); brand identity; brand articulation; brand architecture; brand communications; word of mouth; and brand experience. The underlying philosophy of the model has four key strands.

First, the SPBM model represents the process of place branding and its key components. Places and their stakeholders have a choice: they can either explicitly seek to manage these processes or leave the processes to run their own course. In other words, many of the processes in the model will take place without any intervention, and visitors, residents, businesses, and others will have an experience of a place, whether that experience is managed or not. Active place branding should: enhance the coherence of the experience; support the efficient use of resources to maximise the enjoyability and appropriateness of the experience; facilitate the evolution of the experience in response to changing circumstances; and, in general, as far as key stakeholders are concerned, engender 'pride of place' that is effectively shared and communicated.

Second, branding is an interactive and evolutionary process. In other words, it is not a 'once and for all project'. This is signified primarily by the inclusion of the feedback loop through brand evaluation. This feedback loop is between the brand experience and brand infrastructure relationships, which, in turn influences brand identity. Most managed branding processes will commence with brand evaluation in order to audit and assess the current situation. Elsewhere in the model, two-headed arrows signify an ongoing interaction between components, such as place brand engagement and place brand infrastructure.

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