

The 4D Model of Place Brand Management

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Place branding is receiving increased practitioner and academic attention. While the need and benefits are becoming more widely accepted, there is uncertainty as to the application of brand principles to places. Both the similarities and differences between corporate brands and place brands have been given attention in the literature with the consensus being that place branding is more complex. This work identifies some of the issues and processes relative to place brand management. While not purporting to be a definitive model of place branding, a model consisting of four sequential stages is proposed. The 4D model consists of the stages of *deciding*, *designing*, *delivering*, and *determining* and is supported by relevant literature and examples from the United Arab Emirates. It is anticipated that the model will contribute to academic work and as well be of benefit to practitioners charged with place branding.

Introduction

It has been established that a place name is a brand and, similar to other types of brands, people can share *a consistent group of characters, images, or emotions* (Simeon 2006) when they recall or experience the place. Location names or place names as brands can identify and differentiate a place from other places (American Marketing Association, 2005 definition of brand). In introducing their *Country Brand Index*, Future Brand (2006: 3) advises:

“Countries are brands, by design or default. A country brand can be a generic label or ubiquitous wrapper, or can become the compelling glue between political, social and economic pillars of a nation. Brand, when properly conceived, and executed, can elevate a country, focus its tourist offering, fuel its outbound and inbound investment, reframe its reputation and create renewed pride among its citizens.”

Not only are country names brands, all place names are brands, and if managed, can potentially deliver the types of benefits proposed by Future Brand for countries. Brands are created (Morgan 1999) and can be managed to influence the meaning of the entity it represents. Brands have a role of communication

(Hankinson and Cowking 1995, Hankinson 2003) and can influence the meanings of identity, image and reputation (Balmer and Greyser 2003). As communicators, corporate brands for instance, compete with communications from an array of sources, including media, customers, employees, competitors and governments. Brand management, therefore, is about managing meaning. With regard to places, Gilmore (2002) claims, it is now a risk *not* to apply a brand strategy to a place name. She suggests that locations that do not seek to brand manage themselves run the risk of being positioned by competitors or other interest groups. As with corporations, the media and even movies can influence the meaning of a place brand. For example, the effect of the movie *Midnight Express* upon the reputation of Turkey (Mutlu 2005) is an example of a movie 'managing the brand'. Effective place brand strategies can counter negative communications (Avraham 2004). Kerr (2007) defines place brand management as "the act of communicating the place brand in a manner to deservedly influence the meaning of the location in the minds of the people who matter to the future of the location".

Academic and practitioner literature has compared and contrasted corporate branding and place branding (Olins 1999). Green (2005: 280) states that while working with stakeholders is a familiar concept, "the stakeholder matrix is considerably more complex in a place branding project". Place brands require multilateral alliances throughout the community and beyond. In addition to the number and nature of stakeholders, it is more difficult to select partners as well as exclude partners. Further, there is not a formal organisational structure and places do not have the same rigid control mechanisms which exist in organizations (Hankinson 2001). Potential partners may decide not to participate or even develop a separate and competing place brand strategy. When compared to corporations, places are less able to exclude groups of users or stakeholders (Kavaratzis and Ashworth 2007).

The need for place brand management is becoming more widely accepted in an environment of more competition and mobility of place markets, particularly corporations and residents (Mommaas 2002). The function of place marketing is increasingly being argued for as a role of government in the era of the "competitive state" (Dickinson 2007). A number of leading authors have called for more research into place branding. Dinnie and Melewar (2008) for instance, state:

"The field of nation branding is characterised by an increasingly large amount of real world activity, but relatively little rigorous theory building. The domain of nation branding remains under-theorised."

In order to better understand place brand theory and practice, we reviewed the literature on place branding and branding generally and examined place branding issues in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Although the UAE study was a matter of convenience for the authors, the UAE was chosen for its rapid economic growth and, hence, the attention it draws to marketing and branding. In particular, we were interested in, *what were the issues faced in managing the place brand* and second, *what governments were doing about place branding*. The consolidation of the literature, as well as an examination of issues in the UAE, allowed us to reflect on what might be essential components of place brand management. These are introduced and discussed in the next section.

A Model of Place Brand Management

While not purporting to be a definitive model of place brand management, we identified four essential stages. The 4D Model shown as Figure 1 consists of the stages of *deciding*, *designing*, *delivering*, and *determining*.

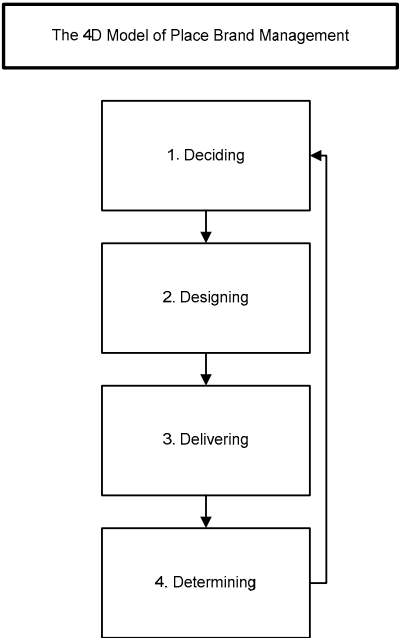


Figure 1: The 4D Model of Place Brand Management. (Authors)

Each of the stages is now introduced and discussed.

Deciding

The *deciding* stage is linking strategy for a place to its brand, that is, its name. The strategic direction of a place should be linked to the brand. The brand orientation argument suggests that brands can be “the starting point for the formulation of a new strategy and an important precondition for a new direction” (Urde 1994: 18). The arguments for a brand orientated corporation put forward by authors including Urde (1994, 1999) and Urde, Baumgarth and Merrilees (2011) are seemingly just as relevant to a place. Important questions include: *What issues are important for the future of a place and why are these issues important?* We argue that some governments in their enthusiasm to implement what they interpret as a brand, such as the hypothetical tagline ‘city of flowers’, do not commence with strategic planning for the future of a place but seem to take the view ‘a brand will save us’. Our point is similar to that of corporate strategy, in that the place strategy and the brand strategy should be aligned. The place brand strategy may be the executive summary of the desired positioning of a place and may be pivotal in driving a new place strategy (see the City of Innovation discussed by Kerr et al. 2007).

In Dubai and Abu Dhabi, the brand strategies have been underpinned by extensive strategic planning in the *Dubai 2015 Strategic Plan* (Government of Dubai 2007), the *Plan Abu Dhabi 2030* (Government of Abu Dhabi 2011) and the *Abu Dhabi Strategic Plan 2008-2012* (Government of Abu Dhabi 2011). The Abu Dhabi Government (2011) states:

“The process involved two years of coordinated work across 26 of the Abu Dhabi Government entities. Tens of government workshops and 350 meetings have been held, and so far eighteen goals, 202 priorities, 636 targets and 1,499 initiatives have been identified.”

Abu Dhabi has a focus on diversification by looking at sustainable industry and infrastructure, urban planning, hospitality, environment (ecology), retail, and culture. Dubai identifies its opportunities as being financial services, professional services, logistics, trade, hospitality, storage, construction with a strong focus on education, particularly at the university level. Once these issues are decided, it is then possible to *design* a brand strategy which may be used to lead the future direction of a place. With regard to places, Van Ham (2001: 2) refers to the changing role of politicians:

“To do their jobs well in the future, politicians will have to train themselves in brand asset management. Their tasks will include finding a brand niche for their state, engaging in competitive marketing, assuring customer satisfaction, and most of all, creating brand loyalty.”

The role of government extends from *deciding* to *designing*.

Designing

The design stage should determine which brands will be used to achieve the desired outcomes. Designing the brand strategy is far more than creative design. While creative design is important, Petromilli et al. (2002: 23) remind us that *logos, taglines, jingles, and spokespeople* are merely representations of the brand. It should be remembered that with the exception of renaming a place, most place brands, that is the names, have existed for many years and some for thousands of years. Also, similar to diversified corporations, nations have a portfolio of brands. This portfolio can be discussed in terms of brand architecture. Petromilli et al. (2002: 23) state that in the context of a business, brand architecture is the external face of business strategy and must be aligned with and support the business goals and objectives of the business. Different business strategies may require different brand architectures. Petromilli et al. (2002) suggest that strategies for brand architecture fall along a continuum ranging from a *branded house, such as* the dominant brands McDonalds and Sony, to a *house of brands* represented by Unilever and Proctor & Gamble. Nations could be seen as a conglomeration of many brands, consisting of place brands, corporate brands (Dinnie 2008 regarding country of origin effect) and even people brands such as politicians and celebrities. Figure 2 provides examples of place and corporate brands in the UAE. The UAE as a country is not a branded house using the nation brand (UAE) as the one dominant brand as reflected by the examples of McDonalds and Sony, but is more aligned to a house of brands consisting of an array of place and corporate brands. This shows the national brand of the UAE as well as brands relative to Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Examples of relevant corporate brands include Etisalat, Emirates, Emaar with examples of events being Dubai Shopping Festival and Dubai World Cup. An important consideration in place brand management is identifying the brand(s) within the portfolio that may be relevant to a place brand strategy and even drive the strategy.

The brand design considers relationships between brands as well as relationships between the stakeholders. In the case of a place brand, not only the brand portfolio and brand architecture are a way of defining relationships, the

opportunity (necessity) exists to build relationships with people behind the brands as well as the consumers of the brand. Jansen (2008: 134) points out:

“Nation branding is a monologic, hierarchical, reductive form of communication that is intended to privilege one message, require all voices of authority to speak in unison, and marginalize and silence dissenting voices. The message itself is, by design, hyper-visible, but the decision making involved in arriving at it and the multiple agendas incorporated within it are neither legible nor visible in the classic liberal sense.”

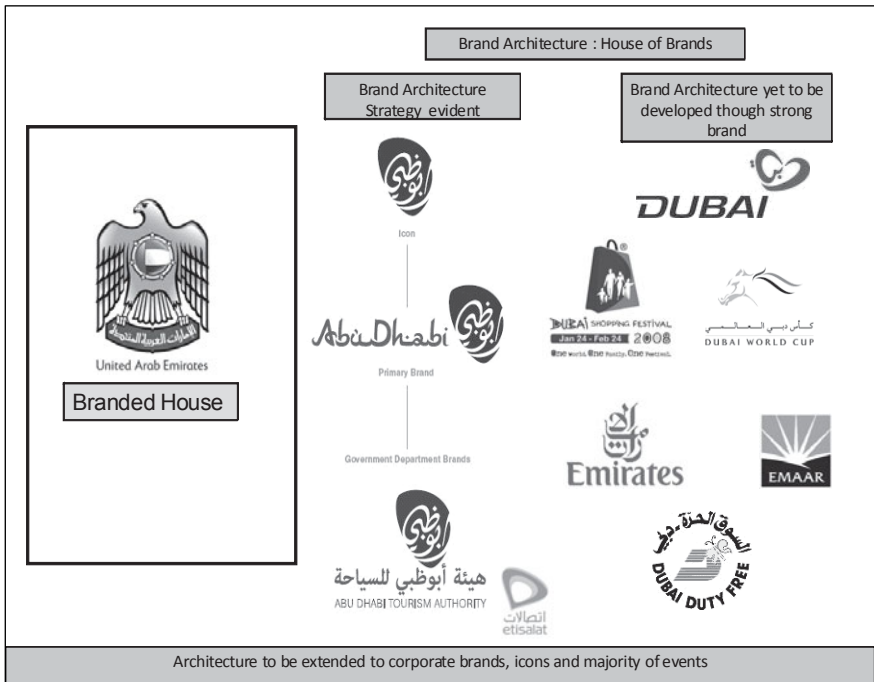


Figure 2: Examples of Place and Corporate Brands in the United Arab Emirates. (Web Pages)

By way of example, Dubai and Abu Dhabi are part of the brand architecture of the UAE. As global brands, these cities might be seen as strategic brands within the nation's brand architecture.

The identification of the national brand portfolio and the determination of the objectives and the target segments should aid the formulation of the brand

design strategy; that is, *which brands can be best managed to achieve the desired objectives?* Identification of the sectors in which a place is to compete is an important consideration which was done by the Abu Dhabi and Dubai governments. Demand analysis should include the identification of existing and likely consumers of the brand, that is, using the brand to appeal to the target segments of place markets, including corporate headquarters, new residents, investors, exporters and tourists (Kotler et al. 1993). It is after *deciding* and *designing* have taken place that consideration can be given to the creative aspects of the brand such as symbols, colours and taglines.

Delivering

As discussed in the introduction, place brands are in many ways more difficult to manage than corporate brands because of complexity of the stakeholder matrix and the less rigid control systems. Morgan and Pritchard (2004: 4) refer to the “political act of place branding”. Schwartz (2004) suggests that the point of advertising is often not to provide consumers with useful decision making information, but to sell brands. We suggest however that the selling concept is insufficient for successful brand management. Brand management should at least be more in line with the marketing concept of delivering value to satisfy the wants and needs of members of targeted segments. It is in the context of creating brand loyalty through the value enhancing role of brand management that the brand experience is important.

Brand value derives from how the brand is managed and delivered, not just the name. Ultimately the name should ‘mean’ some type of value in the minds of place consumers. Included in Kerr’s (2007) definition of place brand management is reference to the requirement to *deservedly influence* the meaning of the location in the minds of the people who matter to the future of the location. The brand must deliver on what is promised (and what is decided). Hall (2008: 239) claims that:

“Place branding is dependent on both hardware: the architectural design of buildings and use of space, which can be used as a differentiator and to communicate an image to a target audience; and software which incorporates marketing strategies to create a place identity through the use of slogans, brand identity programs, and other traditional marketing tools being applied to a place.”

Agreeing with Hall’s claim, place managers need to deliver on the promise as it relates to the physical environment. This might include attention to landscapes, streetscapes and infrastructure. This tangible hardware not only satisfies

functional needs but communicates meanings about a place. While also agreeing with the importance of the ‘software’ which we argue is included in the *deciding* and *designing* stages of our model, there is also a need for internal stakeholders to deliver the brand. In corporations, employees' ability to deliver on the communicated brand promise is suggested to be dependent on the employees' awareness of the brand (Harris and de Chernatony 2001). Importantly, there is no point projecting a brand to existing and potential customers if the employees of the company do not champion the values of the brand, or worse still, are openly critical of the corporate brand strategy. The ability to link the promise of the corporate brand to the corporate culture is a challenge for managers and marketers. A reduced brand-culture gap can be a source of competitive advantage (de Chernatony 1999, Hatch and Schultz 2003). A similar scenario is evident in the tourism marketing literature where one challenge facing destination marketers is to encourage the host population, that is residents and business proprietors, to deliver on the brand promise (Buhalis 2000). For place branding, therefore, it is important that internal stakeholders are aware of the brand strategy and their role in delivering the brand promise. Kerr et al. (2007) in their study found that even community leaders, the ‘senior management’ of the community, disagreed on the merits and worth of their place brand. It is argued that acceptance of a place brand requires ‘buy-in’ on the part of stakeholders, particularly internal stakeholders. In their brand management study of a city, one respondent commented, “it is not just a council initiative, it is a city initiative”. Managers of the place brand need to ensure that the brand promise is delivered by its population.

By way of example, the document Abu Dhabi Brand Identity (Office of the Brand of Abu Dhabi 2007) identified the word ‘respect’ as summarising: “A cherished past and good fortune, Abu Dhabi has nurtured a rich, live and proud culture that delights people that crave authenticity.” The document goes further to discuss “Delivering our Promise” and advises:

“This promise must exist at every stage of conversation with the outside world – from watching a cinema commercial in Berlin, to experiencing a taxi ride to Abu Dhabi Airport to Emirates Palace. Even to the way we brief architects on new buildings.” (Section 1.0)

Determining

The fourth stage of our model is *determining* the effectiveness of the stages of *deciding*, *designing* and *delivering* the brand. This should consider the economic and social objectives set by the leaders of the place. Not only should the

objectives be set, the items and measures which can be used to determine the success of the brand strategy also need to be specified. Kerr and Braithwaite (2011) provided a list of key performance indicators for a place. They classify these as being *tangible* and *intangible* outcomes and are shown in Figure 3.

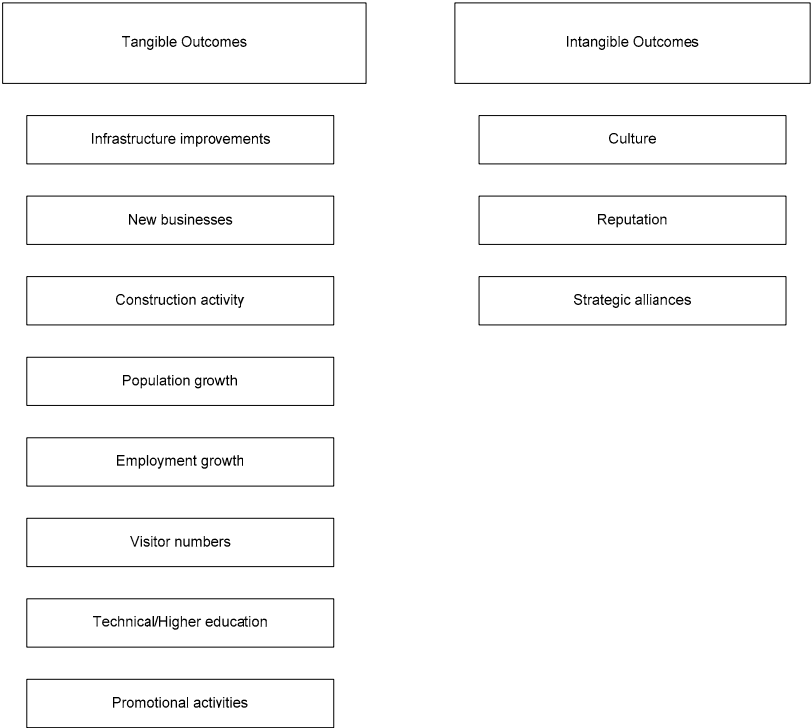


Figure 3: Examples of Measures Which Can Be Related to Brand Strategy and Brand Performance. (Kerr and Braithwaite 2011)

These tangible outcomes shown in Figure 3 can be measured and longitudinal data is often readily available from government departments or business associations. With regard to the intangible outcomes, culture has a focus on the internal stakeholders and instruments can be developed to measure constructs such as commitment to and confidence in the place. Florek (2011) and Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001) provide literature and recommendations regarding place attachment. Reputation has a focus on the summary of images held by external stakeholders. Baxter and Kerr (2010) provide explanations and examples as to

the measurement of place identity and place image. Strategic alliances or partnerships formed by a place internally and externally can be identified although their value may be difficult to measure and quantify. Examples of strategic alliances may be public-private partnerships, projects across government departments, as well as corporate joint ventures.

In the case of the UAE, we were not able to find public evidence of steps taken to determine the effectiveness of the stages of brand management proposed in our model. This seems to be consistent with most place brand strategies where measurement of performance of the brand is neglected. Brand tracking studies similar to that used in corporate and product brand management (Keller 2008) are warranted to demonstrate the effectiveness of place brand strategies.

Conclusion

Jansen (2008: 134) points out, “nation branding is, in short, a risky business that can backfire financially, politically, and culturally”. It is for this reason that theories of place brand management are needed. While not purporting to be a definitive model of place brand management, we suggest that based on our review of relevant literature and using examples from the UAE, the stages of *deciding*, *designing*, *delivering*, and *determining* are necessary for effective place brand management. It is anticipated that the 4D model will contribute to existing works and provide the foundation for more academic work and as well be of benefit to practitioners charged with place branding. To support our claim, we use Stuart’s investigation of the then current 1999 models of corporate image formation and corporate identity management and the proposal for a more definitive model of the corporate identity management process. It is both pleasing and exciting to see the increased interest in place brand management not just for the sake of academic pursuits, but also for the importance of the real world economic and social benefits which we and our academic and practitioner colleagues believe can result from place brand management.

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