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Branding Destination Image: A Stakeholder Causal Scope Analysis for Internationalisation of Destinations

S. M. Riad Shams

Abstract

The impact of relationship marketing (RM) on internationalisation process and the branding of destination image both are widely, but separately researched. However, the implications of RM vis-à-vis the branding of international destination image are not broadly explored, especially from the different internationalisation contexts. This conceptual paper précises insight, encircling this gap on the roles of RM constructs to influence the cause and consequence of stakeholder relationships and interactions at different internationalisation continuums, with a viable impact on branding international destination image. This is an initial conceptual framework, which needs to be empirically tested to generalise the findings.

Keywords: branding; brand positioning; authenticity; destination image; reputation; internationalisation; relationship marketing; tourism; stakeholder.

Introduction

Branding destination image is a well-researched area. However, the influence of relationship marketing (RM) to branding destination image is not broadly explored, specifically from different internationalisation perspectives. Extant literature shows that the impact of RM on internationalisation process (Johanson and Vahlne, 2009; Ruzzier et al., 2006; Samiee and Walters, 2003) and the branding of destination image (Qu et al., 2011; Balakrishnan, 2009; Konecnik and Gartner, 2007) both are widely, but separately researched, to the author's knowledge, the analysis of RM in relation to the branding and reputation of the image of international destinations from various internationalisation phases is rare. However, there are two conceptual works identified on "relational network and place (tourist destination) brands". In the first paper, Hankinson (2004) developed a theoretical framework on the relational aspects of destination brands by analysing the interrelationships of brand positioning and brand personality ("the set of human characteristics associated with a brand", Aaker 1997, p. 347), and how proactively these two features are rooted in brand reality, in order to fulfil the promised brand experience. Hankinson conceptually depicts the interdependence between these three brand features with customer relationships, media relationships, brand infrastructure relationships (i.e., travel and accommodation facilities of the destination) and service relationships, although, the impact of stakeholder relationship issues and more specifically the RM constructs on customers'/international visitors'

perceptual, communicational and value perspectives in branding are not the area of concerns of this study. It is recognised that there is little critical consideration about the role and influence of stakeholders and their relationships in tourism strategy (Ellis and Sheridan, 2014). The second study on relationship perspectives of destination brands is also a conceptual one, however is an extension of Hankinson's (2004) work. Here Harrison-Walker (2012) contributed by theoretically analysing the communication process of a destination's relational brand. Harrison-Walker analyses the target audiences' understanding about the brand personality, brand positioning and brand identity (names, logos, symbols, slogans, jingles and packages). Therefore, the analysis of stakeholder relationships and RM, in relation to branding of an international destination image from the collective viewpoints of brand perceptions, communications, value and relationships, associated with the image and reputation of that image of an international destination, particularly based on its different internationalisation continuums in the global market is an unexplored area.

The synthesis of a concise literature review explains that the extent of stakeholders' perceived authenticity experience would have influence to underpin a company's image, not only through branding the image, but also branding the reputation of that image. Such a brand building initiative could be based on promoting the authenticity of that image's relevance to customers' needs, and differentiation against the competitive alternatives. This proposition is elaborated with relevant example in the 'discussion and future research' section of this paper. Centred on a cause and consequence of stakeholder relationships and interactions as a stakeholder causal scope (SCS), the influence of stakeholders' perceptions about a company, industry or a destination appears as significant to positioning a brand based on the reputation (authenticity) of its image. Since, the existing scholarly thoughts suggest that reputation is relational. Therefore, this paper attempts to fill the gap in RM research, in relation to branding international destinations' image, by distinguishing the impact of SCSs on communication/promotion of various image features. In this attempt, the purpose is to influence international visitors' brand value perceptions, pertaining to how the authenticity, relevance and differentiation issues of these image features could be branded through the pre and post internationalisation continuums, against the needs of international visitors.

To analyse the relevant existing scholarly views from extant literature of authenticity, image, reputation, branding and RM, this paper follows an inductive constructivist interpretation approach, to verify the arguments, where findings evolve logically from the reviewed

literature (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1994). Thus, this conceptual paper presents the relevant literature/views through the progress of the discussions, as an inductive approach, to rationalise the findings with respect to the purpose of this study (Hallier and Forbes, 2004; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Since, a discussion on the relevant terms and definitions is often useful to contribute to literature; this paper begins with such a discussion. The overall discussion of this paper follows the following structure:

- discussion on the key terms and definitions that includes authenticity, reputation, brand positioning, destination branding and destination image;
- the nexus between reputation, image and branding;
- relationship marketing, stakeholder causal scope and branding;
- internationalisation continuums and branding destination image and
- discussion, academic and professional implications, including future research.

Key Terms and Definitions

Authenticity

The word authenticity...meant trustworthy (Cappannelli and Cappannelli, 2004, p. 1)...it is used to describe anything that is genuine, real or true (Kennick, 1985) or characterized by honesty and simplicity (Boyle, 2003)...it may be something that is sincere, original and innocent (Fine, 2003). (Assiouras et al., 2015, p. 539)

Authenticity is a “socially constructed concept” (Cohen, 1988, p. 374), and reflects through “genuineness, not being false...and of having verified origin” (Gundlach and Neville, 2012, p. 485), “and bona fide (i.e., being actually and exactly what is claimed)” (Molleda, 2010, p. 224). Services are often promoted based on its genuineness as an indication of authenticity of its claims and contributions to the customers’ needs (Chhabra, 2005).

Reputation, Brand Positioning and Destination Branding

“Authenticity plays a key role in building, sustaining, and defending reputation” (Greyser, 2009, p. 590). For example, authentic assertions about the activities of a company, the performance and behaviour of their employees and products and services, and delivering that authentic promise, generally form a positive reputation of that company.

Reputation is a stakeholder's overall evaluation of a company over time. This evaluation is based on the stakeholder's direct experiences with the company, any other form of communication and symbolism that provides information about the firm's (or industry's/destination's) actions and/or a comparison with the actions of other leading rivals. (Gotsi and Wilson, 2001, p. 29)

Brand positioning plays a key role to convey the relevant information to the target audience/stakeholders about a brand (corporate or product/service or destination brand) that influence the brand's reputation. Since, positioning is a brand communicational tool that concerns "how a brand is positioned in the mind of the consumer with respect to the values with which it is differently associated or which it owns" (Ries and Trout, 1981; Marsden, 2000; as cited in Marsden, 2002, p. 307). The overall activities, associated with such an effort to position the relevant information about the brand and its uniqueness in the mind of the stakeholders to distinctively satisfy their needs is generally known as branding. From this perspective, destination branding is defined as:

The marketing activities (1) that support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates a destination; (2) that convey the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; and (3) that serve to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience, all with the intent purpose of creating an image that influences consumers' decisions. (Blain et al., 2005, pp. 331-332)

Consequently, brand positioning and branding are relevant to "Plato's assertion that memories evoke related memories" (Warren, 1916; as cited in Marsden, 2002, p. 307), where the stakeholders' perceived experience or memories of a unique value of a destination brand is important to differ it from other destination brands by creating a new image or reinforcing the existing image of the brand.

Destination Image

Image of a country or a destination is the blend of beliefs, ideas and impressions that people have about the country or the destination (Kotler et al., 1993). For example, how the image of nation A signifies through the minds of people of nation B (Anholt, 2007). Therefore, understanding the views of international visitors about their perceived experience is important. On one hand, to enhance destination image, one should first identify the alternative sources of visitors to recognise the beliefs, ideas, impressions and other natural, historic and service-oriented distinguishing image features of a destination, where according to Hakala et al. (2013) branding could play a significant role to reinforce visitors' recognition or source of awareness about the image of a destination. On the other hand, a destination has an image with or without branding (Fan, 2010; 2006). Here branding of a destination image includes promoting the image that the destination inherits for long time, and ideally presenting the image more appealing where possible (Hakala et al., 2013; Fan, 2006).

Consequently, in order to enhance visitors' awareness about the destination image, evaluating the alternative sources of visitors' awareness, e.g., in terms of international destinations, the different internationalisation continuums of the destinations through which visitors receive information, develop their awareness and recognise the image, would be significant to promoting/branding that image.

The Nexus between Reputation, Image and Branding

How a company's businesses reflect (e.g. the extent of authenticity) through their stakeholders' perceptions is the key to form/reform their reputation (Gotsi and Wilson, 2001; Ettenson and Knowles, 2008). Reputation is recognised as an evaluation of value that reflects through an organisation's attributes and develops over time based on the consistency of their performance, which can be influenced by proactive communications (Gray and Balmer, 1998). As a communicational tool, brand positioning nurtures the mental attitude of the stakeholders to occupy a position in their minds through a gradual development of their perceptions (Herrmann and Huber, 2000). Consequently, brand positioning is not identical with reputation, however they are closely interrelated and interdependent (Ettenson and Knowles, 2008), where in the long-run, reputation could be perceived as the outcome of positioning.

In the contemporary experience economy (Molleda and Jain, 2013), communication influences stakeholders' perceived experience to convey authenticity message (Grayson and Martinec, 2004). Also, it is an integral part of such communications (e.g. brand positioning) to understand the impact of authenticity on stakeholders' perceived experience (Milman, 2013) to develop a lasting authentic experience in the minds of the stakeholders. Through such a communication process, reputation and positioning collectively could influence stakeholders' perceptions based on an enriched awareness about the authenticity of claimed relevance of a brand to customers' needs, and authenticity of claimed differentiation of the brand to satisfy those needs, in comparison to the competitive brands. Since, in general, underlying the perceived authenticity, an experience/memory of a brand's reputations is a precondition for stakeholders' willingness to or not to associate with the brand, where brand positioning attempts to turn that willingness to decision making through the brand's relevance and differentiation to stakeholders' needs. Therefore, in the nexus of reputation and brand

positioning, stakeholders' perceived authenticity experience is imperative to assure that the stakeholders consider the company or a destination and its products/services from the best promising perspective.

(please insert Figure 1 about here)

Consumers seek out authentic brands and experiences – in all variety of consumption scenarios, as it contributes to perceptions of quality and brand imagery (Thompson and Tambyah, 1999; Penaloza, 2000; Holt, 2002; Brown et. al., 2003). Recognizing the importance of perceptions of authenticity, brand managers have often responded by imbuing their brands with indications of authenticity (Beverland and Luxton, 2005; Beverland, 2006; Beverland et. al., 2008). (Gundlach and Neville, 2012, p. 484)

Again, both image and reputation are developed based on stakeholders' perceptions, where image is a portrait (e.g. idea, belief, impression) of a brand in the stakeholders' mind, and reputation is the extent of trust or distrust (Nguyen and Leblanc, 2001), e.g., the extent of authenticity of the brand's claimed relevance and differentiation to the stakeholders' needs, in rival to the competitive brands. Similar to the impact of authenticity on reputation, the positive perceived degree of authenticity of a destination's image, in relation to the beliefs, ideas, impressions and other natural, historic and service-oriented distinguishing image features of the destination is generally the key for favourably branding that destination image in the mind of the stakeholders. As a consequence, it can be argued that in the nexus of image, reputation and branding, stakeholders' perceived authenticity experience has a significant influence to communicate companies' messages to develop positive/authentic image, reputation and position of a brand in the mind of the target audience. In the long-run, this perceived authenticity experience centred image and reputation of that image positively impact on brand positioning, and contribute to the brand's competitive advantage, performance (e.g. sale) and sustainability. Since, image and reputation both are recognised as vital brand building tools (Gartner, 1993; Govers, 2012), where competitive advantage and sustainability of the brand relies on its positive image (Fahy et al., 2004), favourable reputation (Argenti and Druckenmiller, 2004; Firestein, 2006) and effective differentiation (Ezeuduji et al., 2013).

Relationship Marketing, Stakeholder Causal Scope and Branding

Reputation and branding are not identical, however they are closely interconnected and co-dependent (Ettenson and Knowles, 2008). Therefore, the unified application of reputation as perceived through authenticity experience, and brand positioning as represented through relevance and differentiation (Ettenson and Knowles, 2008) of a business/industry or a destination evolves as significant for promoting/branding the overall image of the company, industry or destination. Following the cause and consequence of stakeholder relationships and interactions, the influence of stakeholders' perceptions (perceptive influence) about a company, industry or a destination appears as crucial to nurture relational reputations and relevant brand positioning. Since,

Reputation is relational: companies (and industries) do not own their reputation, stakeholders and observers do. Reputations are formed largely by the perceptions of these external 'others'. Companies can influence their reputation, but they cannot control it completely. (The Oxford University Centre for Corporate Reputation, 2012, np)

Various relationship marketing (RM) constructs, such as trust, satisfaction, commitment, communication, reciprocity and co-creation, reliability, responsiveness, bond and so forth (Agariya and Singh, 2011) are usually derived and enriched through the cause and consequence of stakeholder relationships and interactions as a stakeholder causal scope (SCS) of strategic market orientation. Usually, based on this SCS, associated stakeholders develop their perception about a company/industry and its businesses. Consequently, stakeholders' perception that is originated through such SCSs creates an influence (stakeholder perceptive influence) that helps SCS to further nurture future stakeholder relationships and subsequent relational reputation by offering authentic products and services and keeping promises, as well as to impact on brand positioning of that products and services through their relevance to customer needs and differentiation, in terms of how uniquely that products or services can meet and exceed the customers' needs, compared to the competitive offerings. Therefore, the established and other emerging RM constructs would have implications to differentiate a destination image, corporate or industry profile or market offering (product and service) through a conveyed central idea, relating to the stakeholder relationship value and relevant brand (corporate, destination and product/service) positioning to the target markets. Eventually, the conveyed central idea (which has to be perceived by the associated stakeholders in order to form perceptive influence) would help marketers to further influence (establish, maintain and enhance) stakeholders' perceptions, in order to nurture relational reputation and relevant brand positioning. Gummesson (2002) described

that the implications of RM can be utilised from any setting (market, culture, industry, perspective and so forth), however the relational appeal should pursue only the presented circumstances of the targeted setting. For this study, the relevant setting is any place as tourists' international destination, its service providers, the visitors and other associated stakeholders. Centred on such recognised and emerging RM constructs, the focus of this setting of an international tourist destination would be to distinguish the prospective relational impact of the associated stakeholders' relationships and interactions on visitors' perceived experience at different internationalisation continuums, in relation to the authenticity, relevance and differentiation of various image features of that destination, in order to branding that destination image.

Internationalisation Continuums and Branding Destination Image

In the internationalisation process of a service (here a tourist destination and its utilities), RM has a significant impact on pre and post internationalisation continuums of the service to identify the issues that need to be understood, in order to effectively manage the internationalisation strategy (Khojastehpour and Johns, 2014a; 2014b). Trust and communication as RM constructs appear as more important in pre-internationalisation continuum to overcome the psychic distance, where commitment and satisfaction as RM constructs are more important in post-internationalisation stage to build long-term relationships (Khojastehpour and Johns, 2014). From this perspective, this paper attempts to fill the gap in RM research, which is described in the introduction section of this paper, in relation to the branding of international destinations' image, by distinguishing the impact of SCSs on communication/promotion of various ideas, beliefs, impressions and other natural, historic and service-oriented distinguishing image features of destinations. Here, the goal is to influence international visitors' brand value perceptions, pertaining to how the authenticity, relevance and differentiation of these image features could be branded through the pre and post internationalisation continuums, against the recreation, relaxation, safety and other needs of international visitors.

Pre-internationalisation continuum of international destinations could be involved promoting the destinations in the cross-border markets through overseas agents, international trade fairs, inter-governments initiatives, website and social media, online communications for bookings and so forth. The post-internationalisation continuum here is relevant to the overall services for tourists from arrival to depart from the destinations, and probably beyond that departure

point. The key concern here would be to understand how various RM constructs could impact on the cause and consequence of relationships and interactions between an international destination's service providers and international tourists at different internationalisation continuums, in order to brand the destination image features against the needs of the tourists. For example, during the pre-internationalisation continuum, following the SCSs associated with an enhanced online and traditional communication approach, with a proactive responsiveness to promote the destination image features against the recreation, relaxation, safety and other needs of the tourists, establishes a foundation of initial trust and reliability by reducing the psychic distance. Therefore, at this pre-internationalisation continuum, the communication and responsiveness as RM constructs are playing their role to establish trust and reliability, which are another two RM constructs and vital for future relationships (Agariya and Singh, 2011). In a sequence of internationalisation of branding destination image, underlying various RM constructs, such as commitment, responsiveness, service quality, culture, superior security, privacy and so forth (Agariya and Singh, 2011), the service providers could play a central role during the post-internationalisation continuum through their cause and consequence of relationships and interactions with the tourists, in order to establish a bond between the tourists and the destination, by a memorable perceived tourism experience. In turn, such an experience could influence to further promote the brand through the perceived authenticity experience of these delighted tourists, e.g. through their word-of-mouth.

Even when the products offered are satisfactory, customers still exercise their right to go from one seller to another. Consequently, marketers are adopting a more strategic and philosophical approach to gaining customer loyalty through designing genuine RM programs. (Little and Marandi, 2003, p. 15)

However, such a proposition would be more relevant with fast moving consumer goods; it would be pertinent as well to a service offering, like international destinations and its services. For example, during the pre-internationalisation continuum, when the offerings and relevant image features of international tourist destination A and B appear satisfactory from similar extent, a consistent and proactive communication approach to promote the promise of the relevance and differentiation of a destination's image features against the needs of the potential international tourists, during their decision making stage to choose one destination among the alternatives, would develop trust and reliability sense and possibly influence the tourists' decisions. During the post-internationalisation continuum, an authentic perceived international tourism experience against the previously promised relevance and

differentiation of the image features, where the relationships and interactions of international tourists are valued in relation to their anticipated and perceived experience, would transmit through their satisfied referrals, especially on the social media, as a sign of their loyalty to refer/promote their favourable/authentic experience. Here, the international tourists' anticipated experience about the image features of destinations could be formed/reformed during the pre-internationalisation communications. During the post-internationalisation continuum, service providers would have the opportunities to turn that anticipated experience to actual perceived experience by delivering the promises about the image features, relating to the relevance of those image features to the needs of the tourists, and the differentiation of those image features against the competitive alternatives. Eventually, together these sources (pre and post internationalisation continuums) to promote awareness about the destination image features' authenticity, in relation to the relevance and differentiation of those image features against the tourists' needs, and how uniquely/differently the promised image features satisfy those needs in comparison to the competitive alternatives, could contribute to the branding of that image.

Discussion and Research Direction

Firstly, based on the cause and consequence of stakeholder relationships and interactions or stakeholder causal scope (SCS), Figure 2 endeavours to clarify this initial framework to branding destination image through promoting authenticity, relevance and differentiation of a destination's image features, in relation to the needs of international tourists. Secondly, Figure 2 attempts to explain how researchers and practitioners could evaluate the impact of this framework, respectively for their future researches and managerial decision making.

(please insert Figure 2 about here)

International tourists search for information for their next tour, as well as international destination service providers attempt to reach to their customers, with relevant information to attractively promote their destination. Following this SCS, during the pre-internationalisation continuum, such promotions are usually centred on an appealing presentation of the destination's image features through online and offline communication channels. Such promotions include how the natural and manmade establishments and services of the destination could be relevant to their holiday, corporate, sports or any other tourism purposes'

needs. How the services could be differentiated from the competitive offerings to customise client-specific needs could be included in such communications as well. Again, apart from the customised differentiation, how typically a destination can be differentiated, in comparison to the competitive destinations based on unique value, reputations, cultural heritage, natural and manmade attractions and so forth are usually highlighted in such destination promotions. For example, if a tourist wants to visit the sea beaches in a certain region, a destination from that region could promote that you can experience both sun rise and sun set from our sea beach if the sun actually rises and sets there. Since, it is commonly known that such an experience is rare in the nature, which allows very few sea beaches in the world to differentiate their offerings from this angle. Ultimately, through such promotions during the pre-internationalisation stage, the international tourist usually develops a 'reliability' sense, as an anticipated authenticity experience that s/he will genuinely have such a rare experience from this destination instead of other destinations of that region. During the post-internationalisation stage, once the tourist will actually gain such a rare experience, s/he will have a 'satisfied' perceived experience, in relation to her or his tourism needs, which is differentiated from other destinations and authentic.

The 'reliability' and 'satisfaction' that the tourist is experienced here are actually two different RM constructs (Agariya and Singh, 2011), which propelled to branding the 'sun rise and sun set' image authentically through the SCSs, during the pre and post-internationalisation continuums, with a differentiation relevant to the tourist's needs. The sun rise and sun set from a single sea beach however is a rare case, it is described here just as an example to demonstrate how the international destination service providers could authentically promote their services based on the RM constructs, in relation to the tourists' needs, with a differentiation to branding a particular image of their destination. In such branding initiatives, service providers need to be careful to utilise the RM perspectives based on their specific situation. Since, RM is applicable from any setting; however the application should follow only the given situation of a particular setting (Gummesson, 2002). Such situations would be centred on the particular needs of the tourists and the particular establishments and services a destination can offer. The 'sun rise and sun set' example shows that during the pre-internationalisation stage, through the SCS centred promotion of the image features stimulates the 'reliability' RM construct to develop an anticipated authenticity experience in the mind of the tourist. Again, in the post-internationalisation stage, the 'satisfaction' as a RM construct and the perceived authenticity experience could stimulate the

tourist to refer her or his satisfied experience on the 'sun set and sun rise' image, perhaps through social media and word-of-mouth channels. The thinner double-headed arrow sign of Figure 2 demonstrates this interrelationship between SCS centred promotion of image features, and RM constructs and their impact on perceived authenticity experience to promoting/branding destination image.

Branding is the promotion of the image more appealingly (Hakala et al., 2013; Fan, 2006). Once the destination image features can be promoted through the pre and post-internationalisation continuums as two alternative sources of tourist to recognise the beliefs, ideas, impressions and other natural, historic and service-oriented distinguishing image features of a destination, based on their authentic and unique (differentiated) experience in relation to their needs, branding destination image would be reinforced. Since, here destinations are not only branding their image, but also branding the reputations of that image through trust (Nguyen and Leblanc, 2001) and the extent of authenticity. However, a greater awareness (reinforced branding) about the image features could be established through these two sources (pre and post internationalisation continuums) of tourists to recognise the image, the extent of perceived authenticity would be dissimilar from tourist to tourist, because of their different background.

Stakeholders' perceived authenticity is influential in stakeholders' decision making especially in a competitive environment (Bartunek, 1984). Also, customers will be satisfied if their perceived experience were authentic (Chambers and McIntosh, 2008). Therefore, a company and its businesses should be authentically linked to the issues associated with the competitive environment (Cox and Mowatt, 2012), where the focus of authenticity is to achieve competitive advantage (Chambers and McIntosh, 2008), e.g. competitive advantage through an authentic reputation of an image and branding that authenticity. In general it is widely acknowledged (Carson and Harwood, 2007; Zeng et al., 2012; Eggers et al., 2013; Bosch and Taris, 2014) that authenticity contributes to organisational performance through higher competitive advantage, more specifically, "when consumers want what's real, the management of the customer perception of authenticity becomes the primary source of competitive advantage" (Gilmore and Pine II, 1999, p. 5). But the issue is implying a binary concept; authenticity actually exists in the minds of diverse customers on a constant basis between the extents of completely authentic or entirely non-authentic (Gundlach and Neville, 2012). The concept of authenticity as a spectrum, with a threshold, is not well researched, but

discussed by Gundlach and Neville (2012), and adapted here in Figure 2 through the use of the thicker double headed arrow to represent the varying level of perceived authenticity by different customers. Since, the perceived extent of authenticity actually position in the mind of the associated stakeholders, in relation to the authentic value to satisfy individuals' value anticipation, where such a perception may differ from stakeholder to stakeholder.

The purpose of adapting the varying extent of authenticity concept of Gundlach and Neville (2012) is to evaluate this branding destination image framework. Since, the extent of authenticity could vary from customer to customer because of different learning experience and behaviour (Littrell et al., 1993). This different learning experience and behaviour would especially be relevant for branding international destination image, because international destinations expect and usually attain international tourists of diverse cultural backgrounds from all over the world. Culture is acknowledged as the blend of values, beliefs and assumptions that an individual inherits from her/his early childhood environment (Hofstede et al., 2010). These cultural philosophies that engrained in people's mind in their childhood reflects through their regular decision making process, and appear as vibrant dimensions of differences in human behaviour from culture to culture (Steenkamp and Kumar, 1999; Steenkamp, 2001). Following this mindset of cultural philosophies, customers evaluate which offer will relevant to their value anticipation (Kotler, 2003). Customers are encircled with the overwhelming of information about the competitive value propositions (Berner and Tonder, 2003). Following this knowledge and their mobility, income and search costs, customers form/reform an expectation/anticipation about their estimated product/service value and act on it (Kotler, 2003), which persuasively impact on their value perceptions about the competitive offerings. Therefore, in this multicultural global market of international tourism destinations, cultural differences play a crucial role in marketing mix, as the market is culturally broaden its horizons (Bent et. al., 2007, Chan, 2006, Ownbey and Horridge, 1997). As a result, this branding destination image framework could be evaluated based on its impact on the varying authenticity extents of multicultural tourists. For example, understanding how a specific image feature and its relevance and differentiation to the tourists' needs impact on multicultural tourists' perceived authenticity experience during the pre and post-internationalisation continuums, would be useful to strategies culture-specific branding initiatives.

This initial branding of destination image framework needs to be empirically tested to generalise its further academic and managerial significance. Empirical studies could be implemented in different destinations/markets, as well as industries, such as tourist destinations, international education destinations, immigrants' destinations and so forth to generalise the findings, with a keen eye to recognise the existing and emerging RM constructs that would have impact on the SCSs during the pre and post internationalisation continuums. Future studies to further correlate these interconnected concepts of authenticity, image, reputation, branding, RM and other emerging issues, in relation to sustainably branding destination image; will be beneficial to enrich this initial proposition. Again, a longitudinal data collection process from specific destinations would be valuable to determine how the mutual application of these concepts has progressed. Additional research can be conducted on establishing a structured process of analysing the potential impact of the established and emerging RM constructs on stakeholders' perceived authenticity experience. Comparative studies among different destinations and perhaps industries could be conducted to compare the influence of this framework from different perspectives. From methodological perspective, further research is encouraged to establish an applied technique to assess the varying extents of perceived authenticity of different customers to enhance the impact of this initial framework. The professional focus of this study has been particularly relevant to marketers of any industry as RM is applicable to any industry. However, the relationship portfolio will accord the given situation only (Gummesson 2002). A series of key components (authenticity, reputation, brand positioning, RM, pre and post-internationalisation continuums) and their application have been identified and analysed as important factors in branding destination image. However, in general, practitioners will be able to apply this framework to underpin their destination image's branding, based on the reputation (authenticity) and brand positioning (relevance and differentiation) of their destinations' image features; beside the academic interest, further research will also satisfy the need for explicit guidance for practice.

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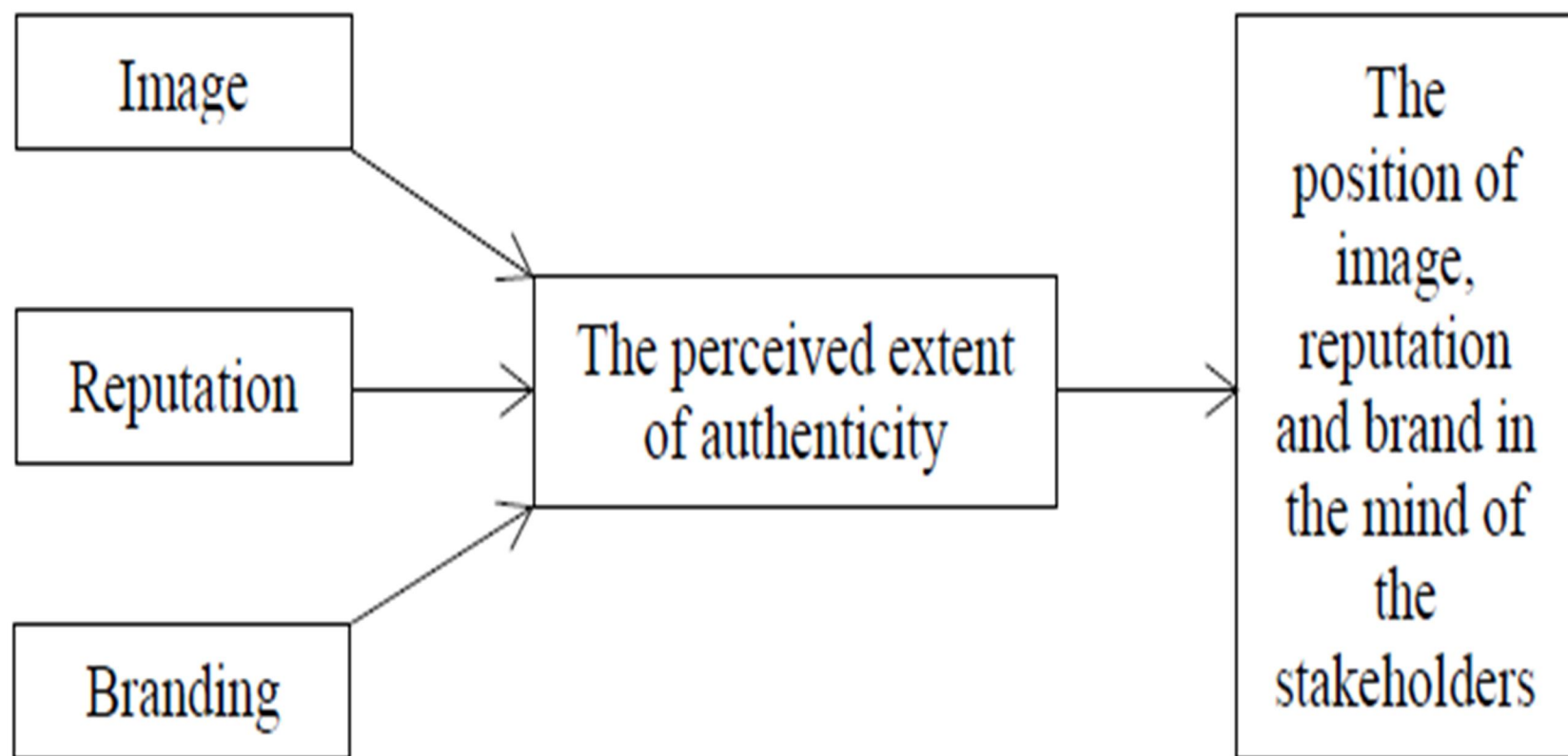
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List of Figure Caption

Figure 1: Authenticity in the nexus of image, reputation and branding.

Figure 2: Impact of stakeholder causal scope on internationalisation continuums for branding destination image.



Driving factors of
branding
destination image

Mediating factors
of branding
destination image

