Chapter 49

Giving Brand Image to a Nation: A Proposed Framework

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ABSTRACT

Adapting Keller’s brand image theory (1993), this paper presents an exploratory framework for giving brand image to a nation. Utilizing unstructured interviews, the result suggests that tourism and hospitality attributes can be used for giving brand image to a nation and behavioral intention. Specifically, the result denotes that the perceived brand image of a nation is formed according to tourists’ cognitive and affective beliefs, which at the end; influence the action to recommend to others and/or for repeat visitation. In addition, the “pretentious” nation brand campaign and national identity found in this exploratory study should be focused upon as variables for further research and testing the framework.

INTRODUCTION

Of the national dimensions that give brand image to a nation, product-country image (export dimension) and tourism and hospitality industry are found to be the strongest ones (Porter, 1990; O’Shaughnessy & O’Shaughnessy, 2000; Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Olins, 2002; Gilmore, 2002; Anholt, 2002, 2007; Fan, 2006; Dinnie, 2008). However, as it is more likely that international tourists associate their experiences (directly or indirectly) interacting with the people and the culture of a nation (Fan, 2006), it is deemed appropriate to propose tourism and hospitality attributes as the major brand image dimensions. Tourism and hospitality as an industry not only attracts tourists and stimulates other national dimensions, but is also able to generate brand image of a nation (Brooks, 2004; Lee and Lockshin, 2012; Qu et al., 2011; Prayag, 2009; Prayag, 2010; Anholt, 2000).

According to Newman (1957), brand image consists of everything that people associate with the brand. In addition, a strong brand image implies identification, quality assurance and reduced psychological risk (Berthon et al., 1999). In this study, a nation’s name is the brand. In this sense, what the foreigners

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think about a nation’s name is considered as a subset of brand image. In addition, Keller’s brand image theory (1993, 2003) points out that brand associations are derived from its types, favourability, strength and uniqueness as elements that form brand image. Consequently, when a set of brand associations exist and grow stronger in the international tourists’ minds, it gives brand image to a nation. A positive and strong nation brand image implies the level of international public attitude towards the nation’s name and implies its positioning. Therefore, a nation that has a brand image has more potential to be the market leader in a certain category (O’Shaughnessy & O’Shaughnessy, 2000; Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Olins, 2002; Gilmore, 2002; Anholt, 2002, 2007; Dinnie, 2008).

Another issue is that in spite of the fact that several studies have acknowledged the potency of tourism and hospitality industry as a front-door to other national dimensions, studies that have integrated these two variables seem to be limited. In this sense, it is deemed appropriate to conduct an exploratory study (Gilmore, 2002; Anholt, 2002; Brooks, 2004; Nadeau et al., 2008; Lee and Lockshin, 2012; Qu et al., 2011; Prayag, 2009; Prayag, 2010). Therefore, this study aims to explore the possibility of giving brand image to a nation and to propose a framework of tourism and hospitality attributes as a nation brand image formation.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

It is without doubt that the idea of treating a nation’s name as a brand is important. In general, it is argued that the idea of giving brand image to a nation is not only to develop an attractive place for tourists, foreign students, foreign direct investment (FDI), talented/skilful people and business transactions, but also for that nation to be a market leader and to have a strong positioning in certain categories (O’Shaughnessy & O’Shaughnessy, 2000; Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Olins, 2002; Gilmore, 2002; Anholt, 2002, 2007; Dinnie, 2008). According to Michel Girard (in Olins, 2002), the idea of branding the nation is considered problematic due to the difficulties in branding the multifaceted attributes attached to the nation; Thus, instead of developing nation brand notions, it is better to look for another direction, such as developing ideas on giving brand image to a nation (Olins, 2002; Fan, 2006; Dinnie, 2008; Kaneva, 2011). In this sense, it is considered inadequate to merely develop a nation’s name as a brand without giving total concern for the multifaceted attributes linked to its entity. If branding a nation’s name is important, it should not diminish its attributes.

Referring to the theory of branding, one of the ways to be a market leader and have a strong positioning is not only by having a brand (Keller, 1993, 2003). Beyond that, it requires brand image. Brand image not only indicates identification as a market leader and a strong positioning, but also signifies multiple associations attached to its functional, competitive advantageous and symbolic benefits/prestige. In the context of the brand of a nation, brand image exists in the international public’s mind through direct and indirect interaction. A very powerful brand image of a nation’s name could be firmly nailed through the peoples’ direct experiences of a nation’s attributes, such as its people and its culture (O’Shaughnessy & O’Shaughnessy, 2000; Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Olins, 2002; Gilmore, 2002; Anholt, 2002, 2007; Fan, 2006; Dinnie, 2008). Additionally, the brand image of a nation can be identified from any kind of product offerings that global consumers associate with a nation’s name. The associations not only imply functional and added values, but also signify prestige generated when global consumers purchase and/or experience the products (Gardner and Levy, 1955; Newman, 1957; Berthon et al., 1999; Sengupta; 1990; Keller, 1993). Therefore, the brand image of a nation signifies a set of associations of how familiar the
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