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Nation branding: A case study of Singapore

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NATION BRANDING: A CASE STUDY OF SINGAPORE

by

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ABSTRACT

Nation branding, or country branding is a relatively new concept. The purpose of this paper is to develop a case study of Singapore as a nation brand. It will first review the conceptual foundation of nation branding and study nation branding application. This study will use the case study approach to gain insight into nation branding concept and inspect Singapore as a nation within the parameters of nation branding. The specific objectives of this paper are to first review the conceptual and theoretical foundation of nation branding by leading researchers in the marketing field; second, to examine and define nation branding and discuss its challenges. Thirdly, this paper discusses why Singapore is ideal for nation branding.

Nation Branding: A case study of Singapore

By

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PART ONE

Introduction

Nation branding is the branding of a country, and it can either attract or dispel tourists. Generally speaking, destination branding is the marketing of tourist destination and its objective is to sell the attributes of the destination. With nation branding however, the country would prosper further in the long run for it enhances not only the competitive advantage against competitors, but also improves the country's economy on the overall. Furthermore, the perception gap between the brand identity (projected by the country) and brand image (perceived by the rest of the world) will be reduced through nation branding. Nation branding is a collaborative effort of the country's people and the government to help build the nation's brand. Every country has its own reputation, brand image, brand identity, and brand value. The people, tourism, culture, governance, economic strategies (exports, investment and immigration), could and would contribute to the country's image. The efforts put forth in all these areas will help build or destroy (with bad decisions) the nation's brand equity or brand value.

Singapore is an Island with 63 islets, located at a strategic location at the Malay peninsular between the Indian and Pacific Ocean. The Port of Singapore is one of the busiest in the world. Singapore is a city-state with an approximate size of 271 square miles with little natural resource. For such a small country, it has established a foundation to welcome million of visitors internationally. This is in part due to the country's marketing effort of its destination through the Singapore Tourism Board; and also owing to the country's visionary leader, the founding father of Singapore-Mr. Lee

Kuan Yew. Singapore, though small, has its place in the world map. Singapore is ideal to nation brand because it has most of the elements of nation branding.

The Singapore Tourism Board has adopted different policies and strategies to promote and champion Singapore. It includes brand taglines like *Uniquely Singapore*, *New Asia*, *Surprising Singapore*, *Instant Asia*, *Green and clean city*. According to Yeoh, Tan, Wang, and Wong (2002), the previous campaigns were branded according to the “then” social, economic, and political conditions of Singapore. The varied branding has led Singapore to deal with different socio-economic condition at those time periods. In the early 1970s, Singapore had experienced slowdown in manufacturing, and as a result the focus on tourism was enhanced. In the 1980s, the economic slowdown led to ‘sacrifice’ the “natural, historical and cultural attraction” to do what was necessary to ultimately benefits the local economy (Yeoh, et al, 2002, p.5.). This demonstrated that the national culture was reactive rather than proactive.

Since 2004, Singapore Tourism Board has launched a national campaign called *Uniquely Singapore* and the tagline is placed on several of the Singapore public transports (buses mainly), as well as on several of its marketing collateral to tourists from all over the world. Yet, if one were to ask the locals if they find anything unique about Singapore, the locals would have to think hard what’s unique about their own country. This is an indication that though the campaign is widespread internationally, it has not reached Singaporeans regarding what is unique about Singapore. The premise is simple, if people are not aware or cognizant about the uniqueness of Singapore, how are they

going to be apostles of the *Uniquely Singapore* brand identity. Singaporeans do not perceive Singapore as unique. If so, what about the perception of tourists, do they feel that the projected image was delivered? What about the tagline *Uniquely Singapore*, did it trigger a negative impression from tourists, as they recalled the tagline, “my country is unique and different too”? Under destination branding, the marketing collateral rolled out was over brand, and as a result, the campaign produced a fragmented message losing its brand identity. Additionally, it did not create the competitive advantage from its competitors in South East Asia such as Malaysia, or Hong Kong.

Purpose

The purpose of this professional paper is to develop a case study of Singapore as a nation brand destination. It will provide a snapshot of the historical review of the branding in Singapore. The specific objectives of this paper are to first review the conceptual and theoretical foundation of nation branding by leading authors in the marketing field; second, to examine and define nation branding and discuss its challenges. Third, this paper discusses why Singapore is ideal for nation branding.

Justification

A review of literature shows that there have been numerous published articles on destination branding but there is few, if any, research on nation branding of Singapore. Nation branding is a relatively new concept, and it requires more understanding on this subject matter. The case study intends to explore the elements of the conceptual framework in nation branding, and to gain a better understanding of Singapore. There will be a discussion if there is a gap between what it says (promotion message) and what

it offers. This study may be of interest to the Singapore government to identify the area of improvements on the existing campaign; to discover and accentuate the campaign strengths, and diminish the campaign weaknesses so as to create a strong brand identity; and expectantly sustain competitive advantages over the neighboring countries.

Constraints

This paper utilizes a case study research approach, as it addresses a contemporary issue. This study can only be exploratory and descriptive in nature, and cannot be generalized. This information gathered relies primarily on secondary research (literature review), and informal discussions. The lack of information and the paucity of affirmation from the STB cannot validate the types of perception survey done in the past. Marketing collaterals (brochure, video clips, and website) related to the *Uniquely Singapore* brand was used to analyze the content of the campaign to study the brand image. Such technique is deemed appropriate in the study of tourist advertising. Given the stated limitations, this study will serve the purpose of gaining insights into nation branding and familiarity on the subject matter for later investigation.

Glossary

Anholt Branding Hexagon. Simon Anholt is an expert in nation branding. He is also recognized for the “Anholt Branding Hexagon” where it has six factors to measure each country’s brand image by combining the six dimensions: Exports, Governance, Culture and Heritage, people, Tourism, and Investment and Immigration.
(nationbrandsindex.com)

Brand. A “Brand” is a name, term, sign, symbol, design, or a combination of all these elements that is intended to identify the goods or services of a seller and differentiate them from competitors. (Kotler et al, 2006).

Brand essence. The brand’s promise expressed in the simplest, most-single-minded terms. For example: Volvo is equivalent to safety. The most powerful brand essences are rooted in a fundamental customer need. (Brandchannel.com, [n.d.]

Brand equity. The Brand equity refers to the value of the brand. (Dinnie, 2008)

Brand familiarity. Brand familiarity means how well customers recognize and accept a company’s brand. (Perreault & McCarthy, 2003)

Brand identity. A unique set of associations the brand aspires through the minds of the customers. It is an implication of promise from the brand name to the customers. (Brandchannels.com, [n.d.]

Brand image. The set of beliefs consumers hold about a particular brand. (Kotler et al, 2006).

Brand Value. The brand value lies in the trust of a brand name - for quality and reliability, a form of guarantee for its reputation - a promise the brand delivers, and the service it provides to the consumers - training of staff to deliver customer service. (Anholt, 2005)

Competitive advantage. Something that gives a firm, or a person or a country an edge over its rivals. (economists.com [n.d.]

Destination brand. Destination brand is a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination. It further conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the

destination. It also serves to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience. (Ritchie, J.R.B, & Ritchie, R.B., 1998)

Place branding. Place branding is “a conscious use of publicity, and marketing to communicate selective images of a specific geographic localities or areas to a target audience” (Gold and Ward, 1994, pg 2). It is also branding a place or destination through a variety of ways such as advertising, direct marketing, personal selling, websites, brochures, public and media relations and through the cooperation of destination marketing organizations with journalists, event organizers and filmmakers.

Nation branding. Simon Anholt coins the phrase “Nation branding”, and it is use interchangeably with place branding by many these days.

Reputation asset. Simon Anholt used the term reputation asset during an interview. From his description, reputation asset is the asset of the brand. The brand is beyond strategy and it is how a country builds its reputation through the various faculties of running a nation.

PART TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

The literature review here would focus on branding, and the different forms of branding that would eventually lead to the conceptual framework of nation branding. The different types of brand definitions will be described, and explained to review and understand the depth of various types of branding. These terms would be substantiated by the varied literature reviewed to further understand the subject matter. Subsequently, it will discuss the nation brand identity, image, positioning, nation brand equity, and country of origin (provenance). All of these would lead to the conceptual framework of nation branding. Lastly, it will discuss the types of challenges that nation branding face.

Brand and Branding

Brand

A *brand* is defined as a name, term, sign, symbol, design, or a combination of all these elements that is intended to identify the goods or services of a seller and differentiate them from competitors. And brand image is the set of beliefs consumers hold about a particular brand (Kotler, Bowen, and Maken, 2006). Simon Anholt (2003), on the other hand argues that brand is intangible because it has brand value as outlined in his book *Brand New Justice*. The brand value lies in the trust of a brand name for quality and reliability, a form of guarantee for its reputation, a promise the brand delivers, and the service it provides to the consumers. The latter requires the training of staff to deliver customer service (Anholt, 2003, p10-12). According to Gilmore, (2002), successful

branding is when the nation continuously builds on the existing identity. These efforts “incorporate, absorb, and embrace a wide variety of activities under one graphic identity to form and project a multi-faceted yet coherent, interlocking and mutually supportive whole” (Gilmore, 2002, p282).

Brand value is intangible, it appeals to the consumer emotion to trust the brand name, with an implicit promise and with a certain reputation (Morgan, Pritchard, and Piggott, 2003). The authors further presented that consumers use their emotions to choose one image over the other and that leads to making a lifestyle statements. When consumers make choices on products and destinations, they use their emotions to choose one image over the other. The selection usually is an expression of their individualities, reflecting their lifestyle, and reinforces certain association. Souvenirs, postcards, and videos are mementos that activate the experience. This further demonstrates travel and tourism “is a highly involving experience, extensively planned, excitedly anticipated and fondly remembered.” (Morgan, et al, 2003, p.286) According to Anholt (2003) “brand names save consumers time, effort and worry” because the trust of the brand name provides a form of guarantee for quality, the reputation is put on the line (Anholt, 2003, p.12).

A brand is an entity that offers value to customers based on features above and beyond its functional performance (Knox, 2004). The brand values differentiate the offer and are the foundation for customer’s preference and loyalty. In an attempt to explain “Brand marketing in transition”, Knox offered the example of the European consumer

goods companies willingness to pay large premiums for the companies they acquire as a means to enhance the product portfolio and expand the geographic territory. This demonstrates the power of branding, an indication where a brand has achieved a certain status with its brand equity, and/or brand value. A branding consultancy firm called Interbrand had conducted a survey in 2003; *Most Valuable Global brands* and found that “the intangible assets of 100 global brands” are worth close to a trillion dollars (Anholt, 2003). This enhances an important point, and that is a brand has brand equity, which is a valuable asset.

Branding

Branding is the act of creating brand awareness of a product, corporation or a name. This can be done through focusing on the brand value or attributes so as to differentiate against the brand competitors and promote these competitive advantages through different media to a target audience. Branding can be a difficult process because it is an “integrating business practice” (Hahn, 2007). The ownership of the brand must incorporate the belief into the corporate culture, communications, product and services. The business decision should reflect that belief, and all employees should champion the brand. This overall integrating practice is not only difficult but also an ongoing process. Hahn proposed four-core discipline in the *ID Branding Framework* when building a new brand. It includes (1) brand strategies, (2) brand identity, (3) brand management and (4) brand experience. This framework is meant to reveal weaknesses, helps to identify needs, avoid ordinary and monotonous campaigns. Fundamentally, the framework provides an all-inclusive foundation to build and manage an enduring brand over a period of time.

Branding critics believe the result from branding means higher prices because the cost of advertising is passed down to the consumers. They also think advertisement is misleading and manipulative preying on the naiveté's or simpleton (Cebrynski, 1998). There is a distinct difference between advertising and branding. Advertising is a paid media, a tool to call attention to a product or service; while branding is the act of incorporating and integrating brand strategies to get the potential prospects to see you as the only one that provides a certain solution to a specific problem (Lake, 2009). When advertisement becomes misleading or manipulative, consumers essentially feels misled and deceived, and that eventually violates the trusts of the consumers, and ultimately looses the brand identity. The customer's perception of a brand (known as perceived value) must somewhat meet the expectation of the value (perceived quality) and both of these must exceed the costs of buying or owning (perceived sacrifice) a particular brand (Knox, 2004).

Different types of branding

There are different types of branding. There are product branding, organization branding, and destination branding. The latter is sometimes called place branding, and currently termed nation branding. Destination branding, place branding, and nation branding relates to the branding of destinations but with slight variation. Many scholars use these three terms interchangeably to describe the branding of a place.

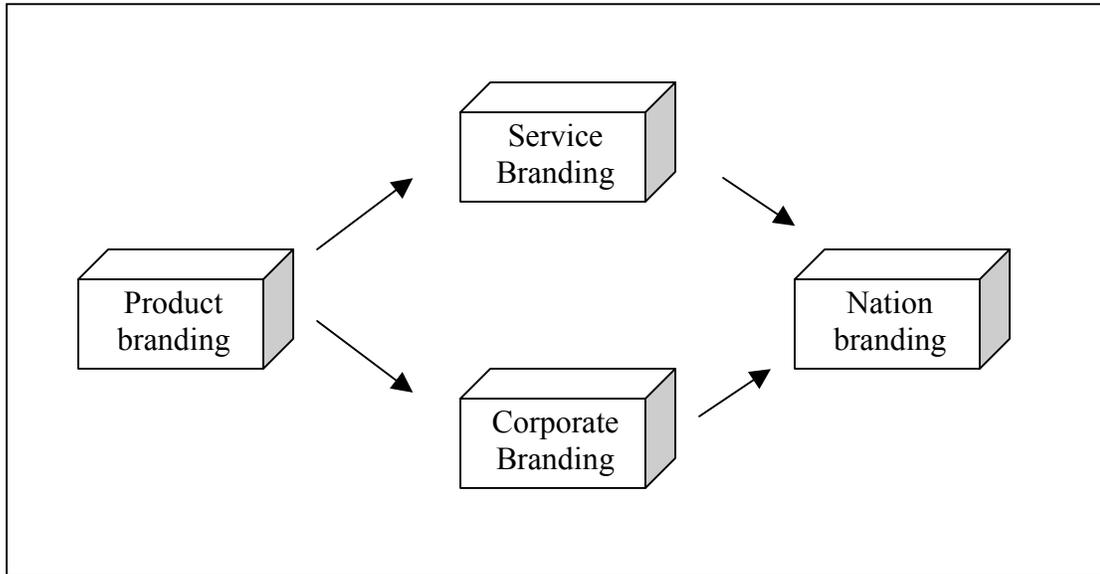
The difference between product branding and corporation branding

Branding a product is different from branding a corporation (Hatch and Schultz, 2001). The difference requires positioning the whole corporation rather than on a

product. Knox (2004) agrees that marketing an organization is at a broader level and the traditional four “P’s” approach cannot be applicable to branding a corporation. Balmer (2001a) presents the differences between corporate branding to product branding in numerous characteristics (see table 1). The first and most obvious is that brand focus is on the company rather than the product. Second, the chief executive officer (CEO) rather than middle manager manages the brand. Third, the corporate brands relate the attraction and support to all organization stakeholders (i.e. organization, community, investors, partners, suppliers, and others). Fourth, the brand efforts go to the entire company rather than the marketing department. The communications mix is the fifth contrasts and it involves the total corporate communication. The time horizon is the sixth characteristics and the corporate brand is as long as the life of company rather than the life of the product. The final difference is the corporate brand takes on a strategic role while the product brand takes on a functional role (Balmer, 2001a). Hatch et al proposed a strong brand name first taps into corporate decisions made by the different stakeholders such as the top management, employees and business associates or community. The success of a corporate brand comes from a framework that links strategic vision, organization culture, and corporate image to be the foundation of the corporate brand (Hatch & Shultz, 2001). Brand is usually build around the corporation’s reputation for its offerings, quality, including service. The outcome of successful brands is several years of investment and strategic planning. (Simones and Dibb, 2001).

Figure 1

Evolution of the scope of branding. The product-nation brand continuum



Source: Extracted from Dinnie, K., Nation Branding (2008, p.22)

Dinnie (2008) has presented that the original application of branding on a product has revolutionized to service branding and corporation branding. And both service and corporation branding has in turn evolve into nation branding (see figure 1). It is easy to draw similarities in branding a corporation and a nation. The focus attention will be on the nation, the country leader will manage it, and the process would involve multiple stakeholders. The brand would be delivered by the nation; the communications mix would become total nation communication. The time horizon would be the life of the nation, and it is a strategic importance to the nation. The table below is adapted from Balmer (2002) “How corporate branding differs from product branding” to draw similarities in branding between corporate brands to nation brands.

Table 1

A Comparison Between Corporate and Product Brands

Adapted from Balmer (2002) to draw similarities in branding between corporate brands to nation brands

	Corporate brands	Nation brand
Focus attention on	The company	The nation
Managed by	CEO	Country leader
Attention and support	Multiple stakeholders	Multiple stakeholders
Delivered by	Whole company	Entire nation
Communication mix	Total Corporate communication	Total nation communication
Time horizon	Long (life of company)	Long (life of nation)
Importance	Strategic	Strategic

It is important to note here that the past decade or so, many marketing practitioner have applied corporate branding techniques on nations (Anholt, 2007), and it had worked on some nations. Spain and New Zealand have had successful branding campaigns while Britain had not. The success of nation branding depends highly on how cohesive the branding process is, and the amount of continuous effort put forth. Moreover, it is not for the faint hearted or those who seeks immediate gratification. Rather, it is for those who have patience and endurance to invest in the future livelihood of the nation.

Destination branding, Place branding, & Nation branding

The term destination branding has evolved over the years. Destination marketing, simply said is the marketing of tourist destinations. Traditionally, this is done by destination marketing organization (DMO), a business entity that promote destination to increase the number of visitors. It is still in use in various parts of the world where the nation's airline would champion the country. The role of DMOs has always been the forefront promoter of any destination. Unless the DMOs take a more active role in the area of branding and promoting the brand, otherwise, the larger operators and transportation companies (such as the airlines) will take what they think is appealing to the market and dilutes the destination brand identity. DMOs are most effective with niche markets (Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2004).

Various authors in the marketing field have different definitions for place branding. *Place branding* is defined as an “extremely complex, and highly political activity that can enhance a nation’s economy, national self-image and identity.” (Morgan et al, 2004) Gold and Ward (1994) define place branding as a deliberate attempt to use publicity and marketing effort to communicate a specific message or images of a particular geographic location or areas to a selected target audience. While Simon Anholt describes that “place branding encompasses measuring that identity, evaluating its strengths and weaknesses and building and communicating differentiating and winning characteristics.” (Anholt, 2009) Meanwhile, Skinner defined place branding as:

“a place’s promotional activities, contextualised in the domain of marketing communications, marking the place with a distinct identity in the minds of the various target groups targeted by the incorporated place, from an inside-out approach, assuring the place’s multiple stakeholders, in partnership, manage and communicate the place’s brand identity to a wider world as they wished it to be presented.” (Skinner, 2008, 923.)

Branding is very costly, it is therefore critical to get the right branding from the onset. Furthermore, the adopted branding proposition must have the potential to evolve during the branding campaign. Good destination branding must be original, different, sustainable, believable, and relevant (Morgan & Pritchard, 2002. p.68-72). The authors presented five phases in destination brand building. (1) Perform a market investigation, analysis, and strategic recommendations, (2) Brand identity development, (3) Brand launch and introduction: communicating the vision, (4) Brand implementation, (5) Monitoring, evaluation and review.

It is important to mention that many authors, consultants, and even governments have used the terms place branding or destination branding to describe the branding of a country (Anholt, 2008) but the fact remains this description is no more than a “product” (destination) promotion, public relations (media communications), and corporate identity like a product or corporation.

Nation Branding

Nation branding is a relatively new term but not a new concept. Countries have always branded themselves in one way or another. Each country's tourism governing body has always market its place as a destination to tourists. In the effort to review literature for this paper, there were hundreds of articles on destination marketing, and as years progressed, the concept developed further into place marketing or place branding, and eventually nation brands, and nation branding. It is natural to deduce that the terminology of nation branding derived from terms like "destination branding" and "place branding."

Destination branding is a term for tourism promotion. Tourism boards from all over the world use brand management to promote their destination, articulating the wonders of their country, and how hospitable they would be (Anholt, 2007). *Country branding* or *Nation branding* (a more appropriate term) is the branding of a country and it involves the people of the country or the nation to develop and build the brand. Nation branding add more dimension to the destination attributes, it encompasses the intangible brand value to build brand equity onto the brand identity. *Place branding* is an umbrella term for "branding nations, regions, cities, towns and villages." (Anholt, 2007) For the purpose of this paper, it is necessary to note that different authors use these terms interchangeably.

Country as brand

The public policy of a country can be a consequence to a country's image, just as the nation's history, famous citizens, art and culture are all sub-brand factors to the brand

image (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). The authors pointed out that for those countries that do not consciously brand its nation would still activate an image on people's mind. Those perceptions most likely are stereotypes, dated, impressions rather than reality or facts. The country images could influence people to purchase, invest, and travel, and the media and entertainment industry play a vital role in shaping people's perception of the destination. The product country of origin is part of the country's brand. Interestingly, what was originally a legal requirement to a country (such as America) to list the country-of-origin have become an indication to consumers as part of the evaluation of a product or destination. The authors advocate nations to manage and control their branding especially when a country wants to achieve global marketplace (compete for tourists, tourism receipts and foreign investments, and talented people). To design a country's marketing strategy, the authors suggests one must first evaluate one's own brand image against the competitors' image. To produce an effective brand, the message has to be real, straightforward, engaging, unique, and convincing. A catchy slogan and visual images would help. In improving a country's negative image, it is easier to generate new and positive associations. Every country has its own unique selling proposition, and hence it attracts different types of tourists. The marketing message must be very specific and to whom the target message should reach. Depending on the destination's unique features, you build upon the strengths. If there are none, countries then build attractions or promote events that are attractive to tourists. Tourists are drawn to destination that offers the best value, or the most benefits and conveniences (Kotler & Gertner, 2002, p249-259).

Why countries should get into nation branding?

Kotler et al, (1999) suggested four critical reasons explaining why cities should brand themselves. These four reasons are also applicable to a nation branding because every nation go through the same process just as a city would but in a wider context. These adapted reasons are: (1) Countries has to adjust and adapt to stay highly relevant and current due to changes in the global environment. (2) As time changes, country evolves due to urbanization. A strong brand would withstand difficult times to deal with urban decay and negative publicity. (3) Countries are more competitive these days for affluent residents and tourists. To sustain competitive advantage, countries are now more attentive to become a more attractive destination for tourists. (4) Self-governance and local funding is the final reason. Countries these days understand the power of creating international events to place them on a world map. It is also through these efforts, that different types of funding (advertisements, live telecasts' fee, tickets revenue, food and beverage, hotels, etc) can be generated.

There are five objectives for nation branding. Nation brand itself to (1) stimulate export growth, (2) increase inbound tourism for tourism receipts, (3) attract foreign investment into the nation, (4) enhance political influence internationally, and (5) manage negative stereotypes. All of these play a role to the brand identity and brand image (Dinnie, 2008).

Brand Identity

Brand identity is the identity of the brand, something that truly is, or a representation of the brand, the brand essence (Dinnie, 2008). It is the identification that

distinguishes something apart from another. The author also believes that there is a gap between brand identity (the identification of the brand) and brand image (the consumers perception of the brand). Many authors in the past proposed a variant of components to build the brand identity. Martin Roll (2006) for one has proposed five components in developing brand identity. The first component is *brand vision* – a document (usually is an internal document) that clearly describes the brand goals (what has to be achieved in order to achieve the brand identity) for future directions within a certain dateline. The second component is *brand scope*, a brand vision statement stipulating the potential market segments and categories. The third component is *brand positioning*, an aggregate perception of the consumers. Fourth is the *brand personality*, a component that connects the brand to the consumers emotionally through the brand’s personality. Finally, *brand essence*. It is the “heart and soul” of the brand. This distinguishes the brand apart from the other and allows it to stand out against others.

Meanwhile, Chernatony proposed similar components. Brand Vision, brand culture, positioning, personality, relationships, and presentations are components to build brand identity (Chernatony, 1999). Brand vision is clear and specific directions. Brand culture is the core values of the brand existence. Brand positioning emphasizes on the functionality of the distinct competence that differentiates a brand. The relationship from this process (employees, consumers, and other stakeholders) reinforce the brand values, personality and positioning. Prior to presentation of the brand identity, brand has to be coherent to persuade all stakeholders to buy in. Chernatony argues a brand vision can be conceptualized into three components – the desired future environment, brand value and

brand purpose (Chernatony, 2000). A brand vision is a communication of a brand with a single voice with clear direction that people can understand, adopt it, and passionately follow that vision. To achieve a cohesive brand, it involves a three-step process (Vergo & Chernatony, 2006). The authors proposed the Delphic brand Visioning model to produce a strong, cohesive brand. The first step is to get different stakeholders to come up with collective vision for the nation. This model recognizes that there will be a diverse range of views from different stakeholder and hence require brand steerers (likely to recognize the benefits of the brand) to help narrow the vision to the core image. The second step is to refine the vision to achieve a higher level of alignment towards the brand. The final step is when the vision is single, coherent, recognized and adopted by people.

Brand identity and brand image are two different constructs (Nandan, 2004). The brand identity begins with the brand name, while the brand image originates from the consumer perceptions. By this distinct difference, they are very dissimilar. On the other hand, these two concepts are crucial for developing brand loyalty, and in this case, are important components to building the nation brand.

Brand Image

“A nation’s brand image is its most valuable assets” (Anholt, 2005). Anholt emphasizes the brand should be seen in context, not the message. He believes if the context were positive, the negative message would still be seen in a favorable way. Brand image is the perceived image of a brand from an individual. The set of beliefs consumers hold about a particular brand. (Kotler et al, 2006). The perception of the

brand image of a destination varies from one individual to another. In “The Meaning and Measurement of Destination Image”, the authors Echtner and Ritchie believes that many people have an image of a destination even though they had never visited that place. Various media induce the perception of the images gathered in that person’s mind. The formation of the brand image includes the different media exposure like advertisements and promotions; friend’s opinions, news reporting through TV, radio; or the Internet, newspaper; or through popular culture such as movies, or literature. These impressions formed accentuate two critical points. First, even when people have not visited that destination, the exposure of various means of promotion and championing of a destination helps individual form an impression. Second, if and when a trip is made to that destination, it is likely for that perception to change after the visitation. It is a natural process where people would measure their own satisfaction (subconsciously) if their expectation were being met based upon their prior image of that destination. It becomes vital that the design of the marketing and promotional strategies of a destination must be an accurate message of what it says and offers. It is important to measure the base image, and evaluate the strength’s and weaknesses of the existing image. It is important to note that if a perception survey is done, then it allows the group of visitors who has a preconception of the destination to be categorized (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003).

The conceptual framework of brand identity and image involves a multidimensional view of three stages (Dinnie, 2003). In constructing the nation brand, individual nation would selectively focus on the identity (tangible and intangible) to best describe the nation brand (history, icons, territory, sports and so on) in (1) *Nation brand*

Identity. These components should represent the nation’s brand essence, “the heart and soul” of the nation. To communicate the brand identity, country could use communicators such as brand ambassadors, marketing communications, cultural artifacts and even past accomplishments in sports, or products as (2) *Communicators of the nation brand identity* as a way to communicate the nation brand identity, to deliver the (3) Nation-brand image. The audiences would include domestic and external consumers, domestic and external firms (inward investors) and government media (See Figure 2).

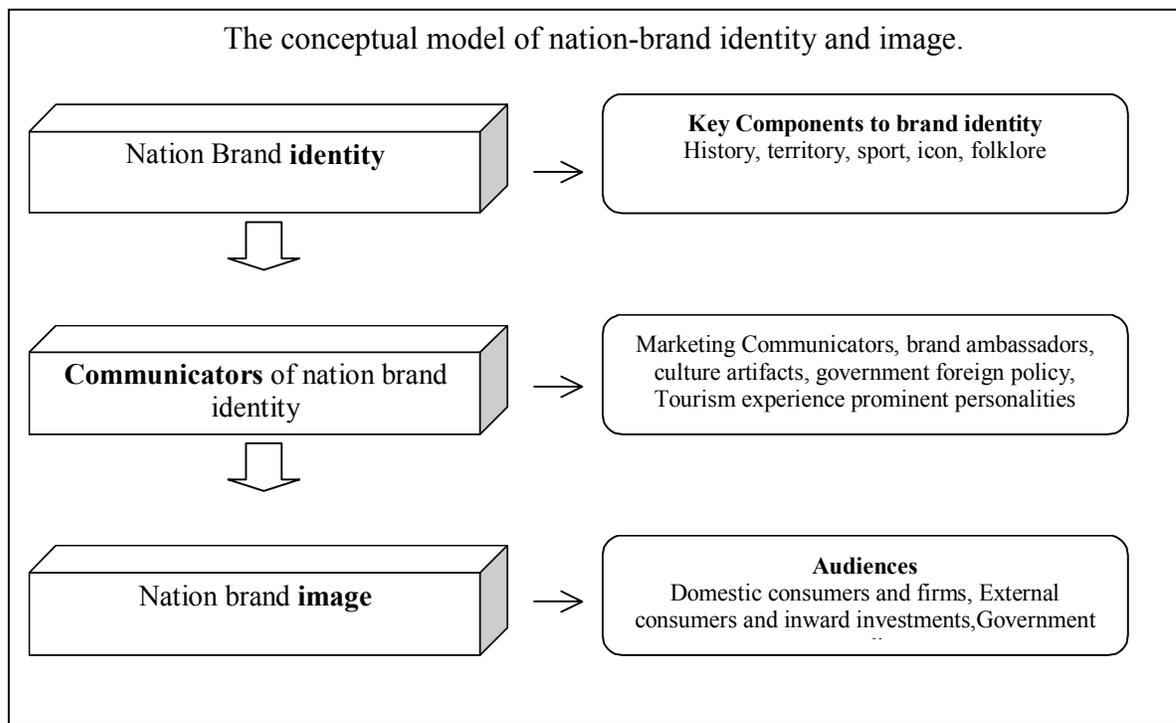


Figure 2.. The conceptual model of nation-brand identity and image

Source: (Dinnie, 2008), p. 49.

Brand Positioning

Echtner and Ritchie (1993) defined “positioning involves creating the appropriate image of the product in the minds of the consumers in the targeted markets” with no exception to tourism destinations that includes states, regions and countries. The authors

believe that establishing and managing a suitable destination image are vital to successful positioning and marketing strategy.

The brand positioning strategy begins with the stakeholder (tourists, international consumers, foreign investor) defining a superiority declaration (competitive advantages) for others to believe with reasons (Quelch and Jocz, 2004). Unambiguous positioning helps nations to succeed. A good positioning platform (tagline, slogan) can help carry the core brand identity, brand essence and image across to the receivers without distorting the message. Hence, this message has to be clear, consistent, competitive, and credible (Jobber, 2004). In recent years, some nations have come out with bland and generic positioning platforms without any differentiating claims for their destinations such as Malaysia, Truly Asia, and Amazing Thailand. Establishing distinctiveness is the key task in brand positioning (Dinnie, 2008).

The nation's image is a factor in buying decisions these days. (J. O. Shaughnessy & N.J.O. Shaughnessy, 2000). Projected image can influence destination positioning, and ultimately the tourist's buying behavior (Govers, Go, & Kumar, 2007). Govers et al. proposed projected tourism promotion should extend the destination true identity because the secondary marketing materials serves to form the perceived image in the consumer's mind prior to the actual visitation. Should the destination be chosen, the actual experience if differs from the perceived images, will lead to the tourists dissatisfaction. The authors concluded that media in general could influence other and form destination image, but the primary source of information (word of mouth and recommendation) given by travel agents, friend and relative have a higher impact in helping tourists

deciding the destination. The most significance of findings is perhaps the tourism promoters' effort (DMOs, and tourism board) was not as effective as compared to a national incident. A case in point used by the authors was the "Royal Funeral raises Britain's Profile" in 2002. Through the Queen's mother funeral, it did raise Britain's tourism up in Cumbria by about 20% even though Cumbria was one of the worst areas to visit due to hands, mouth and foot disease. The authors contributed that the "temporal environment or situational influences can have a dramatic short-term effect on perceived destination image."

Many countries spend millions of dollars to nation brand themselves. And not all countries are successful. *Bravo Spain* succeeded, yet *Cool Britannia* did not. What sets them apart? Gilmore (2002) explained Spain succeeded because of various reasons. Other than advertising and promotion activities at a regional and national level, Spain had done more to reposition for its new and modern identity and image.

"Its branding effort incorporate, absorb, and embrace a wide variety of activities under one graphic identity to form and project a multi-faceted yet coherent, interlocking and mutually supportive whole...Spain continues to take an active approach to maintaining its brand going forward."

Cool Britannia was a pun phrase for "Rule Britain" and have originated from Tony Blair. It was popularized in the midst of 1990s and it was to represent the modern Britain, a forward thinking nation, and a world leader that is creative and innovate. It was

supposed to encapsulate the national spirit at that time. However, the tagline was not well received by the public. Critics call it cynical and snobbish, while others think that the tagline was a designer concept and the single phrase would not be able to truly capture the essence of the Britain brand identity that was built with history, culture and traditions, especially when all of these meant differently to individuals.

Brand equity

Brand equity refers to the value of the brand (Dinnie, 2008). Brands have value, and prominent brand equity suggests consumers have high level of the brand awareness, are familiar with the brand, and maintain a favorable impression to the brand image, perceive the brand is of high quality and are loyal to the brand. (Keller, 2003, Kotler, Bowen, & Maken, 2006). Brand equity can influence purchasing decision. The consumers in their own mind have a perceived value of a certain brand; a ranking (in their opinion) where they think one brand value is better or higher than the other. A hotel room in Ritz Carlton to Four Seasons for example. Brand equity can also be built upon (Farquhar, 1989). This view is similar to Anholt's value of provenance.

Provenance and country of origin

The country of origin "Made in [country name]" is the value of provenance, and helps build the country's brand image. Provenance ultimately benefits the country's economic, cultural and political future (Anholt, 2002). Dinnie (2008) presented the evolution of nation branding is derived from the national identity and country of origin to converge into the homogenization of markets and increase sense of national identity, that eventually lead to the emergence of nation branding (Dinnie, 2008).

Simon Anholt's nation branding and competitive identity

Simon Anholt, is an expert in place branding (Kahn, 2006) and was also known to coin the phrase “nation branding” in 1996 to describe the branding of a country. In an interview with Lee Hudson Teslik of Councils on Foreign Relations (CFR), Anholt simplified the definition of nation branding as applying corporations’ branding to countries but with slight differences. The first is reputation asset; the brand that comes with the country has an asset. The second difference is the focus of managing (behavioral aspect) the nation’s image through a collaborative effort to work towards the fundamental “common” image. This requires the government officials, corporations (for profit or nonprofits), or other stakeholders to be consistent with what the country represents (CFR, 2007).

Nation branding (to Anholt) is not just about tourism but rather a collaborative effort of the various faculty such as the promotion of tourism, investment and trade, plus public and cultural diplomacy”, (Kahn, 2006). For this reason, Anholt prefers to use the term “competitive identity” to “nation branding” because managing the brand name of a country concerns the reputation of the nation, and it involves the national identity, policies, and economics of competitiveness. Competitive identity differentiates one nation to the next with its competitive advantage in the global market. Globalization has changed the world. The world becomes smaller because it is easier to reach via technology (telecommunications included) and transportation. The result is a one world, one market scenario. This lead to a more competitive market for tourists, consumers, investors, entrepreneurs, international sporting (the Olympics for example) events,

international media, talent and so on. National image matters, and nations should be concerned because the reputation of a country becomes the integrity of the nation, generating trust from its existence in the world, and the respect earned from all of that. In essence, the brand identity of a place becomes the competitive identity of the nation. According to Anholt, , and the place image

All nations have its own brand (Anholt, 2002), and places get their brands from public opinion (Anholt, 2008). People usually conjure up an image or multiple images when a country is being named. If you talk about France, people would think romance, the Eiffel Tower, perhaps even fashion. The perception varies from one to another because it highly depends on individual experience and/or association through either experience or media exposure (magazine, Internet, word of mouth, or other means). Products and services, corporations and even the country's inhabitants contribute to the country's image. In terms of product and services, it is the provenance or the country of origin that strengthens the country's image. Consumers perceive a product with a "Made in Japan" better than a similar product "Made in Vietnam". Corporations' way of doing business reflects on the integrity and business ethics, as well as employees' efficiency. The citizens of the nation contribute to the impression given to the countries they visit through their behavior and actions as well as the tourists' experiences. Provenance plays a part to the brand equity, and it can reinforce the brand image.

Anholt further explains that to launch a global brand requires self-belief, panache and chutzpah. It involves objectivity to see what others see and accept that perception;

government support; and constant investment in the place brand itself. The latter effort requires the stakeholders' synergies to cooperatively commit to building the provenance. These stakeholders could be government, corporation, or its people. An example in Singapore would be the FORMULA 1™ inaugural grand prix in 2008 with its first ever night race on a city circuit in Asia. This event though has only 40,000 international visitors but the live telecasts of the event at various parts of the world have placed Singapore on the world map. Ong Beng Seng (a property developer), Bernie Ecclestone (owner of the F1 brand), and the Singapore government collaborated to make the F1 event possible. Building provenance for a nation is similar to building brand equity, where the value of the country's name is tied to the overall brand's image in the market.

The brand image is synonymous to the country's reputation (Anholt, 2008). A country with poor reputation (uncultured, backward, or even unsafe politically) find their marketing effort inefficient because the perception of the public opinion is low, hence less likely to be chosen as a destination for vacation or business travel (Meeting, Incentives, Conventions & Exhibitions -MICE). Countries with positive reputation (culture, forward and politically safe) gain easier entry to the global marketplace with doors open, trust gained, respect given along an expectation that quality and competence workers will be there to meet the needs.

Anholt is recognized for *Anholt-GfK Nation Brand Index* (NBI), and it is based on the same six categories to measure the global perception of a country. The nation brand is how others perceive a country. It is an important concept because a well-built and

constructive nation brand provides a critical competitive edge. For this reason, it is important for countries to understand how publics perceive them across the nations. The NBI is an analytical ranking where 25,000 people were polled worldwide on their perceptions of the cultural, political, commercial and human assets, investment potential and tourist appeal of 50 developed and developing countries. It is an index of national brand power, a barometer of global opinion. The NBI essentially measures the perception individually in each of these categories. The six categories together form the *Nation Brands Hexagon*.

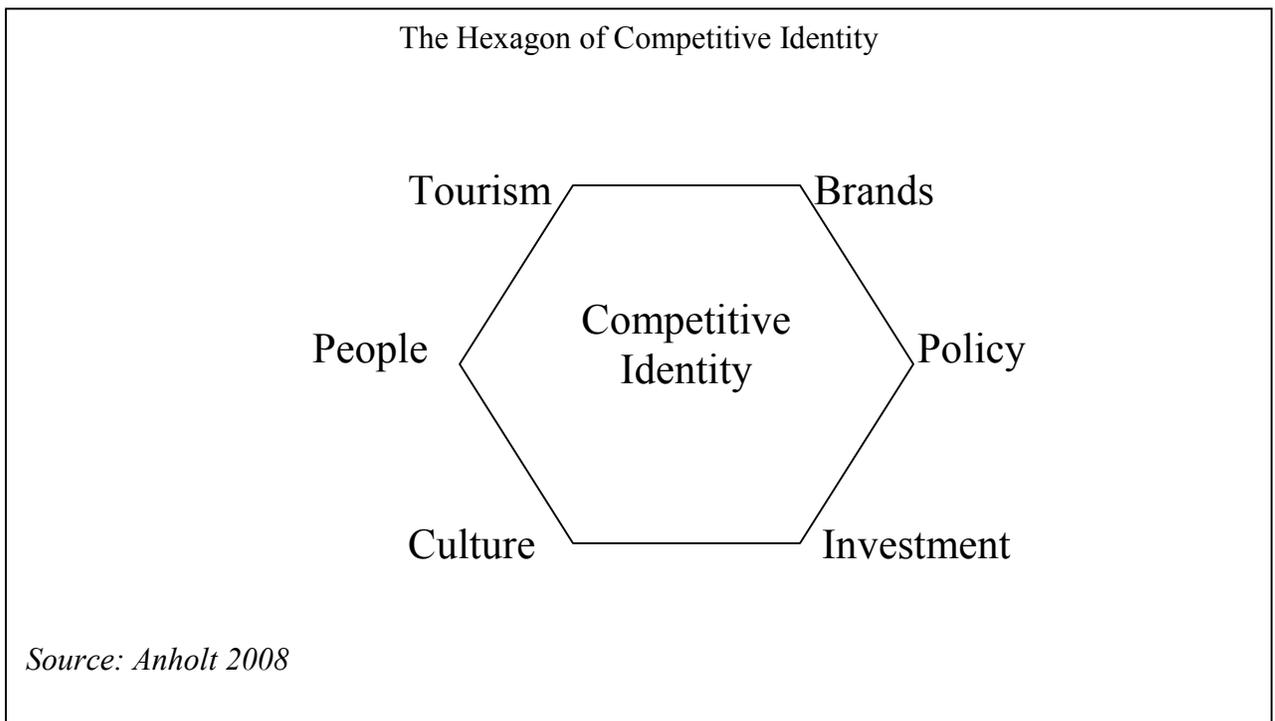


Figure 3. The hexagon of competitive identity

The NBI measures the power and appeal of a nation's brand image, and tells how people around the world see the character of that brand. This information can be useful

because it help to find out where the nation's image is in people's mind. It also serves to evaluate if its image is consistent to the project image and if there is a gap between the image and the actual experience. If a gap exists, the negative word-of-mouth would jeopardize repeat visits, not to mention the tourists would become the nation brand terrorists.

Conceptual framework to a place image

There are three conceptual frameworks to place brand. Kotler et la, Gilmore, and Anholt. The framework from Gilmore and Anholt has similarities, while Kotler's framework varied slightly.

Country should take on a more conscious effort in branding because country images draw out identifications, affect evaluations and purchase decisions. Additionally, countries compete for tourists, foreign investments and talented people. Kotler et al (2002) proposed five strategic approaches to brand a country. A country has to first perform a SWOT analysis to evaluate the nations' strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to define the country's objectives. The second approach is to choose a specific direction (from industries, personalities, natural landmarks, or historical events) for distinctive branding. The third approach is to expand upon an umbrella concept that covers its separate branding activities with consistency. Allocate adequate funds to finance each branding activities that would be highly relevant to create a greater impact is the fourth approach. The last approach is to create export controls to ensure exported products are trustworthy and meet the affirmed performance.

Gilmore (2002) assimilated the framework for corporation for country branding as well. The brand sits at the center (heart of the nation), where it represents the core values and ideology. It is the reason of existence and its reputation in the world. The spirit of the people consists of values, and it stands as a guide to the strategic decision-making, acts as a driving force and motivating its people in the different factors (environment, resources, culture, history, economy and people). The values represent the nation's belief system and it evolves with times and adapts to technology or caters to the changing needs of the market trends. Countries can utilize this model to nation brand, without fearing producing a homogenized brand because it is the people, and their spirit that makes it unique to each individual nation (Gilmore, 2002 & Anholt, 2002).

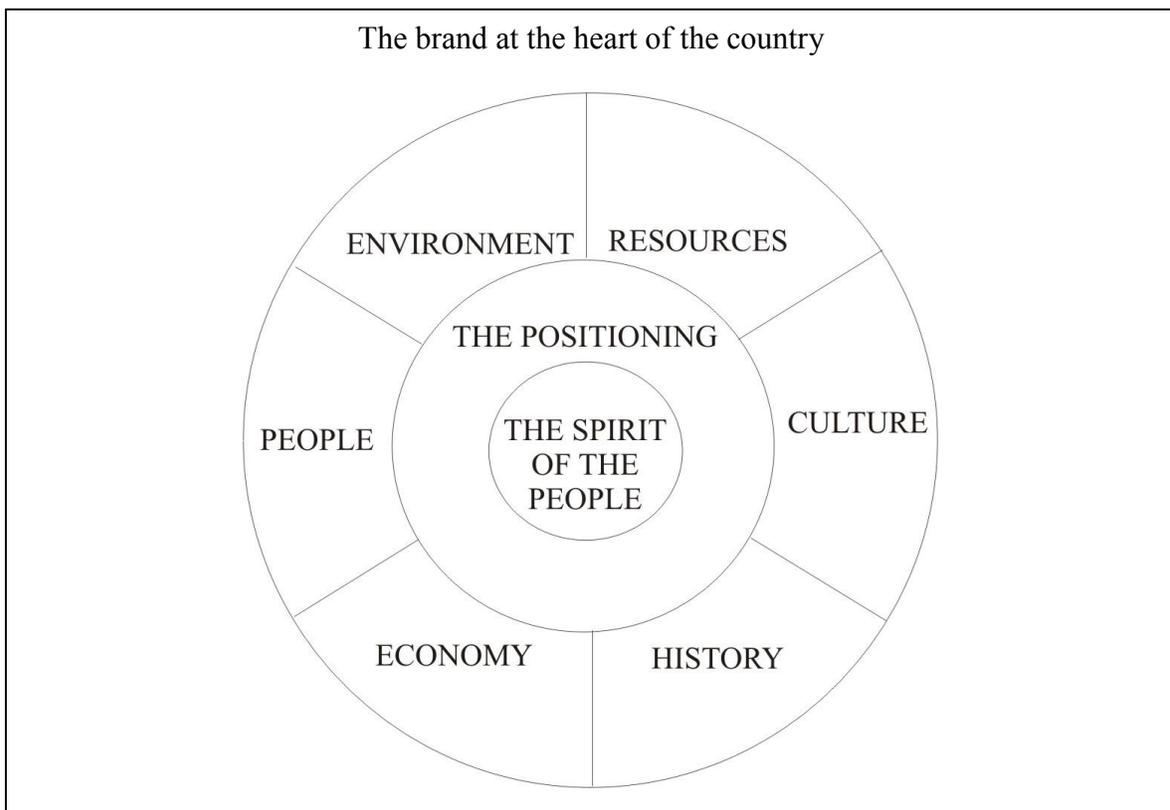


Figure 4. A framework for country branding Adapted from corporations to country branding (Gilmore, 2002), p.286.

Place brand provides trust, quality assurance, which set in motion for new sub-brands entry in the marketplace (Anholt, 2002). Anholt, (2008) articulated six basic paths to build a place image. Naturally, *tourism promotion* is the first because it has the largest budgets in branding the nation. It is also the first place tourists would seek pre-trip information prior to the actual vacation. *Exports* (products and services) are image ambassadors when the country of origin is unambiguous. *Government Policy* (domestic or foreign) has an impact on a place image as well. Domestic policy will be reported on international media while foreign policy affects other nations. Diplomacy is needed when dealing with foreign policy. *Investments* (foreign investments) and the ability to attract the talent pool is another route to strengthen a place image. Cultural events and activities (Opera, or famous authors) can raise the place image. The country's inhabitants and citizens can also affect the image especially with their mannerisms or behavior when they are overseas, as well as on how they treat the tourists. International celebrities, or high profile leaders, sport stars can elevate the image as well.

The challenge of nation branding

It is now more critical than ever to create a unique identity for destination because it is now more competitive for survival in the global market place (Morgan and Pritchard, 2004). The authors believe there are four major challenges - limited budget, little management control, and political pressures with consideration to stakeholders. External environment factors such as economic downturn, natural disasters and pandemics can affect the tourism industry drastically.

Quelch and Jocz has presented the nation brand challenges. One of the challenges includes the people buying in to nation branding and is cynical to the idea. Another challenge is when the tourists' visit the destination and found the reality does not match the projected image from the pre-trip information gathered prior to trip, the gap will lead to disappointment and they will become brand terrorists. This would lead to low repeat visitation and damage the brand image indirectly. Local governors and mayors have different objectives to promote their own region and cities rather than the nation. Lastly, the government cannot control the flow of information through the Internet that shape the national image.

Anholt, (2008) argued that even if the nation could all get together to speak in one voice, that solves only part of the solution. It is not sufficient to enhance the national image on the overall. The challenge is to have all of the stakeholders (government, corporations, people, and so on) to become committed and dedicated to the development, and help build the nation's image. On top of that, everyone (different stakeholders) has to partake a proactive role to take charge to fulfill the commitment independently to improve the image with an impact. Each of these groups (tourism, brands, Policy, Investment, culture & People) has to embrace an attitude that they make a difference when they contribute towards the common goal (build the nations brand). People will notice the new and/or improve image. The author advocates that the government's initiative must carried out with a real purpose or it would be mistaken as propaganda. This would waste taxpayer's money. Management of the country's reputation should be a nation policy, and not a campaign for the tourism board, or a political activity. The

most efficient of corporations would embrace the brand strategy as their business strategy; a nation should do the same by incorporating the brand strategy into their policymaking.

Tourism in Singapore

Tourism revenue is critical to the hospitality and service business in Singapore. According to the Yearbook of Statistics, Singapore 2009, the tourism industry contributes to 5.74% of Singapore's GDP for the year of 2008. Without tourism revenue, Singapore as a nation will suffer drastically as S\$ 14.8 billion (STB, 2008) of tourism revenue is substantial to the economy and a small country like Singapore, not to mention the number of jobs it creates within the tourism industry. Singapore has no natural resources, so the citizens become the resource. Human resource is the key to the service industry such as: Healthcare services (which promote medical tourism), education services (positioning Singapore as the educational hub for South East Asia) and tourism (which generates hundreds of thousands of jobs in the hospitality industry). The hospitality industry includes a wide range of service-oriented businesses such as hotels, F&B, tourist attractions, the upcoming Integrated Resorts (Casinos), and theme parks.

It is critical for Singapore to position itself well in the tourism industry, especially during the present global economic slowdown. Travelers who can afford to travel during this time will be more selective than usual. Their destination choice will be based on their unique preferences and desires. Competition is fierce among neighboring countries within South East Asia particularly during the economic downturn. Singapore has position itself as a "compelling leisure and business destination" (Mr. S. Iswaran, 2008).

Singapore has grand plans in the pipeline. The international *Cruise terminal at Marina South* is due to start in 2010, two nature-themed attractions in Mandai would be ready by 2010 and the *Garden by the Bay* opens in 2011. In 2008, the Singapore government along with the property development tycoon Ong Beng Seng and Formula One owner Bernie Ecclestone have launched the first ever night circuit race in Asia. The inaugural race has placed Singapore on the world map. This agreement was for five years with the option to renew the next two years after its fifth year. Singapore will be hosting the first Youth Olympics Games in August 2010.

The Minister for Trade and Industry of Singapore, Mr Lim Hng Kiang announced on January 11, 2005 that STB would be responsible for the Tourism 2015 goals. STB would take charge to increase the visitor arrivals to 17 million tourists, increase tourism receipts to S\$30 billion, and create 100,000 jobs in the service sector within Singapore by 2015 (STB, 2005). This initiative will be funded with S\$2 billion Tourism Development Fund to achieve three key focuses. The first is to strengthen Singapore as a Meeting, Incentives, Convention & Exhibitions (MICE) destination. The second focus is to make Singapore a leading destination for leisure in Asia by enriching tourists with unique experiences and matches the “Uniquely Singapore” branding. The last focus is to build Singapore as a high-end quality destination for tourists to come for healthcare and education services (STB, 2007).

Singapore was a colony of Britain since 1823, and eventually became a self-governing state in 1958. The Singapore Tourism Promotion Board (STPB) was set up in

1964, one year before Singapore became an independent nation. Since then STPB has been promoting Singapore as a destination, and also keeping records of the number of visitors that came into Singapore. In 1965, only 98, 481 tourists visited Singapore (Singapore Travel News, 1979-1980). In 2008, Singapore has welcomed 10,116,500 tourists. (Yearbook of Statistics Singapore, 2009). The increase of tourist arrivals every decade (see below table) shows that Singapore, as a destination is getting more and more attractive. This is partly due to the marketing effort, but major contributions were made by the government developing Singapore from the third world to the first world and adding new tourists attractions.

Table 2

Visitor Arrivals from Singapore

VISITOR ARRIVALS						
Year	1965	1975	1985	1995	2005	2008
Visitor arrivals (000)	98	1324	3031	7136	8943	10115
Tourism Receipts (S\$m)	69	280	3653	11697	10871	14800

Sources: Yearbook of Statistics, Singapore 1990, 2009
Economic and Social Statistics, Singapore 1960-82
Singapore Travel News, (1979-1980)

PART THREE

Introduction

The case study will examine why Singapore is ideal for nation branding. It will first discuss the branding history of Singapore and further discuss the weaknesses of the Uniquely Singapore campaign. This section will explore the Singapore's brand identity, image, and positioning for nation branding. Through this discussion and implication section, there will be attempts to recap what it takes to nation brand, and further discuss if Singapore should take the nation brand conceptual framework, and address how this approach would help Singapore as a whole.

Research methodology

This paper utilizes a case study approach for this topic. Most of the research came from published information in the public domain. The review of literature, analysis of the current STB brochure and other case studies is appropriate for this exploratory study. The key term for this research started with destination marketing, and through several review of such articles, had broaden to include place branding and eventually country branding and nation branding. Thorough research has led to Anholt's nation branding or competitive identity model and further research revealed that Singapore has certain elements in place and the brand identity and image has not yet achieved a cohesive brand status. Success in branding Singapore is vital to the development of Singapore as a tourist destination if it wants to achieve the 2015 Tourism goal. It is a natural next-step for Singapore to embrace the nation-branding concept.

The Uniquely Singapore campaign was launched with a two-prong effort. The first is to promote Singapore as a destination to tourists. Secondly, the campaign is meant to have the citizens be tourism ambassadors to champion the unique features of Singapore. Informal discussions with taxi drivers have provided information to two issues. First, to establish if these taxi drivers serves as a tourism ambassador, and second, what were the common comments from tourists about Singapore. Both of these two issues relate to the perception of the Singapore identity, brand image, and as a result affect the tourism industry.

Case study of Singapore.

The nation brand identity is the brand essence (heart and soul) of the nation. It identifies and distinguishes one country from another. There is a gap between the country's identity and the country's image. The country identity is projected while the country's image is perceived. To acquire the country's identity, it requires the nation (people) to visualize a brand vision that clearly describes the nation's goal with clear objectives and it has to be achieved within a certain set dateline. In 2005, the Minister of Trade and industry, Mr. Lim Hng Kiang announced that by 2015, Singapore would welcome 17 million tourists and try to achieve S\$30 billion of tourist receipts annually. To meet this objective, Singapore is in an ideal position to nation brand. Nation branding essentially helps a nation to further the nation's economic growth by focusing on the nation's identity and brand image. Nation branding is complex, and the public policy of a nation is significant to the country's image. The nation's image becomes the reputation of the country.

Many locals commented on the branding of Uniquely Singapore that was rolled out on March 9, 2004. The locals do not see the word “unique” as capturing the essence of Singapore because every country is unique in their own ways. Henderson (2006) argued the word “unique” as bland, regular, and over generalized. It is a word that “applies to every destination”. The author states that the marketing effort will not be able to convince tourists that Singapore is “unique” through normal media communications (Henderson, 2006, p270). Henderson also revealed that Singapore has been known in the past as “staid, restrictive, boring, conservative, too strict with nothing much to do on a tiny Island.” (Henderson, 2006, p.267) The features STB highlighted in the “Uniquely Singapore” campaign existed in other countries such as Malaysia, or Hong Kong. The bland tagline did not create any competitive advantage over any neighboring countries, not to mention other competing countries in the global market.

The branding history of Singapore

Singapore is made up of a group of Islands, and even though it lacks any natural resources, it is one of the most affluent and stable countries in Asia. This is due to its strategic location linking the Indian and Pacific oceans, and is the gateway to South-East Asia through its shipping routes. Singapore is one of the world’s largest and busiest seaports in the world. It is a nation of multi-cultural backgrounds but is united by the use of the English language. Singapore’s belief in education, technology advancement and enterprise has made Singapore into an education hub, and an attraction of medical tourism as well as a place for foreign investment (Boniface & Cooper, 2005).

Singapore is a young country with only a 43 years history as an independent republic. Singapore declared independence from Malaysia in 1965. In 1968, then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew had the foresight and vision of naming Singapore “The Garden City”. The two key reasons for the concept was to first woo investors. It was a subtle approach to convince potential investors in the early years that Singapore was an efficient and effective place because continuous maintenance will reflect conscientious. The second reason was to soften the harshness of life and to raise the morale and pride of the surroundings (Lee, KY, 2000). In 1968, Singapore was ahead of the times when PM Lee Kuan Yew had the vision to incorporate the “green and clean” message into the environment while developing Singapore. More importantly, PM Lee must be given the credit for being a visionary leader. He was able to strategically place Singapore as a destination and concurrently build Singapore into where it is today: a country with strong infrastructure that is modern, and politically safe. Singapore went from being a third world country to first world country in the span of about 30 years.

Singapore has place brand itself since the beginning. Former PM Lee Kuan Yew initiated the practice of branding Singapore since 1965, the STB placed a new brand on Singapore every decade or so to keep Singapore as an attractive city for tourists to visit or revisit. Each of these branding messages market Singapore in more advanced ways. They adapt to the needs of the visitors while maintaining the core message such as “East meet West”, “Multi-racial community”, and “Business hub”.

Singapore's branding message has changed many times over the years. In the beginning, Singapore was known as the Lion City. A term coined by prince Sang Nila Utama. In 1819, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles signed a treaty with Malaysia on behalf of the British East India Company to develop Singapore as a trading post. In 1867, Singapore became a British crown colony. According to the "Singapore, The Encyclopedia" (2006), Singapore during the 19th century had cleared the jungle to make way for agriculture, and urban growth, it had wiped out all the green. The colonial government had attempted to introduce street planting but was halt by World War II. In 1963, Mr Lee Kuan Yew brand Singapore "Green Singapore" to attract foreign investment. Resources were allocated and dedicated to building a natural environment for Singapore during the 1960s and 1970s. Active planting of trees and shrubs were planted along roadside, vacant plots of land, and new development sites to beautify Singapore and provide a better natural environment for the citizens. In 1967, "The Garden City" campaign was launched (Singapore: The Encyclopedia, 2006)

Chang (1997a) reported that Singapore had changed the branding message three times before settling on "Instant Asia" between the 1960s and 70s. In the 1985, the message was "Surprising Singapore" and astonishingly, there was very few literature found on this campaign. The only literature found on this campaign was a booklet and a poster. Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (STPB) published the brochure, and it was given out to tourists during that period of campaign. In it, geographical information was briefly given, the country was described as a modern destination, multiracial cultural, and promotes both Indonesia and Malaysia as destination for further exploration for the

tourists. The brochure also promotes Singapore as a place for different world cuisine, as well as recommending some local food. The last theme promoted in this brochure was the multi-racial traditions. The poster of the Surprising Singapore campaign was in Sepia tone, with an image of a trishaw driver with a tourist couple sitting on it looking at Clark Quay, with the business district landmark (Shenton Way) as a backdrop of the poster. This projected image has a “traditional feel” (because of the use of sepia effect), and yet it is contrasted with the modern building as a backdrop. The waterfront (Clark Quay) is one of the elements used in urban tourism.

In 1996, the “New Asia – Singapore” campaign was adopted for the next seven years. The focus was to promote Singapore as a tourism hub for the Far East and Australasian region ([from China to New Zealand) STB also champion Singapore as the tourism capital of South East Asia (Ooi, (2004). In 1997, STPB made a conscious effort to change its name to Singapore Tourism Board (STB) to recognize the significant change of the tourism industry that shapes the modern Singapore (Yeoh, Ser, Wang & Wong, 2002, p4). Singapore wanted to be the regional hub and also wanted the world to see the country as New Asia. According to Ooi, 1300 departing tourists were surveyed and the respondents were asked the impressions they have of Singapore and their preference of Singapore’s alternate brands. From the literature review of many articles on branding, the approach of asking the tourists of alternative brand would go against the approach of branding. National branding should come from the nation’s values, not based on visitor perception of what Singapore should be. Every tourist has different

perception based on his or her actual experience and individual background. Shouldn't the focus be from within other than from outside? This practice invites bias criticism.

Table 3
Singapore branding

Time period	Singapore's tagline
Since Singapore was found	<i>The Lion City</i>
1967	<i>The Garden City</i>
1970s	<i>Instant Asia</i>
1985	<i>Surprising Singapore</i>
1996	<i>New Asia</i>
2004 – present (June 2008)	<i>Uniquely Singapore</i>

“Uniquely Singapore”

In the STB's Annual Report 03/04, *A New Brand for Destination Singapore*, STB launched the latest branding campaign, “Uniquely Singapore” to much fanfare. It is an attempt to update and contemporizes the image of Singapore. The new brand emphasis is on Singapore's distinctive blend of rich culture and the modern attributes that could enrich the visitors by offering unique and diverse experiences. Capitalizing on Singapore's credibility for efficiency and quality, it hopes to capture the Singapore Unique Selling Propositions (USP) and reinforce the country sustainability.

The new brand was designed to be “compelling, differentiating and bold” to differentiate itself from other destinations. It was meant to utilize Singapore's credibility

to inspire not just STB, but also the industry partners and Singaporeans alike to share a common voice, reverberating the tourism industry's core messages. According to STB, the process of developing this brand required a meticulous evaluation of the Tourism Board, and its existing industry business strategies, product offerings, service delivery and the Singaporeans' perceptions. In other words, it targets the tourists as well as the locals.

The intended brand message extends beyond promoting Singapore to the world. It is about creating more awareness among the Singaporeans of the simple things in their lives that could be distinctive, enriching, and interesting for tourists. The whole idea is to encourage Singaporeans to become the country's tourism ambassadors.

According to an STB employee, "*Uniquely Singapore* speaks of a destination that offers a unique blend of the best of the modern world and rich cultures to deliver enriching experience. The brand position differentiates Singapore as a premier destination, offering a unique array of enriching experiences from traditional cultural experience to innovative modern arts performances, all delivered with a high level of service quality, reliability and efficiency." The employee also briefly mentioned STB had done a perception survey in the past but was not able to provide the results or the questions asked. STB has six categories to the survey: (1) Awareness, (2) Correct Associations, (3) Perception level of those who are aware and those who are not aware of the slogan, (4) Resulting impact on all other brand health measures, (5) Comparison of

slogan scores against main competitors, (6) Evaluation of results versus the specific measures of what Uniquely Singapore represents.

The Weakness of “Uniquely Singapore”

In a marketing collateral downloadable from the Asian Tourism website, STB brands Singapore as a city like no other, because it is easy to appreciate its people, its “state-of-the-art” infrastructure, and always something new happening everyday.” The opening of the brochure markets its destination attributes as “unique” because of its people, landscape, place in the world, and passage through time”. The brochure also promotes Singapore as a destination for culture (Esplanade Theatre, festivals, and local art scene), food (Hainanese Chicken Rice and Chilli Crab), shopping (malls, shops and market), business center (conventions - MICE) and water city (cruises).

Mr. Lim Neo Chian, the Deputy Chairman and Chief Executive of the Singapore Tourism Board in the launch of “Uniquely Singapore” campaign tried to explain why or what is unique about Singapore. To STB, “Singapore merges the best of the East and the West, combines modernity with rich old traditions. Singapore fuses Chinese, Indian, Malay, and other cultures with its foods, and is an island inhabited by 4 million people who are multi-racial, multi-religion, and multi-lingual harmoniously. (STB Speech transcript by Mr. Lim N.C., 2004). If the brand identity of the “Uniquely Singapore” campaign was meant to capture the essence of “unique”, then it did not achieve it completely because it did not capture the uniqueness of Singapore, the message was generalized and did not create much differentiation from its neighboring country. In terms of multi-racial, multi religion, and multi-lingual, America could contend it. In

terms of being modern, Hong Kong is conceivably more modern than Singapore if not the same. Furthermore, Hong Kong has also positioned itself as a shopping and business center, and with an abundance of nightlife to boast (Calantone, Benedetto, Hakam, Bojanic, 1989). So, what Singapore offers is not unique to tourists. This creates a gap between perception and reality (Anholt, 2008). In terms of food, Malaysia has similar food like Singapore. According to Anholt (2008), national image is “not created through communications and cannot be altered by slogan such as *Malaysia - Truly Asia*” (Anholt, 2008, p212). This is “product-style” marketing effort, and it does not help Singapore as a nation project a consistent image. A bland tagline is generic branding; it does not create a distinctive proposition, and is basically ordinary. It is definitely not worth the millions of dollars countries pay these days for branding a country.

A place or destination is different in branding from a product especially not when it involves the reputation of a country. The government should always observe their global image in countries they aim to target. The stakeholder should collaborate together and agree on a national stratagem. In developing the strategy, it would involve many intricacies and can be a long drawn out process. If the stakeholders could unite as one, pin down the purpose and objectives, and fulfill the process, it would reflect the will of one nation. Finally, the hardest thing to do for the country’s reputation is perhaps to continuously maintain the reputation in every sector (Tourism, exports, culture, people, brands and policy).

Singapore has also position itself for urban tourism. Exactly what attract tourists to cities? Places like Paris, New York, or Singapore? Ruetsche (2006) explained tourists are attracted to different elements within urban areas. People are attracted to historic district with rich cultural background like landmark, buildings, and the local character of a place. A waterfront attracts tourists because of the visual appeal and the “something to do” activity. Business travelers that visit Singapore for MICE would also take the opportunity to take some time off for leisure travel as well. Festivals and Events such as the Film Festivals and Olympics attract tourists as well. Shopping and F&B though is categorized as secondary element of tourism, it still play a very important part to the tourism industry because visitors still need to eat as part of their vacation time, and shopping souvenirs for colleagues, friends and family in very subtle ways tell their friends where they recently spend time for their vacation. Conveniences and the urban standard of living probably attracts tourists because it is the comfort level that people can easily adjust and adapt to when they are away from home. It is important to note that through developing Singapore as a destination for urban tourism, many of the redevelopment projects such as Chinatown has “lost its original character and authentic elements” (Yeoh et al, 2002).

Implications and Discussion

The brand identity of Singapore

Singapore is a very young nation, and because it is young, it has flexibility and is not bound by cultural traditions. It is also because it is infantile; it has the ability to build many things from scratch (Gilmore, 2002). Gilmore also thinks that because it is smaller, it is easier to manage its citizens who are more patriotic and would serve the

country and fulfill the brand name. For the same reason that it is young, it lack experience in certain areas. The lost of original identity through urbanization, the lack of attractions due to limitations of natural resources, the inflation on cost of living has made Singapore expensive and no longer a destination of good buys (contrary to Surprising Singapore campaign), the level of service rendered out in the service industry are inconsistent in the hospitality industry (hotels, F&B, and retail) with a scarcity of good professional MICE organizers (Cheong & Khem, (1988).

Singapore is a young country, and though it has some form of identity, the identity is indistinct. This is reflected in the STB brochure.

Singapore has much strength. It has achieved a multi-racial and multi-cultural society living in harmony and as a result provided an environment that is politically safe and stable. The super infrastructure, and modern superstructure, makes Singapore a clean and green place. Tourists have been associating Singapore with qualities like: a shopper's paradise; excellent hotel facilities; and a nation of educated citizens.

It is important to point out that the government is aware that the service sector needs major improvements and has invested S\$100 million recently to spearhead the second phase of the national initiatives called "Go-the-Extra-Mile for Services" (GEMS). GEMS allow management executives of small & medium size enterprise to receive training to perpetuate the service culture within individual organization. The first phase of the GEMS movement was launched in October 2005 to train the front line employees to provide better service. The government later found out that the first launch was

inadequate because the upper and middle management did not adopt the service culture. Hence, the government had to start the second GEMS initiatives. This is an example of having a reactive culture, and it is usually normal for a collective society. Singapore needs to take a proactive approach in managing not just the brand image for the tourism sector but also the five other sectors.

Singapore's image

Wan and Hui (2003) identify few implications and conclusions through their study in *Singapore's Image as a Tourist Destination*. It is a challenge for the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) to differentiate Singapore from its neighboring countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong, or Taipei because Singapore is urbanized and is categorized as a modern city-state-country. In terms of architecture style, Singapore is contemporary to the point that there was little distinction between buildings with heritage versus new modern buildings especially when it is compared to the aforesaid countries. The structured survey done by Hui, and Wan (2003) revealed otherwise. In that study, 131 tourists participated in the survey at the Singapore Changi Airport. The results stood out against the Singapore Tourist Board claims. Only 16.7% of the tourists thought that Singapore has a diverse culture and people. This highlighted that the local culture has the lowest mean score and the authors explained that it is contributed to the fact that Singapore is more urbanized, with many modernized building and few unique architecture building that reflects Singapore heritage. Additionally, Singapore has little focus on scenic views and as a result of this fact; Singapore should not position itself in direct competition with other neighboring countries that has those advantages. In the same findings, it suggests that Singapore is strongly perceived s being politically sound

(mean at 4.5), safe and convenient (mean at 4.5) and clean (mean at 4.2). The authors recommended STB to use these factors as part of the promotional packages. The authors also revealed that Singapore is a relatively good place to shop and to find good food and had proposed promoting “Singapore Food Festival” and “The Great Singapore Sales”. Other suggestions included segmenting different regions to market Singapore especially when results of the findings reflect that the tourists from different country of origins have different perceptions of Singapore. The authors finally concluded more work is needed to ascertain the key determinants of Singapore as a tourist destination. Under the destination branding, the marketing collateral rolled out was over brand, and as a result, produce fragmented message losing its brand identity (Choate, 1997).

The brand positioning of Singapore

In 2008, the Nation Brand Index (NBI) ranked Singapore as the 24th with a score of 53.7. Although Singapore did not reach the top ten lists, it is an accomplishment on its own to be listed at the 24th position because Singapore is a small country with no natural resource. Singapore did not get to where it is now on luck but rather on the country’s leadership and careful strategy.

In the Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First: the Singapore Story 1965 – 2000*, Mr. Lee wrote about his effort to build Singapore since its independence in 1965 from Malaysia. Singapore came a long way, from a country with poor resource, hinterland to a strong infrastructure in a span of 30 years. The strategies to plan, the years of patience, and the efforts it took to build were remarkable. The Singapore Army was built from scratch in 1965 so that citizens can protect their own

country. In 1963, the Housing Development Board (HDB) was initiated to provide families the opportunity to own their home with affordable homes build as a means to create stability. In 1968, the idea of building Singapore to be the financial center within 10 years was sowed, and later came into fruition in 1978. The government ruling party that was voted in backed in 1959 has a mission to establish a clean and effective government and it is still its mission these days. The clearing of the illegal hawkers that would create road chaos were given proper hawker license in 1971 and only then, Singapore was able to reclaim back its roads. The Singapore government have ensured all the children of Singapore be given a proper education with subsidized school fees. And because a lot of its citizens were educated, the level of competence improves as a nation. Additionally, Singapore keeps pace with present times, and it evolves with changing needs. Take the service industry for example; to encourage a more service-oriented industry, the government has created more Service awards to recognize the service industry through Go-The-Extra-Mile-for-Services (GEMS). In terms of tourism, Singapore recognized the lack of natural beauty and replaces the lack of it with man-made beauty like a clean and beautify skyline. One of the things tourists do not see often is the constant maintenance of these buildings, roads, and the green environment. This is part of Anholt's theory of building provenance for the nation, it takes time and patience to build, and whatever that was done in the past, has now become part of the country's brand image.

Conclusions

Summary

Based on Anholt's competitive identity, there are six pathways: tourism, brands, policy, investment, culture, and people. If one were to evaluate Singapore in each of these pathways, one can see that Singapore has some of the elements in place but it lacks certain cohesiveness. The Singapore government has invested time and money to nurture all of these sectors. In the tourism sector, even with the Uniquely Singapore campaign, the stakeholders need to buy into the concept that nation branding would help the nation prosper further. Think of it this way, in a hospitality corporation, to deliver excellent service, each and every one of the employees has to believe in the hotel vision statement. The frontline employees must buy into the corporate culture and the management has to embrace the culture as well. Every department of the hotel needs to work together to render great service. If the sales team tells the hotel guests how great the hotel is, and the front desk were rude, the hotel guest would be dissatisfied. In other words, every stakeholder of the country has to work towards the common goal so that the country's brand has the ability to compete in the global market. The brands of export product and services in Singapore are limited partly due to the high cost of living here. The "Made in Singapore" products are in the biomedical science, chemicals, electronics, precision engineering, and transport engineering sectors. In culture, Singapore focuses on performance art (Theatre, and Dance) more than Visual arts. The museums in Singapore by and large focus on Asian art, and the contemporary art scene lacks luster. If Singapore wants to compete globally, it has to have an open mind. In investments, Lucas Arts and Microsoft have set up offices here and most recently, Singapore has anchored Marina Bay

Sands and Resort World as the two mega integrated resorts. In governance, it has been competent but there is a lack of communications. Individual agencies have their own mission and they pull away from each other. If nation branding was adopted, these agencies will have to more cohesive.

Singapore should embark on nation branding because it has many elements somewhat in place. Singapore tries to stay current and relevant; and it evolves with the present global environment. Singapore is competing for affluent residents (investment) and tourists. Singapore has hosted the first F1 event and will be hosting for the next few years, and is also working towards hosting more international events like the Youth Olympics in 2010. All these efforts are to increase inbound tourism for tourism receipts, attract foreign investments, enhance political influence internationally, and seek to stimulate export growth. By and large, Singapore should take on nation branding to position itself to compete in the global market.

As discuss earlier, the present brand identity of Singapore is indistinct. Singapore needs to define its own brand identity. From that identity, have all the stakeholders work towards a cohesive brand. There should also be a flow of communications to share a common goal. Transparency is essential in this communication process to keep things on track.

Suggestion for future research

Singapore need to identify and recognized its own identity. Without clarifying this, nation branding is not possible. Singapore has some form of identity but it is quite

difficult to pin down what it is because it is still in the growing stage as a nation. Having said that, Singapore should first research, and find out what is the public's view on Singapore's identity. While doing perception survey on tourists provide an insight of what the tourists think of Singapore, it seems that there is a lack of information regarding the perception of its citizens. On the STB website, there was a write up on how the branding of Uniquely Singapore came about. It appears that the "trade" people (people within the tourism sector) were interviewed, and these trade people thought positively about the campaign. In hindsight, the interviews should be extended to include lay people to get a well-rounded view. After all, it is the laymen that make up the bulk of the nation.

As mentioned earlier, Singapore has little distinctiveness to separate itself from Malaysia, Hong Kong, and other neighboring countries. However, Singapore has a distinct strength, and it is politically safe and sound. Research could be done to ascertain how to portray this in the branding campaign. Additionally, the Singapore public transport is another strength because it provides great convenience to get around. The Mass Rapid Transport is phenomenal. It is safe (unlike Paris), it is clean (unlike New York), and it is easy to use. The food court in Singapore is unique. It offers good, affordable food in a clean and cool environment. This is a feature quite unique to Singapore.

There is a strong case to argue for the nation branding of Singapore. The initial research and surveys conducted thus far is not in depth enough and does not provide a

good and thorough understanding of the brand identity of Singapore. To successfully compete in the global market, nation branding is crucial. To successfully nation brand, Singapore will require more foundation data.

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Appendix 1

Offices of STB

Americas

New York, USA
Los Angeles, USA

Europe

Frankfurt, Germany
London, UK

South Asia

Mumbai, India
Delhi, India
Chennai, India

Middle East

Dubai, UAE
Destination Marketing & Promotional Activities
Middle East – Destination Ad Campaign

Greater China

Beijing, China
Shanghai, China
Chengdu, Sichuan, China
Guangzhou, China
Hong Kong, China

Taiwan

Taipei, Taiwan

ASEAN

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Bangkok, Thailand
IndoChina, Vietnam

ASEAN (INLANDS)

Jakarta, Indonesia
Medan, Indonesia
Manila, Phillipines

Oceania

Sydney, Australia
Auckland (Marketing Representative), New Zealand