

Applying Anholt's National Branding Model: The Case of Kenya

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Abstract

In essence, branding a country improves its profile and reputation, thereby enabling it to attract foreign direct investments while making it an ideal destination for tourism and trade. For this reason, governmental entities are beginning to employ branding strategies to sell their regions and countries to the rest of the world. This phenomenon has resulted in a new concept of marketing called place branding. With Kenya seeking to position itself as an attractive investment destination and with aspirations of becoming a middle-income country by the year 2030, it is essential to identify the critical place branding strategies and ensure these are incorporated into the country's strategic plan (Vision 2030) in order to compete effectively against competition. Accordingly, the researchers extensively review existing literature relating to place branding. From the analysis, the authors propose a conceptual framework for strategic place branding for Kenya. The paper concludes by suggesting areas that future studies should address.

Keywords: Nation branding; Strategic place branding; Brand strategy; Country image perceptions; Kenya

Introduction

Branding is as important for a country just as it is for a product or service. Just as consumers look for brands that they perceive good so do travelers, business leaders and employees look for a country to visit, invest in or work in. Branding a country is so important that where people live, go for holidays, work in, educate their children or even set up companies is dependent to a large extent on the associations they have for that particular country. Indeed due to branding different countries have been associated with different things, Japan for instance is associated with good cars and electronic items whereas Costa Rica is known for coffee. The future of any country is largely dependent on the associations that people have about it and those associations can either be positive or negative. According to Cevero (n.d), "the public impression of a country is important as a source of national pride, invariably, people source part of their own identity from the image of their country" (as cited in Future Brand, 2012–2013). Place branding is therefore a powerful tool to differentiate countries and obtain competitive advantage.

Branding

A brand can be defined in different ways. Hankinson and Cowking [1] defined a brand as a product or service made distinctive by its positioning relative to the competition and by its personality, which comprises a unique combination of functional attributes and symbolic values". On the other hand, they argued that a brand is a cluster of meanings. More recently, the American Marketing Association (AMA) defined a brand as "a name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller's goods or services as distinct from those of other sellers" (2010). Clearly, a brand is valuable to the owner as it can assist consumers to perceive equity and differentiation among competing products and firms [2,3]. Accordingly, Anholt [4] argues

that countries have always been brands, and just like any other brand, nations have individual identities which are unique unto themselves [5]; no two nations are alike. Based on their unique identities, many countries have been branding themselves deliberately and systematically for centuries, even if the respective vocabulary has only recently been adopted [6].

Branding is a deliberate process of selecting and associating product and/or service attributes because they are assumed to add value to the basic product or service [7]. According to Keller [8], branding adds other dimensions that differentiate a product or service in some way from others designed to satisfy the same need. Stern [9] notes that all entities can be branded, ranging from places to people, ideas and even things. Central to understanding place branding is the idea that brands exist in the minds of consumers as branding is comprised of emotional, intellectual, psychological and physical aspects, and place branding is an extension of this to the physical and social environment of place [10]. As such, place branding centers on people's perceptions and images and puts them at the heart of constructed, orchestrated activities, designed to shape the place and its future [11]. However, a place - unlike a product - does not begin from a zero base [12]; local communities, the built environment, heritage, infrastructure, all form a constituent part of image and identity [13]. The concept of place branding has consequently been pervasively adopted by communities, cities, regions, and nations since places have meaning, identities and images that can be harnessed to create brand value [14,15]. In this regard, managing the place brand becomes an attempt to influence and treat those mental maps in a way that is favorable to the present circumstances and future needs of the place [11]. Branding should therefore be seen as a strategic management process that requires long-term involvement and commitment.

Place branding

Place branding is commonly understood as the general phenomenon of marketing, branding, promoting and regeneration of a particular city, region and or location [16]. It refers to an articulated set

of marketing actions that present the following traits: i) is different in terms of unit of analysis, ranging from the city to a whole country; ii) may involve multiple stakeholders including local and national governments, citizens, companies, and the media; and, iii) cover a large array of objectives, such as enhancing exports, protecting local/national production, attracting tourists and foreign investors, facilitating international relations, and more [17].

Place branding evolved from the confluence of various factors since the early 1990s, including globalization and growing international competition in many sectors, the fall of communism, specific events that served to exacerbate the intensity of competition, and demographic pressures and changing migratory patterns [17]. Place branding affects the resources that get channeled into a nation or a city as they compete for the global stock of wealth with the aim of accomplishing economic, political and socio-psychological objectives [15]. If well implemented, place branding will attract tourists, foreign direct investment, improve international relations and political relevance to a country.

In a nutshell, a well branded country provides for its citizens and others a reference point on which to gauge the country [18]. Consequently, every government in today's competitive environment is attempting to shape a specific place entity through which they promote to country/region their targeted markets with the intention of attracting investors and visitors [4].

Strategic place branding in Kenya

According to Kotler and Gertner [19], strategic place branding is about enhancing a country's position in the global marketplace. It requires an understanding of its current strengths and weaknesses and of the future opportunities and threats it faces. It also involves setting objectives, forming target groups and drawing up an implementation

plan. The process entails managing the factors that may affect tourists' and other interest groups' decisions, such as the country's image, attractions, infrastructure and people, and should involve government, citizens and business [20].

Owing to the need to improve its image, Kenya as a country initiated branding efforts through the formation of the Brand Kenya Board (BKB), a state corporation established in March 2008. The Board's mandate is to ensure an integrated national brand is created, harnessed and sustained in the long-term. The key role of the Board is to coordinate various initiatives of marketing the country within government, the private sector and other key stakeholders. The Board will also facilitate creation and maintenance of the Kenyan Brand with a view to identify and distinguish Kenyan products, services and concepts. Further, the Board is tasked with undertaking initiatives to differentiate Kenya from the rest of Africa and improve the international attention and goodwill towards Kenya [21].

BKB plays a leading role in Kenya's development agenda by undertaking initiatives geared towards creation of a unique country identity and image that shall make it stand out in the global arena as a wonderful place to visit, invest, work and live. In this regard, BKB has put in place a holistic brand management program recognizing that anybody or anything that impacts on the country's perception and reputation matters [21].

Theoretical review

This study is anchored on the national brand hexagon model by Anholt [22] which proposes that a nation can understand measure and ultimately build a strong national image and reputation by using the six dimensions of the national brand hexagon namely the people, tourism, exports, governance, investment and immigration as well as culture and heritage (Figure 1).

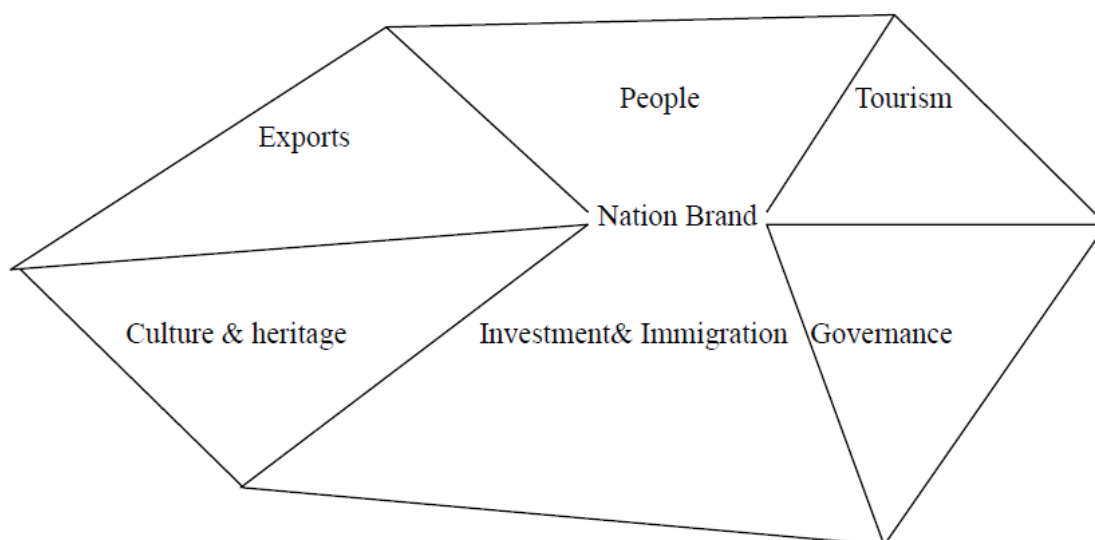


Figure 1: This conceptual model illustrates the multi-facet nature of the nation-brand construct.

Literature Review

If a place can be managed as a brand, it is therefore essential to understand which dimensions are involved in the brand's construction [23]. Therefore, this section groups the literature according to the national brand hexagon model by Anholt [22], a place branding model consisting of six dimensions (or areas of activity) namely people, tourism, exports, governance, investment and immigration as well as culture and heritage that stakeholders communicate to the world in order to build their country's image. Each of these dimensions is discussed in relation to the Kenyan context.

People

People signify the population's reputation for competence, openness and friendliness and other qualities such as tolerance [24]. It also includes the behavior of its citizens/residents, high-profile leaders, media, sport stars and the general population. It centers on residents and their interactions with each other and with outsiders, forming the social milieu of a given place [25]. Various studies have discussed the role of local people in place branding, showing that they are indeed a critical dimension for the formation of place brands and should therefore be considered as a manageable asset within place branding. The other role of residents is that of ambassadors for the place brand [15,25]. A strongly involved citizen, in contrast to a mere resident, will show positive behavior that goes beyond their normal duties of a citizen defined by law and social norms [26,27]. The perceived authenticity and trustworthiness of word-of-mouth highlights the important role of residents in the place brand communication process [28]. The views of residents are significant for external target markets as they are naturally considered informal, authentic and insider sources of information about the place. The main challenge is that the residents of places do not constitute a homogeneous, coherent group but include a multiplicity of groups of people that are bound to have varying and conflicting preferences, desires, or, attitudes. For instance, local entrepreneurs who are also residents will be inclined to have different expectations from their place's brand than people who are not economically active. Students living in the area will have a different set of desirable place attributes than residents in a different life-stage [25]. The Brand Kenya Board has proposed several national branding initiatives that involve Kenyans. For instance, Kenya is rich with international achievers in all fields; be they sports, environment and academics. The Board is thus exploring how to use all these categories of achievers as effective marketers for the country. The board also seeks to work with the many Kenyans living abroad on initiatives to improve Kenya's image. It will also focus on expatriates working in Kenya. Due to its position as a communication, diplomacy and humanitarian hub, Nairobi houses the headquarters of many international organizations and corporations. These employ people from all over the world. Kenya can benefit from the resourcefulness of expatriates, especially in disseminating information about Kenya to their friends and relatives. With the schools and colleges catch them early initiative, the Board aims to work with the school system to inculcate Kenyan values into young people very early in their formative years. The Board works in conjunction with schools to disseminate national values espoused in the constitution through talks, drama, songs and dances. The government through the BKB has also initiated programmes to encourage and motivate the youth to seek alternative employment and have hope and confidence in themselves and their country. The programmes inspire the youth to participate in the socio economic development of the country [29].

Tourism

Tourism captures the level of interest in visiting a country and the draw of natural and man-made tourist attractions [24]. Tourism benefits greatly from a strong country brand [30]. In essence, tourism branding typically involves "mass-marketing" approaches (media advertising) by government and industry associations, and both mass and more focused approaches (such as personal selling and incentives to travel agents) by associations and individual firms [31]. Tourism has become a global industry and is widely considered to be one of the fastest growing and most important industries in the world [32]. Kenya is one of the world's most popular tourism destinations thanks to its natural attractions, unique historical and archaeological sites, improving touristic infrastructure and its tradition of hospitality. The tourism industry has been one of the most important drivers behind Kenya's economic development over recent decades by reducing unemployment, raising national GDP and improving the country's balance of payments. Tourism is Kenya's third largest foreign exchange earner after tea and horticulture, and a major employer, accounting for about 12% of the total wage employment and 13.7% of the gross domestic product (GDP) [33]. Tourism in Kenya relies on the country's natural attractions, including wildlife in its native habitat, as well as fine beaches and other coastal ecosystem assets. It ranges from low-density tourism focused on a "wilderness experience" in less modified ecosystems, to high-density beach tourism requiring a relatively limited set of ecosystem services – primarily sand, sea and sun. Viewing wildlife in its natural habitat is the primary objective for about 80 per cent of the international visitors who come to Kenya for holidays, while 70 per cent of the visitors to Kenya come to see places of natural beauty and engage in nature-based activities. Kenya is endowed with various attractions, including white sandy beaches, rich cultural heritage, spectacular sceneries and diverse wildlife protected in 60 national parks and reserves, which include the world-renowned Maasai Mara and 6 UNESCO World Heritage sites. These include three cultural heritage sites (Fort Jesus in Mombasa, Lamu Old Town and the sacred Miji Kenda Kaya forests); and three natural heritage sites (the Kenya Lake System in the Great Rift Valley, Lake Turkana National Parks, and Mount Kenya National Park/Natural Forest) [34]. However, it remains underdeveloped compared to other top tourist destinations in terms of the number of tourists, yield, and diversity of experience. Vision 2030 envisages a tourism sector that accounts for a significantly larger share of GDP based on a doubling of international visitors and the development of the sector across a full range of tourism, from high-end niche markets and the conference business to coastal and safari tourism that exploits Kenya's natural environment [35]. Kenya's mature tourism industry is facing stiff competition and grappling with fallout from global financial uncertainties [36]. As a result, tourism performance fell below the medium term targets. The government through the Kenya Tourist Board (KTB) is undertaking promotional campaigns targeting domestic travel by giving competitive packages to travelers. As the competition for tourists intensifies at the global level, the government should avail more funds to the KTB to support promotion of Kenya's tourism to emerging markets such as Russia, the Middle East, India and China. The government also needs to implement strategies to accelerate growth of the sector, including full operationalization of the Tourism Act 2011, increased investment in infrastructure, improved security, implementation of Vision 2030 flagship projects such as development of resort cities, and continued diversification of source markets [34]. However, it is a central concern in place branding that the diverse and complex nature of a place-brand transcends the narrow confines of any single industry sector, including

that of tourism. In many cases, too-tight a link between tourism and the nation-brand, for example, may actually prove detrimental, particularly for countries whose tourism industry is founded upon rural and traditional imagery such as Kenya [37,38].

Exports

Export refers to the public's image of products and services from each country and the extent to which consumers proactively seek or avoid products from each country-of-origin [24]. Studies reveal that consumers extend the characteristics of places to products hence prefer products from specific countries and not others [39]. Accordingly, export promotion organizations recognize that their country's reputation constitutes a potential asset to be managed carefully [19]. Just as companies offer distinct products and services to international markets, so do countries which may be known for exporting particular products and services [31,40,41]. The country's product origin may therefore provide it with a competitive advantage thus making companies from a specific country promote a product using the country of origin as an asset [42]. For instance, Swiss watches, Scotch whisky, Columbian coffee, and Russian vodka are all examples where companies use the country's name in promoting the product [32]. Although Kenya boasts some of the highest quality export products in the world such as coffee, flowers and tea, these products are rarely identified with Kenya as they have not been adequately promoted in the global arena, and quickly lose the "country-of-origin" tag once sold to other nations for processing, repackaging and branding [21]. To support country branding, it was imperative that an identity mark be developed and adopted for all products as a made-in tag (so as to enhance the competitiveness of the country's products and services [21]. In this regard, the BKB has developed a mark of identity with the buy line "A Touch of Kenya". This mark will distinguish Kenyan goods and services locally and internationally. Many Kenyan manufacturers have adopted the Mark and continue to do so [18]. However, for Kenya to become a globally competitive and prosperous nation by the year 2030 it will require international trade policies that support export expansion of manufactured and non-traditional goods and services in both regional and extra-regional markets [43].

Governance

Governance means the public opinion about national government competency and fairness, as well as its perceived commitment to global issues such as peace and security, justice, poverty and the environment [24]. Good governance is essential in strengthening democracy, promoting effective policy implementation and application of rule of law. Good governance also promotes accountability, transparency, efficiency, and rule of law in public institutions at all levels. In addition, it allows for sound and efficient management of human, natural, economic, and financial resources for equitable and sustainable development [34]. Without proper functioning of institutions of governance that promote social stability and legal certainty, there cannot be any investment and assumption of risk that form the basis of a market economy [34]. Regrettably, Kenya is perceived by the international community and locals as insecure, poor, and a country with weak governance structures [21]. While Kenya's aggregate governance performance is above the continental average score based on the Mo Ibrahim African Governance Index, [44] an assessment of Kenya's governance based on Worldwide Governance Indicators produced by the World Bank reveals that there is greater scope for improving governance on all fronts, namely: i) Voice and

Accountability, ii) Political Stability and Absence of Violence, iii) Government Effectiveness, iv) Regulatory Quality, v) Rule of Law, and vi) Control of Corruption. In this regard, the implementation of the newly enacted Constitution is a major milestone in uplifting Kenya's governance performance. Various independent offices have been established that have their foundations in the Constitution to spearhead reforms in various spheres of the society [34]. On its part, the Brand Kenya Board initiated a public service rebranding programme which focused on embedding the concepts of branding and customer care into the management of public service. The objective is to ensure that the public service, which is the face of government, projects the right image. Further, Brand Kenya Board developed a Brand Master Plan to help manage Kenya's identity and image. The plan is under implementation and is also expected to inculcate a uniform look and feel within government [18].

Investment and immigration

Investment and immigration signifies the power to attract people to live, work or study in each country and how people perceive a country's quality of life and business environment [24]. Various studies point to the instrumental role of place brands in channeling resources into nations and cities/towns as they compete for the global stock of wealth, trade, populations, power and prestige aiming to accomplish various economic, political, or socio-psychological objectives [15]. It is therefore not surprising that branding a place as a choice destination for investments has emerged as a key strategy [45]. Given that the global investment pool is finite and competition for investment funds is fierce, a growing number of countries have undertaken aggressive and proactive programs to attract foreign investors [31]. Accordingly, Governments eager to attract foreign direct investments (FDI) have to undertake a specific type of marketing called investment promotion which has been shown in various studies to be closely associated with FDI inflows [46-48]. Many countries have developed special marketing programs, so called investment promotion agencies (IPAs) that are geared towards the attraction of FDI [48]. There are currently hundreds of national and sub-national IPAs although only a few existed a couple of decades ago [47]. Kenya's current investment promotion and marketing framework is fragmented by sectors and activities with overlapping mandates and administered through numerous policies, regulations and legislation spanning several ministries and sectors. While the Kenya Investment Authority (KenInvest) is charged with spearheading investment promotion in the country, there are other institutions involved in investment promotion. They include the Export Processing Zone Authority (EPZA), Vision 2030 Delivery Secretariat, Export Promotion Council (EPC), Konza Technopolis Development Authority (KOTDA), LAPSET Corridor Development Authority (LCDA), Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM), as well as the Kenya National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KNCCI). The marketing efforts seem to be bearing fruit as Kenya's investment climate is rated as the strongest in the EAC, with FDI flowing in from emerging and developed markets and a high volume of multinationals with regional and continent-wide headquarters in the country. As a sign of confidence in the country, Kenya was the top destination for international investors in the Eastern Africa Region in 2013 after attracting 12 private equity deals valued at over USD 110.5 million [49]. Moreover, Kenya prides itself in its large pool of highly educated, skilled and sought after work force in Africa, trained from within the country and in institutions in around the world. The country also has a large number of expatriates living and working in Kenya.

Culture and heritage

Culture and heritage stand for global perceptions of each nation's heritage and appreciation for its contemporary culture, including film, music, art, sport and literature [24]. In other words, it is the array of resources that show that a place is unique and distinctive. As such, the term "culture" within the concept of place branding is oriented more towards cultural goods, products of cultural industries, and heritage [50]. Cultural branding owes its development to the growing importance of the cultural, leisure and entertainment industries within the contemporary economy, as much for tourists and other visitors, as for the local population [51]. Ashworth and Kavaratzis [52] identified three major types of contribution of culture, commonly used as place-branding instruments: signature building and design, personality association, and hallmark events. Cultural products such as films, books and music also have a major part to play in determining a country's reputation and image. The image effects of cultural products can have great longevity [37]. Kenya has 52 different communities with distinct languages and dialects, hence the name – "Land of Diverse Cultures". Kenya's ethnic diversity has ways of life that reflect African, Asian and European influences. Despite historical experiences and a myriad of impacts from the external environment, many communities have managed to retain their traditions almost as they were many centuries ago. The Government has embarked on a programme to promote the diverse culture of the Kenyan people. A new theme – "Kenya a Land of Diverse Cultures" - was launched in 2005. The programme is dedicated to the promotion of cultural tourism in collaboration with stake holders in the industry. It entails staging of countrywide cultural festivals that will culminate in identification of "Cultural Ambassadors" who will articulate their culture to other Kenyans and to the world [53]. Cultural events are favored largely because of their visibility and wide acceptability of cultural products as merit goods adding value and desirable brand attributes to a place but there are numerous other possibilities such as sporting events, commercial fairs, even political rallies and international "summit" meetings [54-60]. Owing to its sporting (in particular athletics) prowess, sports events are increasingly being used to brand Kenya internationally. This is due to the realization that in a similar way to tourism, a country's sporting achievements can project an extremely powerful image upon which nations may partly construct a nation brand [61-63].

Limitations of the Study

This study faced two major constraints. To begin with was the fact that it is a conceptual research paper and therefore restricted itself to desk research on secondary literature regarding the concept of strategic place branding, in this case of a nation. The second issue was the dearth of empirical research about strategic place branding in the Kenyan context in spite of the growing importance of place branding.

Conclusions

Branding is emerging as an important strategic tool for marketing nations and regions as they seek to exploit the advantages of a unique, strong brand such as attracting foreign direct investments, tourism and trade. With Kenya seeking to position itself as an attractive investment destination and with aspirations of becoming a middle-income country by the year 2030, the country has formed several sectoral bodies such as Brand Kenya Board to help in positioning the country globally against competition. Nonetheless, despite the fact that these promotional entities are doing a commendable job in branding the

country, there is growing recognition that effective place branding should be a more holistic undertaking that integrates the views, oppositions, and desires of Kenyans because no one sector or entity can do it alone. In short, re-branding the country will not be easy as place branding poses considerably complex challenges in terms of strategy development and implementation. To this end, this study has identified a number of key constructs that characterise place branding and play an important role in its application. These constructs are encapsulated in a theoretical framework that is geared towards supporting the development of more effective place branding strategies that are more likely to foster sustainable development and growth of places.

Suggestions for Further Study

Seeing that this study is conceptual in nature, one avenue for future research could entail the empirical testing of the model to ascertain its usefulness for strategic place branding in the Kenya context. In addition, future studies could also explore how individual cities, towns and/or regions in Kenya could brand themselves based on their unique attributes so as to distinguish them themselves from competition.

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