The management of destination brands: Five guiding principles based on recent developments in corporate branding theory

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Abstract

In recent years there has been an emerging literature with regard to corporate brands and their management. This paper examines the relevance and potential contribution of this literature to the management of destination brands. It is evident that there are important features of destination brands that distinguish them from product brands and that these have led to differences in the way destination brands are created, developed and maintained. The paper concludes that corporate brands, in contrast, share similarities with destination brands and that the emerging literature on corporate branding can therefore make an important contribution to our understanding of the particular problems of destination brand management and how it might be improved. The paper presents five guiding principles and a framework for the management of destination brands based upon the literature reviewed. An agenda for future consideration and research is also presented.


INTRODUCTION

The marketing of places and in particular, the practice of place branding has grown significantly over the last quarter century. Many cities, regions and countries are now actively marketing themselves using techniques normally associated with the creation of classical product brands. This phenomenon has manifested itself in several ways with varying degrees of success. For example, marketing strategies leading to designation as the European Capital of Culture have arguably changed the perceptions of cities such as Glasgow in the UK and more recently Liverpool. Also, successful marketing campaigns to host the Olympic Games, such as those mounted by Barcelona, Sydney and, more recently, London, have helped to build positive reputations for these cities which, in the case of Barcelona and Sydney, have been sustained well beyond the events. Similarly, the construction of architecturally adventurous buildings such as the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao might also be argued to have changed that city’s image. Other cities, such as New York have re-built their reputations, through vigorous ‘clean-up’ strategies supported by creative advertising like the ‘I love NY’ campaign used to re-launch the city in the 1970s. Marketing campaigns such as
these, it has been argued, have transformed places into brands and as a consequence, brought considerable extra investment and long-lasting cultural and social benefits.2

As a result, more cities, regions and countries are now beginning to engage in marketing rather than rely passively on the slow, organic development of their images through for example, artistic/ literary connections, education or the news media.3 The development of a positive brand image is now regarded as requiring proactive marketing intervention.

Academic interest in this area comes from several academic perspectives. There has, for example, been a growing critical literature on place marketing, focusing on its social and political implications.4 Domains such as geography and urban planning have researched the practice from a positive, socio/political perspective.5–8 From a normative perspective, contributions can be found in the retail marketing literature9,10 and the marketing strategy literature.11 It is, however, probably in the area of tourism marketing which seeks to promote places as travel destinations, that interest, specifically in place branding, is most developed.12

Despite this expanding body of literature, however, very little has been written about how place marketing and in particular the branding of places, should be managed. This gap in the literature is surprising given the numerous articles highlighting the marketing difficulties arising from the distinctive nature of the place product.13–17 It is particularly surprising given the shifting focus, evident in the literature on brand orientation and the management of corporate brands, from product brands to the organisations and the people supporting the brands.18–20 These more recent contributions to marketing theory, it is argued, are also of potential value in the context of the management of place brands.

This paper focuses on the branding of places as tourism destinations—places targeted at leisure and business visitors rather than residents, employees or investors. The paper’s contribution is to review this emerging literature, developed in the context of corporate branding and to adapt it to the practice of destination branding. The paper is in three parts. First, it summarises the characteristics distinguishing the place product in general from mainstream products. Secondly, it maps the shifting focus of brand management and evaluates the emerging literature on corporate branding in the context of destination branding. Thirdly, it proposes five guiding principles and a managerial framework for the creation, development and maintenance of destination brands.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Places brands

The literature on place marketing in general and destination branding in particular, extends across several academic domains including: geography, urban planning, tourism and retail marketing. A review of this literature suggests that places as products differ in several fundamental respects from commercial products. These differences, it has been argued, not only make the task of destination branding more complex21 they also call into question the relevance of a marketing theory based on organisations with no experience of such complexities.22 In this section, the distinctive product factors contributing to the complexity of destination branding are reviewed under six headings: (1) the co-production of the place product, (2) the co-consumption of the place product (3), the variability of the
place product, (4) the legal definition of place boundaries, (5) administrative overlap and (6) political accountability.

The co-production of the place product
A place is not a single standalone product; it is comprised of an amalgamation of individual services, such as shopping and sports centres, theatres and museums as well as infrastructural services such as road and rail networks.23 The place product is therefore co-produced by a multiplicity of autonomous organisations, both public and private. Furthermore, this product will, for most of its history, have evolved in an unplanned manner. Unlike mainstream marketing, which begins with new product development, place marketing begins with an old product, the design of which has had little or no marketing influence. As a consequence, place branding is not an ab initio activity but a re-branding exercise.

The co-consumption of the place product
Because of the multi-faceted nature of the place product, it is consumed24 simultaneously by different consumers for different purposes.25 Thus, places are not only co-produced, they are also co-consumed. As a result of this, the benefits which the place consumer experiences are mediated by their interaction, either passive or active, with other consumers, who may not be seeking the same bundle of benefits.26–27

The variability of the place product
Each consumer’s experience of the place product is individually assembled from the variety of services and experiences on offer. Variability is of course a characteristic of the consumer’s encounter with any individual service;28 but the problem is compounded in the case of the place product, which is a multi-service experience. As a consequence, the place marketer may have little control over the service experiences chosen compared to the marketer of a single service.29

The legal definition of place boundaries
The boundaries of a place are set by national governments and are therefore legally defined, which sometimes makes it difficult to define a place as a unique and meaningful product.30 As a consequence, the place may not represent the ideal product. It is for this reason that place marketers often work together and combine two or more places together in order to provide a more attractive offer. For example, in the UK, the seaside towns of Scarborough, Filey and Whitby have developed the ‘Yorkshire Coast’ brand and the Midlands towns of Stratford, Warwick, Leamington Spa, Kenilworth and their surrounding countryside share the brand ‘Shakespeare Country’.31

Administrative overlap
The organisation of local government can also make place marketing more difficult by creating administrative overlap that can lead to conflicting marketing strategies. For example, there is evidence that conflicting brand strategies between a regional authority such as a county, and a town or city council can lead to brand confusion among tourists. Such conflicts are frequently the result of weak relationships between stakeholders.32

Political accountability
For nonprofit organisations in the public sector, responsibility for the delivery of services ultimately rests with those who are politically accountable.33 At a national level, elected governments determine regional
policy and the organisational structures for delivering it. Such policies are subject to change as political complexions and priorities change. At the local level, government officers may recognise the potential benefits of participating in competitive markets such as tourism, but ultimately the responsibility remains with elected members whose time horizons reflect the timing of the next election.34 Such horizons are frequently inconsistent with the longer term aims required in the case of commercial activities such as the development and maintenance of a brand image.

The shifting focus of brand management

In contrast to the complex nature of place brand management, mainstream product and service brands are usually managed within a single organisation, through a line management structure. This allows decisions to be made more quickly and provides for greater managerial control over the implementation process. Nevertheless, in common with most areas of business management, the management of brands has been subject to scrutiny in many organisations in recent years that has resulted in significant changes in the way many brands are now managed.

Until the second half of the 1980s, the basic organisational model of brand management practised in the UK and the US was still based predominantly upon the brand manager system developed by Proctor and Gamble, and Johnson and Johnson in the 1930s.35 Under this system, product brands were managed by brand managers who acted as brand champions and were responsible for all aspect of their brand’s marketing.36 In the late 1980s, however, a series of takeovers of large product brand-owning organisations highlighted the link between the value of an organisation and its brands. At the same time, the marketing environment was changing rapidly brought about by globalisation, media fragmentation, advances in information and communications technology and changing patterns of distribution. As a result, many brand-owning organisations began to reflect on the value of their brands and to consider new ways of managing them.37

First, this has led to a greater emphasis on corporate branding in order to strengthen corporate profiles as a means of reducing the threat of takeovers. Secondly, it has led to the responsibility for branding being raised from middle to senior management in recognition of the strategic importance of brands. Thirdly, it has in many cases, led to the prioritisation of corporate branding over product branding. These changes have been accompanied by a growing academic interest in the way corporate brands are managed. In particular, there has been an emerging literature focusing on ‘the challenges faced by organisations in managing and aligning multiple identities and images across different stakeholder groups.’38

A review of this literature suggests that it can be characterised by five underlying themes: (1) the role of top management, (2) the influence of corporate culture, (3) departmental coordination, (4) stakeholder communications and (5) partnerships. The following literature review is therefore discussed under these five headings.

The role of top management

Changes in both organisational culture and brand image begin with the creation of a strategic vision—a clear sense of what the organisation aspires to be and a signpost to its future direction. It has been argued that strategic vision, corporate culture and brand image are linked together and therefore a key management role must be to ensure alignment between
these three components.\textsuperscript{39} If the strategic vision is to form the basis for changes in the core values of the brand, it must connect with existing corporate values.\textsuperscript{40,41} The core brand values which summarise the brand identity are a subset of the corporate values which summarise the organisational identity. Changing core values affect management decisions at the highest level and it has therefore been argued that the management of branding must be led by the CEO and senior management.\textsuperscript{42,43} Leadership by top management is required to develop, communicate and embed the strategic vision and brand values in the culture of the entire organisation.\textsuperscript{44–47} Senior management must take the lead in the development of a brand charter:

\begin{quote}
\textit{...a short overview on everything that everyone...needs to know [in order] to have an up-to-date appreciation of the branding process.}\textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}

Such a document can help ensure a focus and vision across the entire organisation, widening the understanding of branding beyond the marketing department. This will in particular, impact upon human resource strategies. de Chernatony and Segal-Horn\textsuperscript{49} suggest that in order to engender a culture which is congruent with the brand values, management should recruit employees whose values will support the brand. Similarly, Simoes and Dibb\textsuperscript{50} emphasise the need to (1) train all staff in the care and nurture of the brand and (2) reward employees whose actions support the brand.

\section*{The influence of corporate culture}

Hatch and Schultz define organisational culture as

\begin{quote}
\textit{...the internal values, beliefs and assumptions that embody the heritage of the company and communicate its meaning to its members.}\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

They argue that it is the

\begin{quote}
\textit{...concern with values that brings corporate branding practice into direct contact with organisational culture.}\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}

They further suggest that a successful brand will reflect the corporate values which staff hold and use.\textsuperscript{51} de Chernatony and Segal-Horn\textsuperscript{52} therefore emphasise the need to understand an organisation’s values in order to develop unique brand values. Such an understanding has, for example, led the Co-operative Bank to build its corporate brand values around social responsibility and Body Shop to build its brand values around environmental responsibility. Consistency between brand values and organisational culture leads to credibility in the eyes of stakeholders.\textsuperscript{53} Kapferer\textsuperscript{54} argues that corporate brands can offer a guarantee of quality and authenticity, expertise and ethics. In order for this to happen, corporate brand values must be rooted in the cultural values of the organisation and acknowledged by both external stakeholders and the organisation’s staff. A strong positive relationship between a brand and the organisation’s staff, referred to by Urde as the internal brand identity, is fundamental to the delivery of the brand experience.\textsuperscript{55} Evidence suggests that incoherent communications, unclear core values and unclear allocation of responsibility and authority within an organisation undermine a brand’s integrity and lead to organisational disengagement with its brands.\textsuperscript{56} As a result, external brand communications may conflicts with external stakeholder experiences gained from previous interactions with the organisation, its past reputation or word of mouth. Thus, the performance the brand delivers must
resonate with the promise the brand makes.67

**Departmental co-ordination**

Kohli and Jaworski cite inter-departmental coordination as one of the core ‘pillars’ of the concept of market orientation—organisational activities and behaviours consistent with the marketing concept. In their study of practising managers, interviewees stressed the importance of co-ordinated action by managers in different departments and the need for each one to be responsive to customer needs.58 Similarly, in a study of three contrasting organisations, Knox and Bickerton59 found that all three organisations highlighted the importance of aligning the relevant business processes with the corporate brand and the contribution these processes make to the delivery of customer value. The principle of inter-departmental coordination, not surprisingly, is also evident in the brand orientation literature. Thus, Urde describes the brand-oriented approach to management as

‘...an approach in which the processes of the organisation revolve around the creation, development and protection of brand identity’.60

Rubenstein also argues the case for putting branding at the heart of an integrated business process.61 Implementing this, however, requires a fundamental review of all marketing and non-marketing departmental procedures and processes and their re-orientation around the brand’s core values.62,63 In many organisations, there is a different understanding of the brand in different parts of the organisation. Thus, Rubenstein64 reports that

‘...many departments will say that their activities have minimal or non-existent effect on the brand, when in fact their behaviour may be fundamental’.

For example, recognition that brands are now strategic assets means that finance departments can have a significant influence on investment in nurturing the brand.65,66 R & D may also have a key role in building core values into new products and product enhancements. While it is generally accepted that customer-facing departments must reflect the brand in a consistent way, many marketing departments have been re-organised around multifunctional teams in order to ensure consistency of brand articulation between back and front offices.

**Stakeholder communications**

There is general agreement in the literature that corporate brands are required to have a wider appeal than product brands67 and to develop identities which embody symbols with meaning in a wider social context.68 Ideally, this is achieved by taking a subset of the organisation’s corporate values and communicating them to a range of external stakeholders. In addition to shareholders, suppliers, distributors and government agencies, these can also include the media, education and the arts who over a long period of time can have a profound influence on the brand image.69,70 Corporate brands are also multidimensional and multidisciplinary. First, in addition to conventional marketing communications, stakeholder audiences interface with the organisation in a variety of ways—for example, shareholder meetings and reports, and employee and distributor training events and manuals. Secondly, they interface in a variety of different contexts including social responsibility, compliance and corporate governance.71 One brand therefore must address these multidimensional
and multidisciplinary interfaces in a way which is consistent with the designated brand values.

Partnerships
The corporate branding literature to date has been almost entirely focused on single organisations. In the new economy characterised by the globalisation of markets, however, the convergence of both technologies and industries, and the growth in strategic alliances and networks, such single organisation-centred theory, it has been argued, is increasingly inadequate. In particular, many organisations have insufficient resources to respond quickly enough to the changing market environment; a swifter and more effective response may be made through co-operative partnerships and alliances. In response to this, Leitch and Richardson propose a multidimensional brand web model of corporate branding based upon the nature of the relationships between organisations. The model is an analytical device enabling an organisation to map its brand relationships with other organisations on the basis of four variables: (1) the power they exert; (2) the compatibility of the respective corporate brands; (3) the goals of each web member and (4) the relative strategies pursued by each web member. Leitch and Richardson suggest that it will be increasingly important for new economy organisations to create and manage their brands in partnership with other organisations, including competitors, rather than fighting for exclusivity.

APPLYING THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES TO THE MANAGEMENT OF DESTINATION BRANDS
Although much of this work remains conceptual at present, the similarities between managing brands at a corporate level and managing destination brands is very apparent. First, to be effective, both types of brand are required to reflect and be reflected by a set of sub brands and consumer experiences. This overarching role of the brand therefore requires management at a similarly high level in the organisation. Secondly, to be effective, both types of brand are dependent upon the establishment of an appropriate organisational culture with good departmental coordination internally and strong, compatible alliances externally. Thirdly, both types of brand must manage and communicate with a wide range of stakeholders.

In this section, a framework for the management of this task is proposed (see Figure 1), based upon five guiding principles derived from the preceding literature review.

Guiding principle 1: Strong, visionary leadership
Responsibility for the development of destination brands in most countries is exercised by Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs), all of which are located in the public sector. These include local government departments, regional development agencies and tourist boards who develop and manage their place brands through a series of relationships with a network of separately managed service organisations both public and private. Services in the private sector will include hotels, restaurants, entertainment and retailing. Public sector services will include conference centres, public spaces and infrastructure.

Whether the destination brands are successful or not largely depends upon effective brand leadership by the DMO. This is not an easy task as they invariably employ only a small number of core staff, operate on tightly controlled budgets and
have no line authority over their organisational partners. Despite these handicaps, the key role of the DMO, and in particular the CEO as brand champion, is to establish a clear vision for the destination brand and to develop a set of core brand values which link positive aspects of the place’s heritage to a realistic vision of what can be achieved in the future. As Hankinson suggests, this vision together with a set of core brand values, is an essential precursor to a wider debate about the brand strategy with potential partners who will eventually help to take the strategy forward. This is an incremental process in which the core brand is extended by means of effective relationships with stakeholder partners, each of whom will refine and reinforce the core brand values through consistent communications and delivery of related services.  

Guiding principle 2: A brand-oriented organisational culture

Because successful destination brands are ultimately developed by an alliance of compatible organisations, aligning organisational culture with a set of brand values is a complicated exercise. Building the brand must begin with the DMO before being extended across partner organisations. In particularly, the DMO must build the brand internally from the top of the organisation. Through a process of training and mentoring, the beliefs, values and behavioural norms associated with the destination brand must be embedded in the hearts and minds of the DMO’s employees. The brand embedding process may be aided by recruiting and rewarding staff who can demonstrate values and behaviours which support the brand. Rolling out the cultural transformation to partner organisations is likely to be more difficult, however. Individual commercial partners may operate nationally and increasingly multinational and it may, therefore, be difficult to argue the case for placing a local destination brand on the agenda of the top management of the organisation. Such an argument, however, could be made at the local level where there are direct benefits to the organisation.
Local public sector organisations outside the control of local government, are also direct beneficiaries of a successful destination brand and may therefore be more inclined to support the destination brand’s development. In both cases, the process of adoption may be aided by the development of a brand charter which sets out the key values on which the brand is to be based.  

Guiding principle 3: Departmental co-ordination and process alignment

Linking branding to other departmental activities within a single organisation also becomes more complex when there are several organisations involved. Once again, the lead must be taken by the DMO; first, by the alignment of its own departmental processes and procedures in support of the brand experience and secondly, by the establishment of a brand-oriented culture through recruitment, education, training and reward systems consistent with the brand values. This is perhaps easier when the DMO is a tourist board and the main organisational focus is on marketing the destination. The task becomes more difficult in local government organisations where there is a far more diverse range of functional responsibilities. Indeed, research has shown that it is not unusual in local government for responsibility for marketing to be split between two departments, one focusing on tourism and the other on inward investment, with little coordination between them.  

Extending this process to partner organisations is more problematic. The extent to which partner organisations will seek to internalise the destination brand is debatable. Among private sector organisations, the priority will always be to instil commitment to the organisation’s own brand; commitment to the destination brand will be secondary unless there is synergy between the brands’ values. This can only happen when partner organisations are involved in the specification of the destination’s brand values at an early stage in the brand’s development. Hankinson describes this process of brand development as:

‘a ripple effect in which brand relationships are gradually extended through a process of progressive interaction between the network of stakeholders’  

The infrastructure for beginning this process is frequently already in existence to a greater or lesser extent in many destinations. Developing agreement about the place brand values can be achieved through established committees and working parties in which individual partners are represented. Each partner organisation should, through a process of internal branding, ensure that the shared brand values are understood and engaged with by all departments, following the lead taken by the DMO. This is a process which will take time to embed, but it can be incentivised through the use of endorsement schemes and licences to practice linked to training. For example, many destinations require their partners to commit to the destination’s brand values as part of a brand accreditation scheme, using the brand as an umbrella device across a range of services.  

Guiding principle 4: Consistent communications across a wide range of stakeholders

Tourism destinations are multi-service products, as a result of which, and particularly in the case of cities and large towns, they are often of interest to a wide range of consumer segments. In this they are similar in nature to corporate brands
and to be successful they must both communicate with a wider audience. In the case of destinations, these audiences can be grouped under three headings: tourist segments, corporate segments and organic influencers. Tourist segments may include both leisure and business tourists. Corporate segments may include both tourism-related organisations and nontourism-related organisations. The organic influencer segment consists of organisations and groups of people who can have a profound influence on the destination’s brand image through their communications role; these include the media, education and the arts in particular. For example, effective public relations or editorial publicity can play a critical role in the rebuilding of a positive image for a destination brand which has been exposed to a long period of negative publicity by the media. In addition, it is also necessary to establish relationships with other longer term influencers such as education and arts institutions whose influence is more passive than that of the media but may be more permanent.

Conflict may arise, both within and between these segments, as a result of the differing needs of each audience. Care therefore needs to be taken in the determination of audience segments and in the way they are communicated with. For each audience segment, the communication must represent both the core brand values and the segment-specific brand values together. One of the key shortcomings of destination marketing is the failure to communicate a consistent message across the various segments which form part of its target market. In some cases, this reflects the lack of coordination between the departments in the DMO and in other cases, this is the result of a lack of coordination both within and between partner organisations.

In addition to consumer-focused communication, the promotion of destination brands, like the promotion of corporate brands within an alliance, also requires partner-focused communications. Communications with this target audience is particularly important during the developmental stage of the brand, when the brand values developed by the DMO are refined through a process of interaction with and between the stakeholder network. Partner-focused communications, particularly in the early stages, are likely to be face to face through meetings, presentations and workshops. Such meetings are also likely to be at top management level and therefore the CEO of the DMO plays a crucial role in winning the support of network partners and in the establishment of a broadly based set of brand values. Face to face communications will also be required to extend the debate to less senior, more operational levels of management, followed up at a later stage by for example, newsletters and web-based communication.

Guiding principle 5: Strong, compatible partnerships

This is perhaps the most widely followed of the five principles. The creation and management of partnership networks has become an established feature of place marketing. Thus, Peck and Tickell observed that partnerships were becoming the dominant modus operandi in the context of urban regeneration. Others suggest that partnerships have become a key planning and implementation mechanism as regards the branding of cities. The central role played by the DMO is now widely recognised. Partnerships, however, come in many forms and embrace a variety of practices, but an important element common to all
partnerships is the need for compatibility—some form of synergy which leads to mutual benefits. Such benefits, particularly in the case of public–private sector partnerships, will usually be of both non-financial and commercial value.100

The central issue for DMOs is how to manage these partnerships effectively. There is evidence to suggest that poorly managed partnerships lead to the adoption of the lowest common denominator approach to destination branding; this can result in a limited focus on symbols, logos and publicity.101 There is also evidence that the undue influence of dominant partners can lead to the abandonment of potentially effective brand strategies.102 Balanced buy-in from stakeholders whose role is to deliver the brand experience is nevertheless crucial; there have been examples in which leading tourism organisations have resisted the imposition of brand strategies developed solely by the DMO.103

The key role of the DMO is to manage the conflicting interests of partners and to accommodate their needs. This is not an easy task; local government and quasigovernmental organisations, local employers, community groups and private and voluntary service providers each have their own individual needs, priorities and expectations.104 As a consequence, the scope for conflict is significant.105 For example, when the UK city of Bradford promoted itself as a potential European Capital of Culture for 2008, the bid was challenged initially by the business community who did not regard culture as synonymous with commerce, despite the increase in commercial activity which would have inevitably followed a successful bid. As a result of this and other areas of conflict, for example hostility between different ethnic groups, Bradford has so far failed to successfully promote its brand strengths.106

A further issue of importance which has to be addressed is the need to engage with the plethora of small businesses which provide many of the services making up the destination product. These businesses are independent and are not owned by large powerful conglomerates. Individually they can have little influence on how a destination is branded, but collectively through organised processes they are more likely to succeed. These businesses, for example guesthouses, are frequently competitors but their mutual interest is served through cooperative activities in a network of equal partners.107 It is for this reason that many small businesses form alliances to represent their common interests, for example hotel and restaurant associations. For similar reasons, local residents form community associations. Both groups need to be part of the stakeholder network if destination branding is to be successful. Evidence suggests that small businesses prefer to be part of a cooperative organisational network that provides a forum in which experiences and concerns can be shared. By providing such an arena, the DMO will increase the likelihood of an interactive process which leads to the fulfillment of the destination brand’s promise.108

In contrast, many DMOs take full responsibility for the branding of a destination, a practice which weakens the involvement of small business and community associations in the delivery of the brand promise. Not all organisations will, however, collaborate all the time and some will interact more frequently and willingly than others.109 Furthermore, evidence suggests that allowing more enthusiastic organisations to take a bigger role may generate economies of both scale and effort.110

These factors demonstrate the importance of establishing an appropriate
institutional framework for the creation of a cooperative network, which can take the branding process forward. A study of partnerships in the context of the marketing of urban retailing suggested that such frameworks should allow for both formal and informal interactions. While formal meetings facilitate decision making, informal interaction allows dialogue to continue between meetings and helps resolve partnership problems.

Conclusion
This paper has examined the potential contribution made by recent developments in branding theory pertaining to corporate brands to the management of destination brands. While it is acknowledged that there are evident differences both in the character and in the management of these two categories of brand, it is argued that there are sufficient similarities between the two types of brand to allow useful lessons to be drawn. Five guiding principles of destination branding have been derived from this newly emerging literature which might form the basis of a framework for the creation, development and management of destination brands. Along the way, adaptations to corporate branding theory have been made in order to facilitate the practical implementation of the framework.

Although the framework presented is intended to represent a holistic model of the destination brand management process, there are no universal approaches to destination branding; each destination will differ in terms of both its potential and its institutional infrastructure. It is also acknowledged that the political realities of destination branding can cause discontinuities in the branding process which impede the brand’s development.

Nevertheless, the guiding principles and the framework suggested are presented as a further step towards a more structured approach to the management of destination branding. In particular, this paper suggests that destination brand management requires strong, visionary leadership and organisation-wide commitment from the highest level downwards to a set of brand values which encapsulate the destination’s brand promise. This process begins with the top management of the DMO and a strategic vision which can form the basis for a brand-oriented culture manifested in the alignment of processes and departmental coordination around the brand. Then, through a process of dialogue and discussion, a brand strategy must be refined by the organisations forming the network of alliances and partnerships who will eventually communicate and deliver the destination brand experience.

The role of the DMO throughout this process is to ensure consistent communications, both collectively and individually with all stakeholders: partners, visitors and residents.

The five guiding principles developed in this paper in support of the framework presented are, as yet, untested as to their efficacy. Therefore, in order to develop further understanding and to test the model’s validity, several areas of research could usefully be conducted under the following broad themes: the role played by top management within successful DMOs, in particular, the management styles, organisational culture and structures established; the management processes and inter-organisational structures established to manage the successful implementation of a destination brand strategy; in particular, the roles played by alliances and partnerships; the effects of political discontinuities on destination brand development, in particular, the extent to which
DMOs are able to deal with these and finally, variations in international practices in these areas.

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