Unmanageable Tourism Destination Brands?

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Abstract

Increasingly researchers and practitioners adopt branding to build and manage tourism destination images. However, we have yet to ask the question: Is it possible to *build* and/or *manage* destination brands? This crucial question is addressed by means of: (1) recourse to the origins of branding; (2) explication of fundamental differences between such origins and destinations; and (3) exemplification by means of resident-tourist interactions. The answer offered by this paper is that destination brands may *not* be manageable at all – or at least, that destination brands are so different from consumer brands that we have to accept that specific elements of destination brands are unmanageable to an extent that questions much of the taken-for-granted ”destination branding”knowledge. Consequently, the paper discusses what branding/brand management can(not) do for destination image building and management.

Keywords: Branding, destination image, resident-tourist interaction.

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1. Introduction

Tourism destination image has been studied extensively (e.g. Baloglu, 1999; Baloglu and Brinberg, 1997; Driscoll *et* al, 1994; Echtner and Ritchie, 1993; Gartner, 1989; Goodrich 1978; Hunt, 1975; Leisen, 2001; O'Leary and Deegan, 2003; Ryan, 1994; Walmsley and Young, 1998). In continuation, increasingly tourism researchers, academicians, and practitioners adopt the works of branding scholars in order to build and/or manage destination image. As such, tourism research is one of those research areas that have actively expanded the branding concept beyond the range of phenomena, for which it was intended originally. However, for a branding scholar it seems that the concept of branding has become so popular that it is adopted by and applied to a host of research areas, for which applicability of the concept is questionable. Especially, such applicability seems questionable due to the fact that (some) "new"phenomena may be fundamentally different from the substantive domain, in relation to which branding as a concept has evolved.

A critical, although often under-appreciated (or even neglected), question to be addressed when adopting concepts originating from other disciplines and/or research areas (e.g. branding concepts) is whether the concepts are applicable to the focal research area (e.g. tourism destinations) or if the origins of such concepts are so fundamentally different from the "adopting"substantive area that applicability is questionable and hence, that adoption requires alteration of extant concepts. The purpose of this paper is to address the *analytical* question on whether the concepts of branding (*i.e.* brand, brand management, branding, and brand equity) can contribute to the subject area "destination image". Further, the aim is to discuss the (more or less) taken-for-granted assumption that it is possible to *build* and *manage* destination image and thus, destination brands.

In order to discuss the applicability of branding/brand management concepts and theory to destination image management, the main body of the paper is divided into 5 sections. First, the origins and contents of brand concepts are presented in order to explicate the underlying premises and assumptions, upon which these concepts draw. Thus, the purpose of this part of the paper is (1) to

account for the products, for management of which these concepts were intended originally as well as (2) to account for the characteristics of such products in order to assess the scope and boundaries inherent in brand concepts. The next task to be conducted is to determine whether fundamental differences exist between the products qualifying as the origins of brand concepts and ”destination products”. Obviously, the first part of this task is conducted by means of review of research on tourism destination image (*i.e.* in section 3 of the paper). In continuation, section 4 of the paper discusses ”severeness” of such differences and thus, it discusses whether such differences affect applicability of branding concepts. As a conclusion of this part of the paper is that differences between origins and destinations may hamper applicability of branding, the next section (section 5) offers examples of ”hampering differences”. Afterwards, the last section of the paper discusses *what* branding/brand management can do for destination image (research) and especially, what this stream of theory *cannot* do.

2. Origins of Branding, Brand Management, and Brand Equity

Centuries ago, branding evolved as a concept of ownership and identification. For example, owners of livestock branded (*i.e.* burned) such livestock in order to identify own livestock/to differentiate from others' livestock (Interbrand Group, 1992). Even further back in time, branding was adopted by craftsmen, who wished to be identifiable as the source of their products. Thus, in ancient times (trade) marks of potters emerged and in medieval time (trade) marks of printers and various other craft guilds followed (Keller, 2003). However, the fertile branding environment, upon which branding in the form of brand management draws emerged during the second part of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century (Low and Fullerton, 1994). The following paragraphs elaborate on these ”fertile branding eras”. The second half of the 18th century qualified as a fertile branding environment and hence, national (predominantly US) manufacturer brands emerged. Primarily the fertile branding environment was attributable to factors such as improved (nationwide) distribution channels; large scale production opportunities; improvements in possibilities for differen-

tiating products by means of packaging; better opportunities for protecting brands; more (and more credible) advertising opportunities; rise of departments stores and national mail order houses; higher population, industrialisation, and urbanisation levels; increases in standards of living; and uneven quality of many contemporary products (Keller 2003). Hence, during this period brands such as Procter & Gamble, National Biscuits, Heinz, and Coca-Cola emerged as national manufacturers engaged in development of (fast moving) consumer goods that were consistent in quality, sold nationwide, and supported by mass market advertising campaigns. The beginning of the 19th century was characterised by dominance of mass marketed brands and increased specialisation in marketing of such brands. Thus, manufacturers started to support brand management with advanced marketing techniques and extensive marketing research. After World War II and in response to the increased diversity and multiplicity of brand related activities and tasks, manufacturers adopted the brand management system; a system characterised by a brand manager, who assumes ”ownership” of a (product) brand and hence, a brand manager who tries to manage all aspects of the focal brand. In sum, following an area of emergence and dominance of mass marketed brands and a subsequent area of challenges to manufacturers' brands (Keller, 2003), the later half of the 19th century was characterised by establishment of brand management standards (Low and Fullerton, 1994).

According to Morgan and Pritchard (1999) and drawing on the preceding section, traditionally branding focused on consumer *goods* – and mostly branding was related to *product* brands. In continuation, the origin of branding as a marketing (sub)discipline was marketing of *fast moving* consumer goods (FMCGs), e.g. food products, soft drinks, personal care products, and cleansing products. Consequently, one feature that characterises branding and brand management literature is that this stream of literature has evolved in close relation with a specific set of products, *i.e.* consumer products and especially, FMCGs. As a result, branding and brand management originate from a world, in which manufacturers produce physical products that consumers define as low involvement products *whilst* (product) brands supervene on (a few) products in narrowly defined product categories. Thus, traditionally one or a few (rather simple) physical product(s) qualified as the focal entities associated with brands.

Turning from origins of brand concepts towards **definitions** of brands, two different approaches underlie definitions of brands. These two fundamentally different conceptions underlying the **approach** to defining brands could be labelled the product plus definition and the holistic view of branding (Ambler and Styles, 1995; 1997). According to the traditional product plus definition, the brand is an addition to the product (Gardner and Levy, 1955; Kotler, 2003). Consequently, the product plus approach holds that the brand it but one of several additions to the product (other, equally important, additions to FMCGs are packaging, pricing, and promotion). Adopting this approach, basically the purpose of branding is to identify the product and/or seller and to differentiate the product and/or seller from competition. Furthermore, the product plus approach to branding advocates that branding has more to do with advertising agencies' generation of image-oriented advertising than with e.g. development and launch of new products. As a result, in a product plus perspective branding is primarily concerned with consumer mass communication. Contrary to the traditional view of branding, the holistic view of branding (Ambler, 1992; Ambler and Styles, 1995; 1997) focuses on the brand in a holistic sense. The holistic view of branding is present in Murphy's (1990) analogy where brands are compared to the psychological concept of *gestalt*. Using this analogy, Murphy (1990:45) claims that "nothing is simply the sum of individual parts"and "a brand acts as a gestalt in that it is a concept which is more than the sum of its parts and which takes a long time to establish in the mind of the consumers". In continuation, the holistic approach acknowledges that brands reside in the minds of consumers (Dyson *et al*, 1996). In figure 1, some important **definitions of brands** are listed. Afterwards, the major conclusions drawn across these definitions are reproduced in order to elaborate on the preceding account for alternate conceptions of brands.

Figure 1: Alternate Definitions of Brands and/or Brand Equity

Author(s)	Definition of Brands and/or Brand Equity
Aaker (1991) *	A set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or substact from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers
Agres & Dubitsky (1996)	The brand does not reside on the shelf even if the product does, but, rather in the mind of the consumer
Ahmed & Zairi (1999)	A brand is more than a product
Ambler (1992)	The promise of the bundles of attributes that someone buys and that provides value … The attributes that make up a brand may be real or illusory, rational or emotional, tangible or invisible
Ambler (1997)	… a bundle of functional, economic and psychological benefits for the end user, it is the aggregation of all accumulated attributes in the mind of the consumer, distribution channels and influence agents … weighted by their importance, which will enhance future profits and cash flow
Arnold (1992)	A form of mental shorthand
Blackston (1992)	A brand is different from a product and that difference is something with which it is invested by the consumer
Bulmore (1991)	People built brands in their heads – whether or not the owners of that brand intend them to
Faircloth *et al* (2001) *	Brand equity represents the biased behavior a consumer has for a branded product versus an unbranded equivalent
Fanning (1999)	The word "brand" is used to represent everything that people know about, think about or feel about anything
Farquhar (1989) *	The added value that a brand endows a product, the brand being a name, symbol, design, or mark that enhances the value of a product beyond its functional purpose
Gardner & Levy (1955)	A brand name is more than a label employed to differentiate among the manufacturers of a product
Interbrand Group (1992)	A brand is a simple thing, it is in effect a trademark, which, through careful management, skilful promotion and wide use, comes in the mind of consumers to embrace a particular and appealing set of values and attributes, both tangible and intangible … it is also much more than merely a label
Keller (1993) *	The differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand
King (1973)	A product is something that is made, in a factory; a brand is something that is bought, by a customer. A product can be copied by a competitor; a brand is unique. A product can be quickly outdated; a successful brand is timeless
Levy (1997)	The brand is a promise that must be kept
Moore (1993)	A brand is basically a name that refers to the product of a particular manufacturer in a particular product category
Nagel (1979)	A brand name represents a collection of concepts which consumers learn to associate with a particular product
Prasad & Dev (2000)	A brand symbolizes the essence of the customers' perceptions
Riezebos (2003)	Brand equity is the extent to which a brand is valuable to the organisation; This value can be manifested in terms of financial, strategic and managerial advantages

* Indicates that the definition offered is related to brand equity, whereas the remaining definitions are definitions of brands.

As the preceding list of alternate definitions of brands and brand equity suggests, brands are defined in multiple ways. Consequently, ontology of brands does not seem to be adequately assessed by brand academicians. In continuation, many definitions seem to be more concerned with the question on what brands are not, than with what they are. For example, brand academicians agree that brands are *not* products. However, explications of key differences between products and brands are often vague and, mostly, academicians settle for defining such differences as some sort of ”added value”.

In continuation, most academicians have a hard time explicating relations between products and brands *although* brand literature relies heavily on substantive elements, for which relations between products and brands are, indeed, strong. Hence, table 1 corroborates that ontologies of brand and products are closely interrelated and thus, that – somehow – brands rely on products.

During the late 1980s, increasingly the concept of **brand equity** became popular amongst brand academicians and practitioners. The increased popularity of the concept of brand equity reflected a wish to shift focus in marketing from tactics to strategic decision-making as the concept presented an opportunity to make such a shift in focus. Thus, increasingly the question on how to build and maintain strong brands was considered to be of vital strategic importance. The claim that branding is the most essential element of marketing is corroborated by the fact that even Kotler (2003, p. 418), finally, claims “branding is the art and cornerstone of marketing”and “perhaps the most distinctive skill of professional marketers is their ability to create, maintain, protect, and enhance brands”. According to several authors (e.g. Barwise, 1993; Magrath, 1993; Rooney, 1995; and Sharp, 1993) the rise in popularity of the brand equity concept was also traceable to a series of takeovers, in which the billion dollar values of strong brands became evident for academics and practitioners alike. Moreover, the Marketing Science Institute’s exploratory conference on defining, measuring, and managing brand equity held in March 1988 equivaleted the acceptance of the concept of brand equity as a, possibly, significant contribution to marketing academia (Leuthesser, 1988). Furthermore, the ”rise” of the concept of brand equity was caused by increased need for ”an integrated brand con-

trolling instrument" (Irmscher´s, 1993, notion) which, again, was caused by the changes in the world of brands (*i.e.* increased costs of introducing and establishing new brands in consumer markets leading to brand and/or line extension strategies as well as increased pressures for short-term successes on the expense of long-term activities such as brand building).

In continuation, the concept of brand equity contains two distinctive, although interrelated, areas of inquiry: Brands as financial assets and the antecedents of such assets (*i.e.* the customer franchise of the brand that the company has built, maintained, or even increased over time). As for the financial aspect of brand equity the term equity originates from the world of finance, in which it is applied in order to describe the "security" that arises from the differences between assets and liabilities.

Although the debate on value of intangibles such as brands and the concern with long-term consequences of marketing actions are, by no means, new, the overwhelming popularity of the concept of brand equity sprung from an increased concern about the "short-termism" (Hayes and Abernathy's, 1980, terminology) that characterised American companies in the eighties. Thus, we may claim the concept of brand equity to be nothing more than simply, and finally, labelling the old idea of brands having value beyond the value they "lend" from products, upon which they supervene.

So far, the main contribution of the concept of brand equity has been an increased understanding of the lifespan of brands being infinitive or at least considerably longer than the lifespan of individual products; especially as PLCs are shortening (for a substantiation of the claim that product life cycles are becoming increasingly shortened and that rates of product obsolescence are increasing, see e.g. Cohen *et al*, 1997; Karlsson and Åhlström, 1997; Lundquist *et al*, 1996; and Sobrero and Roberts, 2002). As a result, research on brand equity is primarily concerned with the leverage and extendibility of brand equity, so that the customer franchise built for strong brands can be deployed in order to increase the success when entering new geographical markets (Barwise and Robertson, 1992) and/or when new products are introduced (Tauber, 1988).

In sum, the main contribution of the concept of brand equity so far seems to be that: (1) The concept enables us to define brands as long-term investments, the values of which may be increased or diluted by means of managerial actions and (2) Thus, the concept shifts focus of branding and brand management from short-term, tactical, communication focused decision-making to long-term, strategic issues.

Concluding on the preceding accounts, definitions of brands and brand equity emphasise that brands encompass *all* perceptions or ideas activated in consumers' knowledge structures when consumers activate the brand node and that product specific knowledge is but one part of such knowledge structures – if such product specific knowledge is part of consumers' knowledge structure on the brand at all. Thus, at present marketing researchers and practitioners seem to agree that conceptualisation of the phenomenon of brand equity is concerned with the value added to a product by consumers' associations and perceptions of a brand (Chaudhuri, 1995; Winters, 1991). As a result, although researchers differ in their perceptions of what exactly brands add to products they do agree that brands rely on products.

Discussing the multiple definitions of products, brands, and brand equity, Grassl (1999) concludes that the ontology of marketing and especially, the ontology of products and brands is still largely unexplored. Furthermore, Grassl (1999) finds that the most prominent reason why ontology of brands is unexplored is that the exact nature of the relationship between brands and products is not well understood, or even a "moot" area, within the marketing discipline. Alas, although Gardner and Levy opened the discussion on relationships between products and brands back in 1955, it seems as if marketing academicians have not fully recognised the fundamental differences between products and brands. For example, most marketing textbooks (e.g. Kotler, 2003) define brands as a subset of products, *i.e.* products consumers are highly aware of. Another example is marketing scholars' dual product/brand use of the brand concept, *i.e.* when we talk about *a* Ferrari, *a* Coca-Cola, or *a* Rolex. Concluding on such examples, Grassl (1999:317) claims that "type-token confusions abound in the literature on brands"and further, he argues that brands and prod-

ucts are treated as intersubstitutable and/or belonging to the same level of concreteness.

Advocating brand realism, Grassl (1999) further argues that brands cannot be reduced to their external characteristics nor are they reducible to any simple combination of product properties or attributes. On the contrary, the phenomenon of brand equity can be explained by the simple fact that brands have greater value than the sum of their tangible assets (Murphy, 1990; Zaichkowsky, 1995). Thus, brands are emergent products that *supervene* on products (Kim, 1990, defines supervenience as a relationship between sets of properties where one set of properties, *i.e.* brands, is only present in virtue of the presence of the other set, *i.e.* products). Thus, an underlying assumption of traditional branding theory is that brands *only* exist if they relate to (physical) products. Another way of saying this is that brands are grounded in products or that products are necessary, although not sufficient, conditions for the emergence of brands – at least in a FMCG context. The preceding argumentation holds several implications.

First, the product-attribute fixation trap (Aaker's, 1996, terminology) prevalent in Lancaster's (1971) model, perceptual maps, and attribute-based multivariate methods (e.g. factor analysis, cluster analysis, and conjoint analysis) reduces products to a set of, independent, properties. Thus, product-attribute fixation is *not* concordant with brand realism due to the fact that brand realists believe brand equity to reside in the fact that properties/attributes are not only salient for consumers but also highly integrated.

Secondly, as brands supervene on products, parts of object space hold intrinsic potential for accommodating brands and brands thus rely on products in a sense of formal ontology (Johansson, 1989). That is; the brand starts with a product, albeit it is not the product. Instead, it is the sense or the meaning of the product (Kapferer, 1992).

Thirdly, brands are salient within their categories and demarcated from those being less-branded by defensible boundaries. In consequence, equity of brands is determined by the degree to which such brands succeed in occupying defen-

sable niches within product categories. As a result, brands exist in the object domain (or substantive domain) and therefore, they are *not* reducable to theoretical constructs that solely exist in conceptual space and/or the meta-language of marketing (*i.e.* the ”brands do not need products” doctrine that seems so popular at present).

Fourth, and drawing on Randazzo (1995), brands consist of physical entities (*i.e.* the ones we find on the supermarket shelves) as well as perceptual entities (*i.e.* the ones that exist in psychological space in consumers' minds).

Fifth, Grassl (1999:338) claims that “products, and *a fortiori* brands, are wholes which are neither ontologically nor economically reducible”.

In conclusion, convincingly Grassl (1999) builds the arguments favouring the following statements: Brands are to be regarded as real phenomena; the ontological reality of brands is that they are entities supervening on products; and successful branding is determined by arbitrary, constraining conditions as equity of brands is determined by the degree to which brands occupy defensable niches within product categories. In consequence, brands are ”moored” into niches, they resist change, and finally, they are characterised by their prägnanz, or salience, in such niches within product categories.

As should be evident from the discussion above, brands are seen as **vital assets**. Basically, an asset is “a property, with an assumed value that should be consistently maximized by an organization”(Davis, 1995:65). As a result, perceptions of brands as vital, although infinite (Hill and Ledere's, 2001, terminology), assets pose multiple implications.

First, such perceptions of brands implie that brands are valuable as well as vulnerable. Thus, management of such assets is a major strategic issue and as a result, “brands are to be managed at a much higher level in the organization … the brand manager needs to be involved in creating the business strategy rather than being one of the implementers … the organization needs to be adopted to brand building”(Aaker, 2000, p. xii). This claim is substantiated by Abrahams

and Granof (2002) who, drawing on Marsh and Templeton Colleges' (2000) international survey of senior executives, claim that 85 percent of companies consider brands to be their most important asset. Secondly, management focus is on strengthening, or at least maintaning, of these assets. As a result, practitioners are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that strategic alignments and managerial actions may dilute brand assets and increasingly, attention is offered to foreseeing long-term effects of managerial actions on these assets. In continuation, focus of those in charge of brands is shifting from short-term performance measures (e.g. changes in market share and changes in advertising recall) to long-term performance and equity of brands. Third, emphasis on brands as vital company assets shifts focus of brand management from tactical, short-term decisions towards long-term strategic decisions on how to invest resources in order to build long-term brand equity.

Finally, Fanning (1999) finds that primarily brand failure is attributable to weak management. In continuation, Keller (1998:388) argues "perhaps one of the biggest threats to brand equity comes from *within* the company"and especially from marketing managers being responsible for too many brands and/or from short-termism underlying the actions of such managers.

Concluding on preceding accounts, (FMCG) brands qualify as manageable assets. Especially, such manageability is grounded in the fact that FMCG manufacturers (personalised by the product brand manager) "control" the marketing mix (*i.e.* product, place, promotion, and place) and hence, they are able to manage most of the brand elements (associations) that create brand equity through brand awareness and brand image. Brand elements (associations) and the ways in which they may generate brand equity and hence, brand awareness and positive brand image is explainable by means of Anderson's (1983) "associative network memory model". According to Anderson's (1983) model, consumers' storage of information in memory consists of nodes (*i.e.* stored pieces of information or concepts such as e.g. brand nodes) and connecting links (*i.e.* strength of associations between a (brand) node and other nodes). Drawing on Keller (2003), positive brand equity is thus caused by (1) high levels of brand awareness/familiarity (*i.e.* the brand node has such a strong impact on consumers' as-

sociative network memory that consumers can identify the brand under various conditions) and (2) positive image (*i.e.* consumers' knowledge structure affected by the brand is characterised by strong, favourable, and unique brand associations). However, as high levels of brand awareness is (only) a prerequisite for building strong brands whereas strength of brands (mostly) relates to creation of a positive brand image, the following section focuses on *how* positive – or negative - brand images are created.

Drawing on definitions of brands and brand equity presented previously, brands *reside* in consumers' minds. Hence, ultimately positive brand image is created by consumers, *not* by marketers, *i.e.* consumers create (not) strong, favourable, and unique associations to the brand node on the basis of all available (sources of) information. As such, consumers choose among a variety of information offered by a variety of information sources (e.g. direct experiences with the brand; word-of-mouth disseminated, direct experiences of other consumers; or marketer-controlled (sources of) information) when they generate knowledge structures on a specific brand.

In a FMCG (low involvement) context, such knowledge structures draw heavily on marketer-controlled sources of information, *i.e.* physical products, packaging of such products, prices, promotion/advertising, and/or marketer-controlled choices of retailers (place). Hence, the claim put forward in this part of the paper is that, traditionally, branding/brand management literature draws on product/brand landscapes characterised by (1) high levels of marketer control over elements to be associated with brands and (2) low involvement products and hence, it draws on fertile brand landscapes in so far marketers' ability to affect brand associations is concerned.

Due to the fertile brand environment of FMCG categories from a marketer's perspective, branding and brand management theory has evolved around the idea that brand identity is a unique set of brand associations that the brand *strategist* aspires to create or maintain (e.g. Aaker 1996). Thus, building a brand identity has to do with selection of "brand elements to represent the identity"(Keller, 1998: 266). Consequently, this section of the paper is closed with

the author's emphasising marketers' *active* role in generation of FMCG brand images; an active role reinforced by consumers' low levels of involvement in FMCG products and hence, consumers' heavy reliance on marketer-controlled information and activities in relation to such products.

3. Research on Tourism Destination Image

In order to confront traditional brand theory and origins of such theory with destination branding, the purpose of this section is to, briefly, introduce the research area "tourism destination image".

Increasingly, tourism destination image is becoming a research area in its own rights. Especially, the increased focus on tourism destination image is based on widespread acknowledgement of the profound effects of such images on tourists' perceptions of destinations and hence, on tourists' decision-making in relation to tourism behaviour – and especially in relation to choice of destination (Echtner and Ritchie 1991; Stabler 1988).

However, even when adopting a marketing based approach to the study of tourism destination image, conceptual delimination does not seem uniequivocal. On the contrary, multiple definitions of destination image coexist (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; Gallarza *et al*, 2002) and further, academicians have still to reach consensus on the concept and dimensions of tourism destination image.

Of particular interest in relation to the subject matter of this paper are the discussions on image elements, *i.e.* discussions on the extent to which tourism destination image is comprised of a multiplicity of factors or attributes. For example, some authors (e.g. Ahmed 1991) adopt a multi-attribute attitude approach to measurement of destination images (*i.e.* destination images are composed of various elements – as products are comprised of attributes – and hence, destination images can be measured by means of decomposition of image into "scores" on various elements or attributes of the destination). On the other hand, some authors adopt brand scholars' idea of brands acting as *gestalts*. According to the holistic approach to (destination) images and brands, tourists thus generate

images by means of assessments that are not (necessarily) based on evaluations of brands on a series of relevant attributes or elements. Instead, tourists may generate destination images on the basis of *holistic* approaches to brands. Hence, according to a holistic approach to tourists' generation of destination images, subjectively and possibly unconsciously, tourists generate destination brands on the basis of nodes associated with the brand node. However, such nodes are not necessarily "attributes" of the destination "product". On the contrary, tourists "decide" which nodes to link to the destination brand node *regardless* of whether such nodes qualify as tourism services of the destination or not. Hence, a major contribution of the holistic approach is that it does *not* presuppose tourists to be "active" information gatherers and/or processors whilst they generate destination images and henceforward, destination brands. On the contrary, the holistic approach acknowledges that tourists may very well generate destination images in a wide variety of ways, e.g. they might generate such images on the basis of one unfavourable and strong association to the destination – even if such an association merely qualifies as a rumor; an "unimportant" attribute; or one "encounter" with the destination.

Drawing on Petty *et al*'s (1983) elaboration likelihood model – and aligned with the holistic approach – tourists may not (necessarily) take the central route to persuasion (*i.e.* tourists may not carefully attend to the content of messages in order to form and evaluate beliefs that subsequently result in strong attitudes that guide behaviour). On the contrary, tourists may use peripheral cues when exposed to information on destinations and thus, less motivated potential tourists and/or people who are not "actively" engaged in destination choice destination-making may not act as rational information gatherers and processors. Especially, peripheral cues might be of importance in relation to tourists' generation of destination brands as such clues may include general credibility of the source (*i.e.* marketers versus friends and family) or attributes that tourists consider to be attitude elements although such attributes do not qualify as rational attitude elements (e.g. in accordance with the claim that women consumers judge the performance of cars on the basis of the colour of the car whilst they prefer the red colour).

Drawing on the preceding paragraphs, tourists may *not* select destinations rationally; nor is destination selection processes necessarily concordant with marketers' "choice" of destination brand associations. Furthermore, tourists do not only generate destination brands whilst being engaged in extensive problem solving activities (*i.e.* when planning a vacation). On the contrary, consumers not currently engaged in vacation planning may very well store various pieces of information on, or related to, destinations with no up-coming vacation "purchase" or planning in mind.

Drawing on Gallarza *et al*'s (2002) excellent review and discussion on the concept and measurement of destination image within an intradisciplinary marketing perspective, most popular definitions of product, place, and/or destination image (e.g. Crompton, 1979; Dichter, 1985; Embacher and Buttle, 1989; Hunt, 1975; and Markin, 1974) define destination images in ways that resemble definitions of brands and brand equity as accounted for in part 2 of the paper. Most importantly, such resemblance resides in the fact that all of the authors mentioned above – in one way or another – talk about associations or perceptions (*i.e.* impressions held; our understanding; individuals' expressions of knowledge, impressions, prejustice, imaginations, and emotional thoughts; sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions; the total impression an entity makes on the minds of others; mental construct developed by consumers on the basis of a few selected impressions; and ideas or conceptions held). Consequently, a basic premise of these definitions is that destination image is something that *tourists generate* themselves in their *minds* by means of some sort of *compressing* and/or *selection* among multiple associations/brand elements and/or on the basis of the brand *gestalt*. As a result, such images are *not* generated (entirely) by destination marketers. This line of reasoning is pursued further in section 4.

In continuation, the claim made by several researcher that tourism image is more subjective than other service images corroborates the claim that destination brands are likely to rely (even) less on destination marketers' communication than FMCG brands do. Consequently - and aligned with Mazanec (1994) – this section is closed with explication of destination brands being: (1) the subject's [tourist's] perceptions of objects [destinations] with respect to attributes, asso-

ciations, or perceptions of the destination *gestalt*; (2) likely to rely less on destination marketers' communication than "traditional" (FMCG) brands do; and (3) the most common attribute/associations across tourism destination image studies is "residents" receptiveness'.

In the forthcoming section, elaborations on such explications are offered in order to (finally) address the question on applicability of branding concepts to destination image creation and management.

4. What's so special about Destination Brands?

Drawing on the preceding section, a destination brand is a brand relating to "a defined geographical region which is understood by its tourists as a unique entity, with a political and legislative framework for tourism marketing and planning"(Buhalis, 2000: 98). Especially, this paper focuses on destinations as countries, regions, and/or cities. In continuation, most destination branding scholars (e.g. Cai, 2002) adopt multi-attribute attitude perspectives on image/attitude formation and thus, they see a destination as comprised of a bundle of products and services. Furthermore, most destination branding scholars see the core objective of destination branding as "producing a consistent, focused communication strategy"Hall (1990: 230). For example, Cai (2002: 722) defines destination branding as "selecting a consistent element mix to identify and distinguish it through positive image building". And further, he concludes that: "Building a brand image amounts to identifying the most relevant associations and strengthening their linkages to the brand"(Cai, 2002: 723). Concordant with most destination branding scholars, Cai (2992) thus considers brand image to be "something" built by active destination marketers on the basis of such marketers' selection and/or strengthening of "some" brand associations. However, the claim of this paper is that destination marketers cannot choose brand associations to the extent that FMCG marketers can and thus, a major problem arises in relation to identification or "choice" of relevant associations of destination brands.

In continuation, most destination branding scholars seem to presuppose destination branding to be primarily an issue related to destination marketers' communication and promotion. However, drawing on section 2 of the paper (and especially the holistic approach to branding) branding is far more than communication strategies. An elaboration on additional elements of branding (*i.e.* elements other than those offered by destination marketers' communication) is offered subsequently.

A destination image and hence, a destination "product" is a complicated product made up of an amalgam of independent tourism actors (Fyall et al, 2003: 646). In continuation and drawing on Keller (1998), a [destination] brand is comprised of consumers' [tourists'] perceptions about an entity [destination] as reflected by the associations held in consumer [tourist] memory. Thus, a destination brand is not something that we "impose" on tourists by means of advertising and other forms of one-way communication efforts. Instead, the image and henceforward the brand are comprised of various bits of information restored in – and retrieved from - tourists' memory and strength of associations to these bits/nodes when the destination node is activated. As a consequence of the preceding paragraphs, tourists' perceptions hence reflect the "sum" of trip experiences as well as all factors of the destination that affect the destination's image.

Drawing on the idea that brand elements and/or associations define destination brands in tourists' minds, destination branding scholars thus claim the core of destination branding to be to *build* and *manage* destination image and thus, destination brands by identifying the most relevant brand associations and strengthen them. However, such elements and associations are not (solely) induced on tourist by destination marketers' attempts to build and manage brands. On the contrary, such images are comprised of *all* associations tourists (choose to) make to the brand. Consequently, tourists may generate destination brands on the basis of associations that are not part of the set of associations identified or "chosen" by destination marketers *or* they may (deliberately or unconsciously) neglect associations, upon the basis of which destination marketers communicate. Hence, the different pieces of information (*i.e.* associations), u-

pon the basis of which tourists generate image are not solely information imposed on tourists by tourist marketers. Instead, all nodes – whatever the source - that tourists associate with the destination are part of his/her knowledge structure on the destination.

Reviewing 25 empirical studies focusing on tourism destination image, Gallarza *et al* (2002) found that ”residents” receptiveness’ was the attribute mentioned most often in these studies. Hence, if we adopt the ”residents” passive role in destination image study’ approach (Echtner and Ritchie 1991) residents are part of image elements of destination brands. One way to interpret this finding (and one highly concordant with the subject matter of this paper) is to claim that the dominance of the ”receptiveness” attribute indicates tourists to emphasise elements *not* controlled by marketers when they generate destination brands. Especially, this line of reasoning seems valid in so far we expect elements such as ”residents” receptiveness’ to rely exceptionally on tourists’ direct experiences with residents and/or other tourists’ word-of-mouth disseminated direct experiences with such residents. Unfortunately, most researchers (e.g. Cai, 2002) seem to settle for the notion that residents’ support for the tourist industry affects tourists’ associations to the destination positively and thus, researchers seem to alienate any residents’ effects on tourism destination brands that do not qualify as *favourable*, unique, and strong associations.

Returning to the issue of tourists’ direct experiences versus marketer-controlled sources of information, we may benefit from discriminating between weak tie associations (*i.e.* pieces of information stored in tourist memory that come from impersonal, one-way (mass) communication sources, e.g. destination marketers’ advertising efforts); associations based on tourists’ personal experiences; and strong tie associations (*i.e.* word-of-mouth disseminated knowledge on the destination received from peers and/or persons in the tourists’ social network, the opinions of whom are considered to be especially trustworthy and valuable by the focal tourist). Drawing on such discrimination between associations, one would expect tourists’ personal as well as word-of-mouth disseminated, actual experiences with the destination to be retrieved more easily than impersonal, one-way market communication, e.g. destination marketers’ advertising and

mass communication. Further, one would expect personal experiences as well as strong tie pieces of information to be considered to be far more trustworthy, objective, and/or impartial than e.g. information received from destination marketers. Especially, this seems to be the case in relation to consumers' destination information searches and retrievals due to the fact that tourism "products" are very likely to score highly on credence qualities (Ostrom and Iabucobucci 1995), *i.e.* characteristics of such "products" that are hard to evaluate even after "consumption". Hence, tourists may find it hard to evaluate destinations both prior to and after "purchase" and thus, tourists might seek to minimise risk associated with the "purchase" by means of relying more on personal experiences (or personal experiences and strong tie based knowledge as discussed previously).

Returning to the "resident biased" brand associations, the claim is that tourists do not just interact with (one) marketer at the destination. Instead, tourists interact with a host of products and services whilst they visit the destination. Hence, destination image is a mental construct developed by the consumer/tourist on the basis of *a few selected impressions* among the *flood of total impressions*. Thus, one would expect especially associations based on personal experience and/or strong tie associations to be among the few selected impressions and associations, upon the basis of which tourists generate destination images whereas the probability of destination marketers' advertising being part of the few selected associations is low(er).

Closing this section of the paper, the key argument is that a key characteristic discriminating between destination brands and brands for the management of which the branding/brand management literature was intended originally (*i.e.* FMCG brands) is that destination brands hold higher probability of drawing on associations based on personal experiences with the product (*i.e.* the destination) and/or strong tie associations than FMCG brands do. Consequently, we might anticipate destination brands to rely more on associations beyond the control of destination marketers. As exemplified in the next section of the paper, reliance on such "uncontrollable" personal and/or strong tie associations may very well lead to generation of brand images based on more unfavourable,

strong, and/or unique associations than associations that are within destination marketers' reach. Consequently, we should dispute the taken-for-granted assumption that destination branding should focus on marketers' choosing of some brand elements and strengthening of associations with the brand of such – marketer selected - elements.

5. Managing the Residents?

As mentioned previously, one feature that seems very dominant when reading the literature on destination branding is that it focuses on destination marketers' efforts to *build* and/or *manage* destination images and hence, destination brands. Thus, this stream of literature focuses more on how marketers can create favourable and unique new nodes and build/strengthen links between such (new) nodes and the destination brand node than on *how* tourists generate destination brand image. For example, Cai (p. 723) claims the destination branding process to be "to select a consistent mix of brand elements to identify and distinguish a destination through positive image building". Apart from the ascription of image building to marketers (not tourists), an (implicit?) assumption underlying the dominant approach to destination branding is that tourists either have no (very little) knowledge on the destination brand prior to being submitted to the marketer's efforts (*i.e.* the less/not knowledgeable tourist uses marketer disseminated information in his/her information search prior to deciding on a destination) *or* the more knowledgeable and experienced tourist holds highly favourable, unique, and/or strong associations to the destination brand after (s)he has visited it. Consequently, predominantly the destination branding literature focuses on strengthening of favourable associations and/or creation of new favourable associations.

Moreover, destination image and branding studies focus on the manageable (*i.e.* weak tie, marketer-controlled) associations and conclude that "efforts of all independent destination actors much be coordinated as they all affect tourists' value perceptions"(Fyall et al, 2003).

However, the claim of this paper is that some dimensions of destination brands are beyond the control of the marketer and thus, it seems highly questionable that the marketer should indeed be capable of managing the brand to such an extent that tourists' associative networks/knowledge structures are comprised of favourable, strong and unique associations that align with the image that the destination marketer seeks to indulge).

Investigation of the ways in which destination image and branding researchers "cope" with uncontrollable associations leads to the conclusion that such researchers are very inconclusive on this subject matter. For example, Cai (2002:726) mentions secondary associations beyond the marketer's control (*i.e.* associations with a place as perceived by tourist that do not result from a destination marketing organisation's marketing programmes or communications). However, Cai (2002:726) settles for the claim that; "while secondary associations are not controllable, they can be borrowed, leveraged, and managed to supplement the intended image building". Unfortunately – although reflecting the approach to such uncontrollable associations within destination image/brand literature - Cai neither considers the effects of unfavourable secondary associations on destination brands; nor does he questions the *manageability* of these associations.

In sum, destination branding scholars thus seem to neglect – or at least underappreciate – the fact that destination brands residing in tourists' minds are not altogether comprised of marketer-controlled associations. On the contrary, destination brands residing in tourists' minds are very likely to be comprised primarily of secondary associations *beyond* marketers' control. Furthermore, interactions with residents seem to hold a major potential for tourists' generation of *un*favourable, strong, and unique associations to the destination brand; or at least a potential greater than that of marketer-controlled destination brand elements.

The purpose of the remainder of this section is to offer some examples of *unmanageable* dimensions of destination brands that may lead to nega-

tive/unfavourable, strong, and unique brand associations and thus, unfavourable destination images and weak destination brands.

As stated previously, tourists interact with a host of (broadly defined) products and services whilst they visit the destination. Furthermore, they may interact informally with the locals (residents) in situations that are not (directly) consumption oriented, e.g. they may ask a local for directions; they might interact with locals whilst going to the beach; or they may sit close to locals whilst dining at a local restaurant. However, locals are beyond tourist marketers' direct control (unless the resident in question is working for the marketer). Consequently, there is certainly no reason why we should expect residents interacting with tourists to interact in ways that strengthen favourable, unique and/or strong "marketer chosen" brand destination associations. On the contrary, we could pinpoint hundreds of examples of locals, who interact with tourists in ways that create/strengthen unfavourable associations and/or weaken "marketer emphasised" favourable associations. Hence, the attribute "residents" responsiveness' that previously was deemed a crucial brand element in relation to destination brands is characterised by the fact that it is beyond the destination marketer's – direct – control.

In the following sections a couple of examples are included in order to illustrate residents' (possibly negative) effects on tourists' generation of destination brands.

The first example upon which the paper draws relates to the destination brand "Wonderful Copenhagen" and the fact that the city of Copenhagen has been promoted as "Wonderful Copenhagen" for decades. Primarily, "Wonderful Copenhagen" is the overall strategy of WoCo (*i.e.* the official congress and tourist organisation for the Greater Copenhagen Area) that aims at enhancing marketability of the Copenhagen destination (Ooi, 2002). However, it would be quite surprising if "Wonderful" qualifies as a favourable, unique, and strong association of the destination brand "Copenhagen" for the relatives to the young Italian backpacker, who was stabbed to death within hours of his arrival to Copenhagen by residents of Copenhagen.

In continuation, Ooi (2002) points to the fact that a deliberate choice is made not to let the ”Wonderful Copenhagen” destination brand as promoted by WoCo encompass the ”full carnivalesque character of the city”. Especially, a key difference between Copenhagen as *it is* and the Copenhagen brand promoted by WoCo is that although Copenhagen is one of the biggest centres for pornography production in Europe (Ooi, 2002, quoting The Economist) deliberately this aspect of the city is neglected by WoCo. Hence, tourists visiting Copenhagen are likely to – somehow and to greater or lesser extents – interact with the seedier destination brand associations comprised of (promotion of) escort services, sex shops, and/or striptease clubs. Drawing on the preceding account for differences in levels of credibility that tourists ascribe to own experiences with the destination versus marketer-controlled information on the destination, one would expect tourists visiting Copenhagen to rely more on their own observations of the city as a destination with a seedier side than they will on WoCo’s ”fairytale” version of the city. In continuation, tourists that, initially/prior to visiting the destination, relied on the fairytale version of the city *whilst* they hold highly unfavourable associations to (anything related to) pornography are thus very likely to generate unfavourable ”Copenhagen images” on the basis of the pornography based brand associations formed whilst visiting the city.

As another example, in order to brand Denmark as a tourist destination the Danish Tourism Board has launched the five values of Denmark (i.e. cosiness, straightforward, design, bright, and oasis). Further, the Danish Tourism Board claims that together these five values characterise Denmark as a quality-emphasising, up-to-date, and hospitable tourist destination. However, no one – including the Danish Tourism Board – can guarantee that the Danes that tourists meet whilst visiting Denmark are e.g. straightforward, bright, or hospitable. On the contrary, it would be quite surprising if the tourist does not have – at least – one encounter with a Dane whilst visiting Denmark in which a Dane does not live up to the five values and/or the destination image stimulated by the Tourism Board. Especially, this line of reasoning is corroborated by the fact that the Danish Tourism Board does *not* promote the five values across the Danish society and thus, we should not expect Danes to be knowledgeable on these five values; let alone should we expect an ”average” Dane to agree on these five va-

lues being able to characterise Denmark. Consequently, the paper suggests that although a FMCG brand company can promote brand values to employees by means of internal branding a destination marketer *cannot* (as easily) promote brand values across residents although such residents play an active role in relation to tourists' generation of destination brands. Drawing on common sense in relation to interpersonal encounters it would thus be quite surprising if *all* tourist-resident interactions that a tourist engages in whilst visiting the destination are positive – let alone consistent with destination marketers' choice of brand elements to be emphasised.

It is no coincidence that the examples offered above relate to Denmark. In fact, the main reason why these examples were chosen amongst the multiplicity of examples, upon which one could draw is that a – more or less – unique feature of Denmark as a tourist destination is that tourists claim *the Danes* to be the main reason why they choose to visit Denmark. Consequently, the examples draw on destination brands, for which the importance of nodes comprised on personal experiences and/or strong tie word-of-mouth is crucial.

Finally and drawing on Ooi's (2002) comparison of tourism promotion authorities of Copenhagen and Singapore, the problems related to unmanageable aspects of destination brands seem to be especially prevalent in relation to political environments (e.g. democracies), in which tourism promotion authorities cannot and/or will not "touristy" their local societies.

6. Implications

As indicated previously, the paper focuses on some specific types of destination brands, *i.e.* "macro level" destination brands (Denmark as a brand) and "mezo level" destination brands (regions or cities as brands). Although the paper does not explicitly incorporate "micro level" destination brands (e.g. hotels, attractions, or caravan sites), intuitively one would think that also "micro level" destination marketers experience problems with unmanageable destination brand associations such as e.g. residents. Hence, in relation to all types of destination brands the claim made during the preceding section was that locals are beyond

the direct control of the tourism marketer. Of course, we may try to educate residents on the economic importance of tourism and hence, the obligation of residents to interact with tourists in ways that enhance destination image. Nonetheless, there is no way we can *manage* – let alone control - tourists' multiple interactions with the locals and thus, at least a considerable portion of destination brands (such as Denmark or Copenhagen) are *per se* unmanageable.

In sum, I thus argue that it is (too) simplistic to apply traditional branding and brand management theory and/or practices to tourism destination image. Especially, the claim made in this paper is that applicability of such theories and/or practices is reduced by the fact that a basic premise underlying these theories and practices is that the marketer can *manage* the focal entity, *i.e.* the brand.

For example, classic branding theory presumes the FMCG company to *manage* the product (portfolio), upon which the brand supervenes as well as the one-way mass communication (*i.e.* advertising) that supports the brand. In continuation, service marketing theories assume that companies can control – or at least severely affect – those people that are crucial in delivering the service to customers, *i.e.* the employees whilst we assume FMCG brand companies to be able to control – or at least severely affect – the entity substituting employees in relation to such brands, *i.e.* retailers/the P for place. However, if we assume a major element of – at least some – destination brands to be tourists' (perceptions of) interactions and encounters with the locals, then such brands are, indeed, less manageable than ordinary consumer and service brands. As such, one might even claim the tourist destination brand "Denmark" to be utterly unmanageable *if* the Danes qualify as the key element of this brand.

Although the aim of this paper is *not* to encourage tourist researches and practitioners to abandon branding and brand management theory and practices entirely, the aim is strongly to urge them (us) to focus less on branding as a device employed in order to build/change image and to focus more on branding as it basically *is*, *i.e.* a powerful tool in the quest for market orientation and respect for customers. Consequently, the purpose of the closing remarks of this section is to address the question on "what branding can do for destination image – if

the primary purpose of branding is *not* that of creating new, favourable destination associations nodes and/or strengthen extant favourable ones?".

Returning to the section on the origins of concepts such as branding, brand management, and brand equity, a key rationale underlying this line of marketing thinking is that being "market oriented" is a key success factors. Basically, the notion of market orientation relates to the fact that marketing has an obligation to collect, analyse and disseminate market intelligence. Consequently, at the very heart of marketing lies the responsibility to be "the customer"s ambassador' and thus, marketing has more to do with adopting to the "voice of the customer" than it has to do with trying to change customers' knowledge structures and associations. Thus, primarily marketing is about *understanding customers* in order to ensure that offerings of the company satisfy consumer needs. In continuation, the main reason why marketing is crucial for companies is that thorough investigation of consumers and subsequent intra-organisational dissemination of consumer knowledge are prerequisites for development of products and brands that consumers *need* (more than those products and brands offered by competitors). Consequently, at its core marketing is concerned with "adopting to customers".

Looking at research on destination image and destination branding, one cannot help wonder why it is branding as devices for changing customers' thinking that predominates whilst branding as a way of understanding – and adopting to – customers is underappreciated. As such, one might even claim that such research focuses more on "what the tourist can do for us" than "what we can do for the tourist". However, thinking of destinations in terms of branding offers an excellent opportunity for understanding the tourist and thus, to diagnose what dimensions of the brands that are good, bad, or irrelevant - although this valuable contribution of branding to destination image building and management is seldom mentioned. Branding as a diagnostic device could thus enable us to understand tourists' basic associations to the brand and consequently, it could enable us to identify any associations that are (especially) harmful to the brand. For example, if the anticipation of interactions with residents being of crucial importance to the destination brand "Denmark" holds true, then we had

better try to disseminate the crucial importance of such interactions to residents than to tell tourists how bright, cosy, and hospitable Danes are.

In sum, the key contribution of this paper to extant destination branding knowledge is that primarily destination branding should *not* be concerned with identifying, creating, and strengthening favourable, unique, and strong brand associations. On the contrary, at its core destination branding is concerned with the basic questions: What do tourists *think* about us?; What do they *associate* with us?; and why are the most important associations (un)favourable?

7. Conclusion

Clifton (2002, p. 161) concludes: "In the end, of course, the future of brands is up to the brands themselves, and to the people who manage them. Reputation is, after all, reality with a lag effect". Drawing on the content of this paper, the future of destination brands *does* qualify as "reputation with a time-lag" and thus, tourists' experiences with destination brands – and all elements hereof – do seem to be the building blocks of such brands. However, especially for destination brands it seems quite questionable if the future of brands is up to "brand managers". In particular, the identification of destination brand managers and/or custodians is troublesome. For example; who manages "Wonderful Copenhagen"? Of course, WOTO might – rightfully – claim to act as brand custodians and brand knowledge disseminators/brand awareness creators. Nonetheless, no destination marketer can claim "brand possession" in ways that even slightly resemble FMCG companies' ownership of brands. Consequently, the claim of this paper is that destination brands incorporate no clear "ownership" and hence, lack of ownership delimits possibilities for brand *management*. As such; a key feature discriminating between FMCG brands and destination brands is that destination brand elements are not owned – let alone controlled – by destination marketers whereas FMCG companies control the most important elements of FMCG brands (*i.e.* the marketing mix). Consequently, the key contribution of branding theory to destination research and practices is *not* one of brand management. Instead, what branding can do for destinations is that branding as a diagnostic device enables destination marketers to *investigate*,

understand, and *respond* to tourists and their perceptions of the focal destination.

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