

Managing Heritage Tourism Brand in South Africa: A Synthesis of Literature

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore how branding essentials can foster or derail heritage tourism growth. Brand management capabilities support heritage tourism destinations such as South Africa to achieve competitive advantage in the global tourism marketplace. Heritage tourism destinations in Africa operate within a highly competitive environment as most of them offer identical products and services to their clientele. Unique historical and political backgrounds associated with particular geographical regions foster their heritage tourism growth. Subsequently, in South Africa, different forms of tourism that exist within the heritage tourism niche such as cultural tourism have gained immense popularity as they attract numerous domestic and international tourists to heritage tourism sites. Branding as a composite of numerous essentials including, but not confined to, brand essence, brand image and brand loyalty, is believed to be a key factor that can either stimulate or hinder heritage tourism growth in tourist destinations including South Africa. A conceptual model has been developed in this paper, based on the interlinkages between the key essentials of destination branding and how they influence heritage tourism growth. This paper posits that there is a strong relationship and interrelatedness between destination branding and heritage tourism growth.

Keywords: Destination branding; branding essentials; competitive advantage; conceptual model; heritage tourism growth

Introduction

Tourism is the largest and highly diverse industry (George, 2017) that has been evolving at a rapid pace across the world resulting from both the changing nature of its market and tourist motivation (Butler & Miossec, 1993). As people travel to places away from their original residences or workplaces in search for activities that are usually not available either in their residences or workplaces (Steyn & Spencer, 2011), the strength and development of tourism hinge mainly upon supply and demand factors (Streimikiene & Bilan, 2015). In many parts of the world, tourism has been considered an essential economic driver resulting from its significant contribution to Gross Domestic Product [GDP] (Martins, Gan & Ferreira-Lopez, 2017), and a major source of income, tourist receipts, employment and state revenues (Haarhoff & De Klerk, 2019; World Travel and Tourism Council [WTTC], 2020). Recent findings by the WTTC indicate that travel and tourism sector contributed 10.3% to the global GDP and created about 330 million job opportunities during 2019, and its overall welfare indicates potential for further growth (WTTC, 2020). Similar to global trends, tourism in South Africa is one of the

major mechanisms for enhancing socio-economic development (Rogerson, 2015). Tourism contributed approximately 9.3% (about R127.9 billion/US\$8.8 billion) towards the South Africa's national GDP and created about 1.5 million jobs during 2019 (WTTC, 2020). In effect, 1 of 22 South Africans, equivalent to 5% of the country's total workforce, is employed by the tourism industry.

Sub-Saharan Africa is peculiar for the much diversity of its environment and people; and its cultural heritage and natural areas are key value propositions to tourists (Ezeuduji, 2015). It is therefore, important for sub-Saharan African countries including South Africa to focus on the development and sustainability of heritage tourism as a viable strategy for national and regional tourism development (Rogerson, 2012) while simultaneously prioritising branding as a major stimulus for heritage tourism growth (Haarhoff & De Klerk, 2019). While previous studies on branding are considered as invaluable in social sciences research, a need for a more comprehensive approach to studying branding and its effect on heritage tourism growth is apparent. Accordingly, this paper critically explores the relationship between brand essence, brand image, brand loyalty and heritage tourism growth. Although there is literature on destination branding with specific focus on its essentials such as brand identity and brand image, there has been paucity of research on this subject that focuses mainly on an African context such as Ezeuduji, November and Haupt (2016); and Hemmonsbey and Knott (2016).

Literary perspective of destination branding and heritage tourism growth

People visit tourist destinations in search for palpable and impalpable heritage offerings such as art, rituals, history, culture, architecture, festivals, religion, folklore, gastronomy, etc. (Vong & Ung, 2012). These visits are described by Timothy and Nyaupane (2009: 3-4) as "heritage tourism" and exhibit "Ethnic Tourism Connection Group" as they include almost all aspects of heritage tourism assets (Moscardo & Pearce, 1999: 429). The authors assert that these visits are attributed mainly to nostalgia, celebration and study purposes. As a consequence, historical, artistic and lifestyle attributes of a specific region motivated by tourists' perceptions of their own heritage remain a core element of travelling package (Poria, Butler & Airey, 2001). Therefore, in addition to heritage offerings as the main tourist inducement, there exists collective representation of what the outside world think, feel, and/or say about heritage tourism destinations. Talerma (2014: 1) refers to this as "branding or a meaning established overtime as a result of tourist-destination interactions, experiences and engagements".

Accordingly, Haarhoff and De Klerk (2019) consider branding as a major motivation and antecedent of burgeoning interest demonstrated by both domestic and international tourists in paying visits to certain heritage tourism destinations. Amer (2018: 4) acknowledges branding as "a mechanism by which a destination's competitive advantage is enhanced and through which inter-exchange value between destinations and tourists can be generated". The author maintains that branding fosters a sense of loyalty and creates direct emotional rapport between destinations and tourists at an appropriate price. As such, this paper considers appropriate pricing regarding destinations' offerings as one aspect that needs considerable attention based on its possible implications for branding process. We take into account the fact that branding entails behaviour of tourists and established relationship between them and a toured destination resulting from a mutual agreement on the quality and value of its goods and services (Haarhoff & De Klerk, 2019). Therefore, the fact that increased domestic prices reduce tourism consumption (Martins et al., 2017), may inform decision-making processes regarding appropriate pricing of a destination offerings such that both destination's competitive and comparative advantages are not compromised.

One possible explanation, as the preceding writing suppose, is that tourists tend to be reluctant to spend more during their tours whether direct or indirect (Zhike & Ting, 2017).



However, Dwyer and Kim (2003) argue that the ultimate visitor perception of prices and value of tourism goods and services is what actually counts irrespective of what the actual price may be. This necessitates a systematic marketing-oriented technique aimed at widely communicating and promoting goods and services offered in a specific tourist destination in a manner that expresses competitiveness regarding unique value proposition (Zenker, Braun & Petersen, 2017). Destination branding as a concept and practical phenomenon became popular during the late 1990s and has become one of the main themes for tourism destinations (Liu, Hultman, Eisingerich & Wei, 2020). It has been used as a mechanism through which tourism products and services are identified, marketed, supported, differentiated and communicated with the aim of strengthening emotional connection between tourists and destinations (Haarhoff & De Klerk, 2019). In overall, destination branding represents name tag, word mark, logo or symbol with which each tourist destination is identified and differentiated from its competitors and can either be positive or negative depending on how a destination is viewed by the outside world (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998). As a result, the manner in which certain destinations are portrayed need not be viewed as stereotypes or biases as this reflects genuine perceptions of the society.

Perceptions entail individual psychological reaction through which sensory responses are processed, organized and interpreted (Dimmock, 2012). However, perceptions are subject to either positive or negative change resulting from significant changes aimed at enhancing tourism industry's competitiveness (Sigwele, Prinsloo & Pelsler, 2018). A positive change scenario is epitomised by a case of Johannesburg, which is South Africa's wealthiest city, biggest commercial centre, a major economic hub and tourist attraction (Leonard & Dladla, 2020; Masilo & van der Merwe, 2016). However, negative perceptions held by most international citizens about Johannesburg had adversely effected on the country's tourism industry (Palmer, 2000). The city was perceived by foreign nationals as lacking proper transportation systems, lacking entertainment and sightseeing opportunities, lacking satisfactory customer services and efficiency, and lacking security and safety (Department of Tourism, 2011). Accordingly, Crotts (1996) and Mechinda, Serirat, Popajit and Lertwannawit (2010) affirm that situational factors can hinder the inflow of visitors toward an affected destination. Afterwards, South Africa and its cities including Johannesburg experienced considerable positive change in terms of international tours. These tours are believed to have been motivated by government's initiatives and efforts to see the country being re-integrated into the international tourism economy post-1994 (Department of Tourism, 2011). Government revamped numerous areas within the city to address safety and physical appeal issues and to curb negative perceptions held by tourists about it (Gauteng Tourism Authority, 2012).

Destination branding has been highly regarded within South Africa; hence, it has contributed towards bestowing ten of her heritage tourism sites as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] World Heritage Sites [WHSs] (Brand South Africa Trust, 2018). The WHS status impacts significantly on the country's tourist demand as those brands associated with UNESCO become increasingly visible in the international tourist market (Dewar, du Cross & Li, 2012). Having realised the extent to which destination branding contributes to the country's tourist demand, the South African government tasked Brand South Africa (a public entity) to project, through branding, a positive image of the country both within and outside the borders of the African continent. Government also commissioned the South African Tourism [SAT] to promote a positive image such that the country is considered as a safe and desirable tourist destination for both domestic and international tours (Brand South Africa Trust, 2018).

South Africa's heritage tourism brand essence

South Africa is a multi-cultural country characterized by unique and diverse natural and cultural resources that have been major stimuli for heritage tourism growth (Mokoena, 2020). As a result, the government mandated the South African Heritage Resources Agency [SAHRA] to ensure that all heritage resources within the country are well conserved (SAHRA, 2015a). All those places that are found to have been prioritising conservation of heritage resources in an authentic manner are bestowed a National Heritage Site [NHS] status by the SAHRA (SAHRA, 2015b). South Africa's unique and diverse cultural and heritage resources have had an important and far reaching impact on both international and local contexts. The country has been bestowed a heritage destination status and nicknamed "The Rainbow Nation" (Chivandi, Samuel & Muchie, 2020: 917). The country's nickname was coined by Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu, post-1994, to describe the country as a host to diverse cultural societies and ethnic groups (Chiger, 2016; Mokoena, 2020). For instance, the overall profile of the country's citizenship comprises diverse ethnic groups (Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Ndebele, Shangaan, & Venda) with each one representing a unique culture and heritage (Pedro, 2008).

As it occurs in many parts of the world, tourists' decision to travel to South Africa had been influenced largely by the functional and emotional values derived from visiting the country's heritage tourism sites (Ezeuduji & Nkosi, 2017), and these constitute a destination's brand essence. Brand essence is defined by de Chernatony and Harris (2010) as unique emotions and/or feelings evoked when tourists think about a particular heritage tourist destination which fosters emotional connectedness during brand-tourist interaction. Brand essence serves as a means by which a core spirit of a brand is captured and through which a brand's competitive advantage is identified and by which benefits of choosing a brand over its competitors are received (Light, Kiddon, Till, Heckler, Matthews, Hall & Wacker, 2012). Based on these descriptions, we view brand essence as a subsequent reaction from positive perception of South Africa which imbues tourists with unique emotions when thinking of their heritage tourism experience in the country.

Functional values comprise primary reasons by which a tourist interest in travelling towards a particular heritage tourist destination is struck (Chen, Leask & Phou, 2016; Ezeuduji et al., 2016) and they include tangible attributes that can be observed and/or measured (Pawitra & Tan, 2003). While emotional values are derived from the intangible attributes of a heritage tourist destination, Fourie and Santana-Gallego (2013) contest that tourism visits to a destination could not only be attributed to functional and/or emotional values but may also be influenced by peripheral factors such as former colonial ties, language and religion, trade agreements, land mass, and income in the place of origin and destination. Unexpected intangible benefits experienced by tourists while at a heritage tourist destination assist in providing them with new experiences (Ezeuduji et al., 2016) as they include self-development, health and relaxation (Chen, 2012). One of these experiences is the culture or diverse cultures within a toured destination (Viljoen & Henama, 2017).

Cultural resources as a stimulus for South Africa's heritage tourism brand essence

Cultural resources are an important pillar and antecedent of heritage tourism (Viljoen & Henama, 2017). In quest for unique cultural experiences, people travel outside their normal places of residence for the purpose of experiencing tangible and intangible cultural activities practiced within a specific ethnic society. Although there has been a multitude of definitions with regard to these travels, it has been extensively challenging to define and/or conceptualise them as they involve culture and tourism as two elements that have been found to be difficult to describe (Mokoena, 2020; Richards, 1996). Against this backdrop, this paper adopts a synthesis definition crafted by Ivanovic (2008); Jimura (2011); and Timothy (2011) which

identifies these travels as ‘cultural tourism’ or a process whereby domestic and international visitors travel to a specific community, region or institution outside their host communities engendered wholly or partly by aspirations to experience authentic lifestyle, history, artefacts, gastronomy, architecture, clothing, and music.

Recent research (e.g. Mokoena, 2020; Viljoen & Henama, 2017) identifies cultural tourism to be among the rapidly growing subsets of heritage tourism. They describe cultural tourism as an emergent competitive niche segment of domestic and international tourism economy. This is resulting mainly from two reasons: (1) increasing demand for trips to numerous destinations characterized by scenic cultural resources (Nkwanyana, Ezeuduji & Nzama, 2016), and (2) changing cultural tourism from being a ‘niche market’ characterized by high income travellers to a ‘mass market’ characterized by a range of travellers (Richards, 2018: 10). According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization Report on Tourism and Culture Synergies [UNWTORTCS] (2018), cultural tourism has had an estimated annual increase of 15% in the past decade and accounted for at least 39% of the total world tourism. Apparently, cultural tourism growth rate had surpassed numerous other subsets within the global tourism industry (Viljoen & Henama, 2017). Significant growth of cultural tourism is ascribed to the advent of experience economy which has influenced the nature of tourism demand to change from escapism to enrichment (McCain & Ray, 2003). Intangible cultural heritage assets such as authenticity and uniqueness became fundamental guarantors of enriching and differentiating tourist experiences (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). Subsequently, consumption of cultural tourism as a unique area of tourism demand emerged significantly (Richards, 1996), driving remarkable cultural tourism growth the world over (Chen & Chen, 2010).

Cultural tourism has been conceived to be a viable strategy for alleviating poverty, sustaining inclusive growth, and enhancing economic development in many parts of the world including South Africa (Rogerson & van der Merwe, 2016; Saarinen & Rogerson, 2015). Reports released by South African Tourism [SAT] (2018) and Statistics South Africa [StatsSA] (2019) reveal that 25.7% of international tourists from Europe who visit South Africa and 5.2% of domestic tourists engage in cultural activities during their tours in the country. Approximately, 77% of South Africans considers diverse cultural resources as main stimuli for the country’s tourism demand. Whereas, about 64% of the country’s citizens considers cultural tourism to be among major sources of the country’s revenue generation (Nkwanyana et al., 2016). Similar to other parts of the world, cultural tourism activities in South Africa occur mostly in cultural villages located within the rural setting of the country (Mokoena, 2020). Some of the prominent cultural villages in the country include, but not limited to, Mgwali Cultural Village (Eastern Cape), Shakaland Cultural Village (KwaZulu-Natal), and Basotho Cultural Village (Free State) (Bovana, 2010; Mokoena, 2020; Shakaland, 2015).

South Africa’s heritage tourism brand image

Heritage tourism brand image refers to a tourist’s perception of a particular destination attributed to offerings associated with symbolic meanings attached to its heritage features as they are held in the tourists’ memories (Haarhoff & De Klerk, 2019). All destinations are characterized by their own images that subsequently influence tourists’ decisions to visit/revisit a destination or not (George, 2017). For example, Mexico’s popularity as a result of her holiday resorts and cities had nevertheless been obliterated by negative perception that international tourist market has developed resulting from prevalent drug-related criminal offences that occurred in the country (George, 2017). This shows that images may be three-fold: positive, negative and/or indifferent. In general, images can be either descriptive or evaluative. Several authors (e.g. Picazo & Moreno-Gil, 2019; Rajesh, 2013; Maumbe & Van Wyk, 2012) who



aimed to conceptualise destination image share the view that destination brand image is a multi-dimensional concept influenced by a multitude of factors from the tourist's perspective. These factors are: cognitive images (destination's attributes e.g. physical infrastructure), distinctive images (destination's unique features e.g. culture, customs and rituals), and affective images (emotional evaluation of destination's attributes e.g. hospitality of a destination and locals towards tourists), external information sources e.g. perception of a destination shared by experienced tourists, socio-demographic attributes e.g. tourists' age categories, and tourist's first-hand experience at a destination e.g. ambience. This shows that destination brand image is a composite of impressions obtained by experienced and potential tourists regarding a particular destination from various sources (Ezeuduji & Mhlongo, 2019).

However, some authors (e.g. Pike & Ryan, 2004; Morrison, 2013) place more focus on how cognitive and affective (cognitive-affective) factors impact upon destination's choice. They argue that tourists are motivated mostly by a combination of cognitive and affective benefits anticipated during their visits to a destination. As a consequence, even though cognitive benefits (e.g. tourist's satisfaction derived from being exposed to proper infrastructure within or outside a destination's premises) have been noted considerably in the tourism literature, a destination that is perceived to have a negative emotional response to tourists is more likely to be ignored during decision-making regarding a suitable destination to be considered for visitation or re-visitation. In this sense, cognitive benefits would be considered during the formation of initial choice sets, while the affective benefits would be applied during the evaluation stage of a destination selection process (Gartner, 1994; Morrison, 2013). The combination of these two components (cognitive-affective) is a fundamental basis upon which tourists' decision-making process regarding suitable destination largely hinges (Pike & Ryan, 2004; Morrison, 2013). Thus, any heritage tourism destination that aspires to be referred to as an appealing brand or aiming to influence tourists' perception and/or behaviour, needs to ensure that it positions itself such that it prioritises the needs and/or wants of the potential clientele (Manhas, Manrai & Manrai, 2016). This process is referred to by Okumuş and Yaşın (2008); and Haarhoff and De Klerk (2019) as destination positioning. The authors argue that it is through destination positioning that each tourist destination makes itself different from its competitors hence tourism is one of the highly competitive industries. The above definition denotes a strong relationship between destination positioning, destination brand image and destination competitiveness, and by which a destination's competitive advantage could be achieved. Competitive advantage provides tourist destinations with necessary edge in terms of tourists' preferences as tourists become more educated and informed about ideal tourism goods and services (Du Plessis, Saayman & van der Merwe, 2015). South Africa is considered to be one of the most attractive heritage tourist destinations in the world attributed to its richness in wildlife parks, scenery and cultural resources (Chivandi, Samuel & Muchie, 2020). Numerous tourists visit the country's tourist sites popularly known for being characterized by the above attractions including Cape Town, Cape Peninsula, Winelands, Garden Route, Johannesburg and Kruger National Park [KNP] (Pedro, 2008; Van Dyk, Slabbert & Tkaczynski, 2020). Also, at the helm of these visits is the country's tourist attractions' image dimensions such as cognitive images, distinctive images and affective images. Different authors (e.g. Ezeuduji et al., 2016; Ezeuduji & Mhlongo, 2019; Haarhoff & De Klerk, 2019; Khumalo, Sebatlelo & van der Merwe, 2014) found that most tourists' travels to these attractions are linked to attributes such as satisfactory state of their physical infrastructure, unique offerings and hospitality to visitors.

Although socio-economic factors such as crime and corruption could impact negatively on destinations' image, Haarhoff and De Klerk (2019) found that there is low rate of criminal offences committed against visitors in the country's prominent heritage sites which assists in

sustaining its favourable brand image. Morrison (2013); All Africa (2018) argue that a destination's global positioning, perception and branding are directly influenced by image dimensions. This relationship is referred to as a 'positioning-image-branding [PIB] approach' (Morrison, 2013). Apparently, tourist destinations seek to offer products and services that align with the tourists' needs and being on a par with the tourism industry's continuously changing trends. As such, the evolutionary theory (a theoretical underpinning of drivers of tourism based on the travel life cycle) argues that tourism is driven mainly by changes in both the tourist market and tourist motivations (Butler & Miossec, 1993). However, it is important for destinations to consider that tourists' perceived image may not always be congruent with what is depicted by marketing platforms (Tkaczynski, Rundle-Thiele & Cretchley, 2015). Thus, it is important that images portrayed through marketing platforms are based on facts rather than idealistic publicity.

Therefore, destinations operating within a highly competitive environment such as South Africa, need to maintain tourists' satisfactory standards in terms of offerings in order to gain competitive advantage over the most threatening competitors that offer similar heritage tourism experiences such as Uganda, Kenya and Rwanda (Schoeman, 2016). It is through maintaining tourists' satisfactory standards that a destination may develop an image through which it is perceived by potential and repeat visitors. Destination's image development can be described as a systematic process by which scientific and technical knowledge is used to meet specific tourist destination's objectives and requirements (Business Dictionary, 2018). It is therefore, important as Lee (2009) suggests that perceptions that prospective, first-time and repeat tourists held for a destination are evaluated frequently as this could assist destinations marketing organizations [DMOs] and tourism operators to achieve three objectives: (1) identifying strengths and/or weaknesses of a destination, (2) predicting tourists' behavioural intentions, and (3) providing crucial information that can be resourceful for future management and development of a destination.

South Africa's heritage tourism brand loyalty

Brand loyalty provides strong basis for success, sustainability as well as competitive advantage for heritage tourism destinations such as South Africa (Chen et al., 2016). Brand loyalty is used in many parts of the world as a mechanism with which tourist-destination attachment is measured (Aaker, 1996). As a result, the concept 'brand loyalty' has drawn considerable attention from DMOs; hence, it is the main source from which benefits such as repeat visits and recommendations to friends and relatives are reaped by many tourist destinations (Pike, Bianchi, Kerr & Patti, 2010). Tourist destination brand loyalty has therefore, been described as a tendency of tourists to repeatedly purchase one brand's products or services over those offered by competitors' and recommend it to their social groups irrespective of changes in the environment (Chatzigeorgiou & Christou, 2016).

Review of literature (e.g. Barnes, Mattsson & Sørensen, 2014; Brocato, Baker & Voorhees, 2015; Chen et al., 2016; López-Mosquera & Sánchez, 2013; Mokoena, 2020) identifies four key components, which are referred to here as indicators (i.e. destination's memorable experiences, destination consumption, destination attachment, and tourist satisfaction) by which heritage tourism destination brand loyalty is attributed. These indicators are ascribed mainly to a destination's distinctive functional attributes such as climate, history, culture and heritage (Novelli, 2015; Rajesh, 2013). These attributes evoke the interest of many tourists who apparently develop certain attitude and/or behaviour as a result of satisfaction from services offered in a destination (Chatzigeorgiou & Christou, 2016). For example, Mokoena (2020) found that about 19.5% of revisits at the Basotho Cultural Village were resulting from tourists' satisfaction with on-site experiences. As things stand, there are three

approaches by which tourist loyalty can be measured (Iordanova, 2016; Kabiraj & Shanmugan, 2011; Yoon & Uysal, 2005), and these are (1) behavioural approach, (2) attitudinal approach, and (3) composite approach. The behavioural approach is concerned with tourist' loyalty in terms of repeat or frequent purchases of the same brand. Attitudinal approach is concerned with tourist loyalty in terms of psychological commitment or statement of preference. Whereas, composite approach measures tourist loyalty in terms of behavioural and attitudinal approaches combined. Against this backdrop, Chen et al. (2016) conclude that tourist loyalty can only be measured through behavioural or attitudinal approach. However, Chen and Gursoy (2001) contend that tourist loyalty towards a particular destination can be properly measured by means of attitudinal approach. Empirical research on tourist attitude (e.g. Patroni, Day, Lee, Chan, Kim, Kerr, Newson & Simpson, 2018; Simpson, Newsome & Day, 2016) confirm that there is a positive relationship between tourist attitude and destination attachment.

As such, tourists who repeatedly purchase a particular brand must have developed positive attitude and trust towards it (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). In other words, underlying loyalty is always built on trust. Therefore, building trust and positive attitude with tourists remain an essential variable for sustaining tourist-brand loyalty. Built trust, as described within the context of tourism, refers to a tendency of visitors to willingly purchase a brand's offerings without considering possible or subsequent costs or benefits from their action (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). Accordingly, being loyal to a destination brand means completely trusting in it (Chatzigeorgiou & Christou, 2016). However, building trust with tourists could be a challenging responsibility for DMOs. This is because trust within the tourism context manifests either through attitude or behaviour (Pike, 2005) and so, completely differs from interpersonal trust since brand is a symbol (Marzano & Scot, 2009) and therefore, unable to respond to a tourist. Trust in destination marketing has not been largely explored (Chatzigeorgiou & Christou, 2016).

Therefore, Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk and Preciado, (2013) propose that winning tourists' loyalty in a contemporary competitive tourism environment may require DMOs to channel their focus more towards developing strategies. In turn, tourist-brand trustworthy relationship or reciprocity between a tourist and a destination could be built. With similar importance as in a destination's image, a tourist-brand trustworthy relationship also needs to be built based upon facts rather than idealistic publicity. Destination's characteristics such as provisioning of satisfactory services, may determine a tourist' decision for trusting it (Chatzigeorgiou & Christou, 2016). Different authors (e.g. Christou, 2013; Kuenzel & Halliday, 2008; Samy, 2016) conclude that individuals, organizations and destinations are trusted based on established reputation, predictability and competence.

Memorable experiences [MEs] refer to experiences that tourists recall post tourist-destination engagement encounter (Kim, Ritchie & McCormick, 2012). Creating memorable experiences necessary for the acquisition of brand loyalty remains a main challenge and a primary aspiration for most heritage tourism destinations (van der Merwe & Saayman, 2014). This pressing challenge arises from a highly competitive and inconsistent environment within which heritage tourism destinations operate (Haarhoff & De Klerk, 2019) due to recent changes with regard to demography, socio-economy, technology and tourists' demands (Mariani & Giorgio, 2017). Although traditional or hard factors such as infrastructure, economy, accessibility and financial incentives play a pivotal role in sustaining tourism (Zeppel, 2002; Mokoena, 2020), it has been difficult and sometimes impossible to differentiate destinations based on these factors (Morgan, Pritchard & Pride, 2011). Therefore, branding a destination in a manner that strengthens destination-tourist emotional attachment has become an essential tool with which competitive and marketing objectives could be achieved (Marzano & Scott, 2009).

Destination-tourist emotional attachment is described by Kyle, Graefe and Manning (2005: 155) as an “affective bond developed between a tourist destination and its visitors as a result of positive and memorable experiences”. This is referred to by Campbell (1987) as destination consumption or a situation whereby tourists select, purchase, use, maintain, repair and/or dispose any product or service offered by an ideal tourist destination. Destination attachment relates to a process whereby the experience gained by tourists regarding a destinations’ physical and social attributes results in strengthening destination-tourist emotional bond (Chen et al., 2016). Destination attachment therefore, serves as a major precursor of destination loyalty. This is affirmed by Yuksel, Yuksel and Bilim (2010) when espousing that emotional connection to a destination enhances likelihood for tourists to demonstrate loyalty towards it and disseminating positive evaluation to potential tourists and social groups.

As an indicator of brand loyalty, tourist’s satisfaction behaviour may be conceived as an overall impressive feeling demonstrated by tourists towards a particular destination measured by perceived discrepancy between pre-travel expectations and post-travel experiences (Altunel & Erkurth, 2015). Tourists’ satisfaction with a destination’s tourism experience translates to a positive match between anticipated and actual experiences while in a destination and may influence destination choice behaviour, consumption of a destinations products and services, and intent to return or to recommend a destination to potential tourists (Chen et al., 2016).

Managing South Africa’s heritage tourism brand: opportunities and challenges

South Africa was bestowed the highest-ranking tourism destination status by the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index [TTCI] as 53rd of 136 global tourist destinations resulting from its scenic cultural and heritage resources (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2017). Thereafter, the country has become one of the Africa’s premium heritage tourism destinations (Matiza & Slabbert, 2020). While this milestone may reflect a country’s multi-sectorial collaborative effort and achievement (South African Strategic Plan, 2015-2020; WEF, 2017), historical records and empirical evidence do not share similar utopian landscape. These sources indicate discrepancies and challenges with regard to the country’s heritage tourism growth. As these indicate, although the country’s brand strategy was placed 5th of 136 in the globe during 2017, the country was also placed 40th of 136 countries of the world in terms of marketing and branding effectiveness during the same period (WEF, 2017).

Despite having been impacting positively on socio-economic development in the country, there are peripheral challenges that are imposing a hurdle on heritage tourism growth. Various sources (e.g. Hemmonsbey & Knott, 2016; Rogerson, 2020; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2020; Signé, 2018) reveal that South Africa’s overall branding efforts have been over the past decades impinged by a myriad of deleterious, relatively controversial contemporary events, stereotypical and outdated Brand Africa effects. According to the sources, these include rampant corruption, poor governance and management, endemic crime, pandemic diseases, xenophobic attacks, and immigration policy.

Conceptual model

This paper proposes that heritage tourism growth hinges largely upon three destination branding essentials, namely: brand essence, brand image, and brand loyalty. There is general consensus among different authors (e.g. Aaker, 1996; Botschen et al., 2017; Chatzigeorgiou & Christou, 2016; de Chernatony & Harris, 2010; Gao & Zhang, 2009; Haarhoff & De Klerk, 2019; Kapferer, 1998; Kashif, Samsi & Sarifuddin, 2014; Keller, 2003; Konecnick & Go, 2008; Okumus & Yasin, 2008; Rosi, 2014) that heritage tourism growth experienced by many

tourist destinations is attributed to a multitude of interrelated components upon which branding as a concept and practical phenomenon extensively hinges. A conceptual model (see Figure 1) has been developed to illustrate interrelatedness and interdependency between branding essentials and a resultant heritage tourism growth. Destination branding is perceived as a collective set of marketing activities undertaken with a specific purpose of influencing choice of a target market (Manhas et al., 2016).

In order to delineate interrelatedness and interdependency between branding essentials, this paper adopted a synthesis analysis (SA). Drawing from a literary standpoint (Adeola & Evans, 2020; Chen, 2012; Chen et al., 2016; Ezeudji et al., 2016; Pawitra & Tan, 2003), a positive perception held by visitors which may result in a unique tourist-destination emotional connectedness (essence) is attributed to a destination's functional and emotional values. Accordingly, some authors (e.g. de Chernatony & Harris, 2010; Light et al., 2012) view brand essence as a means by which a core spirit of a brand is captured and through which a brand's competitive advantage is identified and benefits of choosing a brand over its competitors are received. In this sense, impressive tourists' perception of a destination's tangible and intangible offerings informed by first-hand experiences; a shared word-of-mouth from friends or social groups or media platforms serves as the basis upon which tourist-destination emotional connectedness hinges and thus, translates to interrelatedness between brand essence and brand image. Conversely, a destination that is perceived to have a negative emotional response to tourists is more likely to be ignored during a decision-making process regarding a suitable destination to consider for visitation or re-visitation or vice versa (Pike & Ryan, 2004). As a result, the manner in which tourism sites are reflected and portrayed to prospective visitors remains one of the fundamental themes for heritage tourism in the post-apartheid South Africa (Bakker & Muller, 2010).

Accordingly, a general impression (image) of a destination held by experienced visitors (informed by previous experiences) and potential visitors (informed by projected perception, needs, expectations, motivation and preferences) plays a pivotal role in striking tourists' interest and informs decisions for future visits (Keller, 2003). This general impression may be influenced by numerous destination's attributes such as infrastructure (which constitutes cognitive image), unique features such as culture (which constitutes distinctive image) and emotional evaluation of a destination's attributes such as hospitality of a destination and locals towards tourists. This subsequently influence potential and experienced tourists' decisions on visiting or revisiting a destination (George, 2017), which translates to interrelatedness between brand image and brand loyalty. Brand loyalty as a resultant phenomenon is attributed to numerous factors such as positive or memorable experiences (i.e. experiences that tourists recall post tourist-destination engagement encounter) and tourist-destination built trust as a result of tourist satisfaction from previous experiences (Kim et al., 2012). It is therefore, evident that unique emotions (brand essence) evoked on tourists as a result of positive perceptions (brand image) for a particular destination may influence decision-making regarding visiting or revisiting (brand loyalty) a tourist destination, which may subsequently foster heritage tourism growth in a destination.

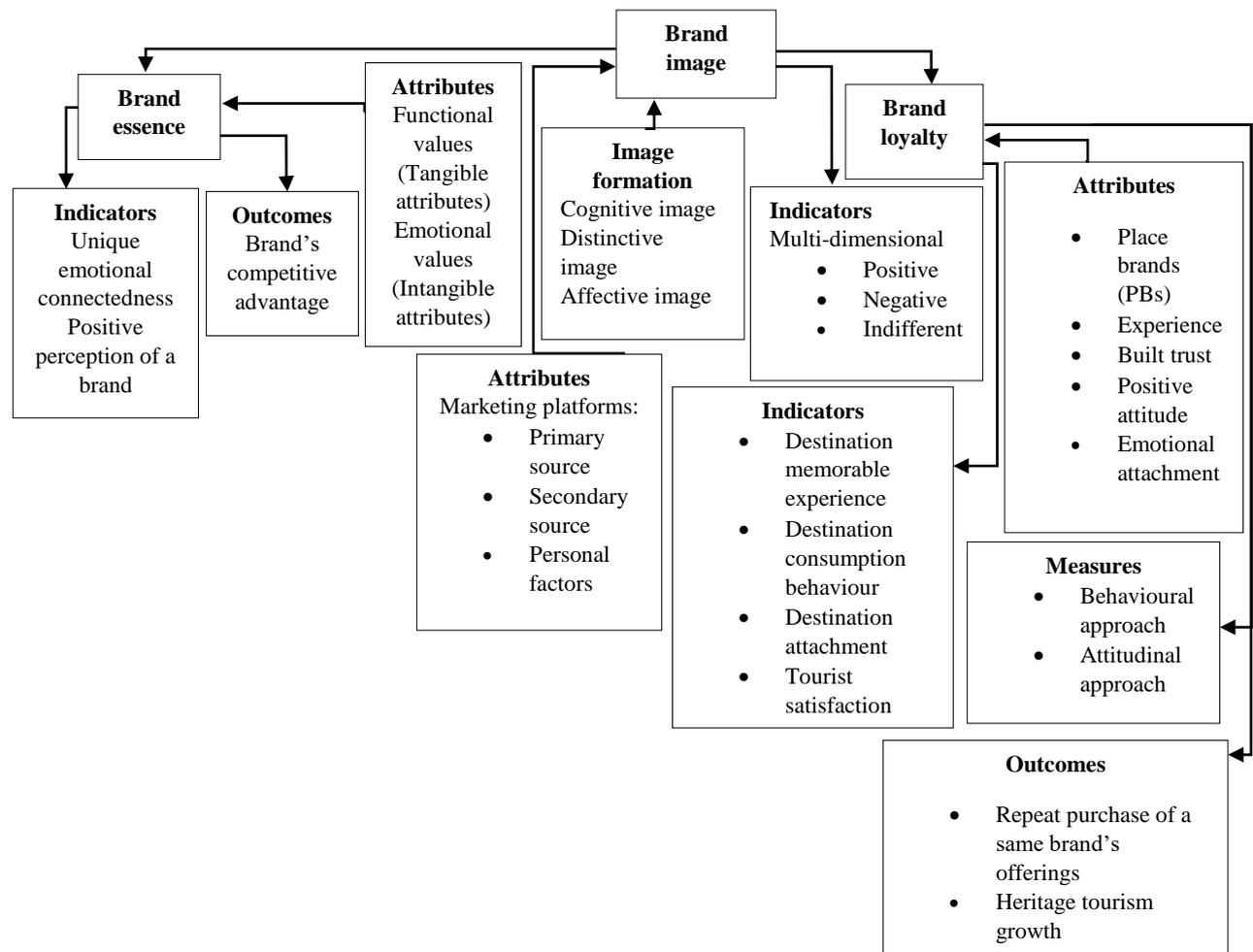


Figure 1. Conceptual model, Source: Authors

Opportunities for future empirical research

One of the branding essentials we discussed in this paper is brand loyalty. Reviewed literature revealed that one of the important attributes toward achieving brand loyalty is built trust. However, there has been limited literature on the concept of trust in destination marketing resulting from paucity of empirical research on the subject (Chatzigeorgiou & Christou, 2016). Accordingly, this paper perceived a gap in this regard, and thus, suggests future empirical research on built trust – South Africa’s heritage tourism growth nexus.

Conclusions and recommendations

The aim of this conceptual paper was to explore how branding essentials can foster or derail heritage tourism growth. Tourism is one of the major drivers of the South Africa’s economy with a significant contribution towards the country’s GDP and job creation (Rogerson, 2015; National Tourism Sector Strategy, 2016-2026; StatsSA, 2019; WTTC, 2020). Subsequently, tourism has been generally acknowledged in the country’s development policies as a vehicle by which sustainable and inclusive economic growth, employment and national transformation agenda could be advanced (Sibanda, Ndlela & Nomlala, 2020; South African Strategic Plan, 2015-2020). One of the important pillars of the country’s tourism economy is heritage tourism (Vong & Ung, 2012). However, the success and growth of the country’s heritage tourism has never been an effortless achievement; hence, it has been underpinned by collective efforts from a multitude of supporting structures including DMOs.

Through different marketing platforms, DMOs ensure that a positive image of South Africa as an ideal heritage tourism destination is maintained; hence, contemporary destination branding takes place within a predominantly broad place brands [PBs] competitive global environment (Mokoena, 2020). Based on a review and analysis of literature, this paper concludes that there is interrelatedness and interdependency between branding essentials such that they collectively foster heritage tourism growth. Equally, heritage tourism growth may be derailed resulting from socio-political risks perceived by the tourist market (Zenker et al., 2017). We therefore, recommend emphasis to be placed on issues of safety and security by DMOs when promoting South Africa's tourism products and services.

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