



Strategies for branding the city of Gaborone as a tourist destination

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Abstract

City branding is a 21st century phenomenon that has been enthusiastically embraced by cities in high income countries. In emerging markets or developing countries city branding has not received much enthusiasm for arguably varying reasons. Cities brand themselves as viable destinations for possible investment, tourist destinations and to work in. City branding reduces risk for the customer or the traveller and acts as a sign of quality. Branding a city is an endeavour to enhance brand equity and to strengthen the core values of the city which results in competitiveness. The main objective of this study was to investigate possible strategies or ways of branding the city of Gaborone into a competitive city brand. The study used content analysis as a research technique and the respondents of this study came from the private sector and the academia. The findings of this study show that branding the city of Gaborone could result in a unique selling proposition and a well-thought city identity. The respondents indicated that Gaborone was unknown and could not compete against cities like London, Paris and Cape Town as a tourist destination. The second theme emerging from the findings of this study was that branded cities compete better than unbranded cities due to their identities and characteristics. It could be argued that a city must look at elements or characteristics that it can leverage on in order to become competitive. For example, the findings of this study showed that peace and security could be used to brand the city of Gaborone. However, it is important to note that peace and security on their own are not a tourist attraction but merely enablers for the branding of a city. The findings also showed that visitors, students and investors looked for personal safety before they could choose to visit a place. Branding a city undoubtedly influences customers' perceptions about the city and can create a good reputation for the city. Gaborone, if branded well, would possibly have its current level of brand equity enhanced for future enhanced tourist attractiveness.

Keywords: city branding, destinations, place branding, branding, tourism, Botswana

Introduction

"Paris is romance, Milan is style, New York is energy, Washington is power, Tokyo is modernity, Lagos is corruption, Barcelona is culture, and Rio is fun", (Prophet, 2006:2). The above statement encapsulates how societies perceive the cities mentioned. The perceptions



are based on what the cities are generally known for. Cities brand themselves to attract tourists, to keep key skills or talents, and to look for investors for their various industries. City branding is about creating an image and competitive identity that sells the city. It is all about differentiation. Zukin (2014) agrees with Saffron's City Brand Barometer model that a city is termed unique when it "pervades a sense of exoticism". Cities must have a very well differentiated proposition to be uniquely positioned in the minds of visitors. Branding is a useful tool for cities to state what they stand for and to attract positive attention despite the "noise" of many messages communicated by other cities vying for tourists.

In modern tourism, identity, marketing and image mean everything. Today, place branding and its tourism-related sub-area of city branding (Gnoth, 2007:350) are commonly used for promoting tourism destinations by tourism destinations marketers. Florek (2013:139) indicates that a place or city's image culminates into a well-thought of branding process that takes into account how a destination should be perceived by investors, students, visitors and other relevant parties and stakeholders. The branding process includes designing, planning and communicating the destination brand identity. The identity of the city or its destination influences consumer decision making when it comes to inter alia holiday packages. Lack of identity or personality handicaps a city that wishes to be a prosperous city. Gaborone is the capital city of Botswana situated in Southern Africa, with a population of over two hundred and thirty thousand (Statistics Botswana, 2011). This explorative study endeavoured to explore opinions, insights and perceptions of various stakeholders and decision makers in Botswana in order to establish how best to strengthen or transform the city of Gaborone as a desirable tourist destination.

Problem statement

A city should be made identifiable and unique by what it possesses or promises. Anderson (2009:2) suggests that the city's image creates or exudes confidence for tourists or would-be tourists. It also communicates the brand's strengths and competitive edge. Baker (2007:40) stresses that branding cities simplifies choices for customers, promises certain quality levels about the city destination, and builds trust for customers about the city brand.

The mayor of Gaborone has lamented that the city does not have an identity or an image that exists in the minds of tourists and potential tourists. This lack of knowledge and lack of stakeholder consultation has been found to be an impediment for cities in emerging markets (Nkaigwa, 2014). The city of Gaborone, in Botswana, is lagging behind the rest of the world as it does not have a formal city development plan. This is because its local governance is not independent from the central government (Nkaigwa, 2014). The objective of this study was to highlight that the city of Gaborone (in Botswana), does not have a clear image that comes to the residents and the visitors' minds because it does not have any official documentation pertaining to that. This study also sought to find factors that impede Gaborone from becoming a competitive city destination with a sustainable and convincing differentiator. The study argues that if Gaborone had a formal integrated branding strategy, perceptions held about it would have been arguably far more 'tourist favourable'. An integrated branding strategy creates an identity for any city and gives it direction and a sense of purpose.

Definition of key terms

Branding: "branding refers to collective representation of what people feel, think and say about a product, service or company, and where meaning is established over time through consistent positive experiences and engagements", adapted (Talerman, 2014:1).



City branding: “is a means of both achieving competitive advantage in order to increase inward investments and tourism and also for achieving community development, reinforcing local identity and identification of the citizens with their city”, adapted (Kavaratzis, 2004:62).

The study was only conducted in the city of Gaborone, a city located on the southern part of the Botswana. Gaborone is the commercial and capital city of the Republic of Botswana. Its geographic coordinates are Latitude 24.65° South and Longitude 25.91° East.

Literature review

The tourism industry the world over, is going through significant changes that are aimed at improving the industry’s competitiveness. The industry embraces destination branding which has resulted in unique and genuine city brands that positively influence tourists’ perceptions about destinations (Gnoth, 2007:349).

Laksiri (2009:19) and Balakrishnan (2008:62) indicate that the concept of city branding is not entirely old. It is only new especially in the tourism academic literature (Gartner, 2009:22). City branding in Van Gelder and Allan’s (2006:3) opinion is now developing quickly with theoretical underpinnings that have been developed and put into full practice in recent years. According to Tayebi (2006:2) city branding nowadays has literature that has resulted in better understanding of the subject. Branding of cities has been enthusiastically embraced in Western Europe and North America as evidenced by almost all examples of cities that have branded themselves e.g. Berlin, Manchester and Lyon (WTO, 2009:72; Eurocities, 2010:8, 10). However, it seems that in low income countries or emerging markets the concept of city branding is not fully understood. South African cities such as Cape Town and Durban, Cairo in Egypt, and Casablanca in Morocco, are exceptions in Africa. It can be arguably concluded that other African cities have not been branded as there are no strategic document/s that can testify to their branding. These cities might not be branded because of lack of understanding of the value of city branding or because of lack of interest in branding them.

City branding is not all about the size and richness of the city. In fact, size does not matter in city branding (WTO, 2009:xvii). Research (The Communication Group, 2012:20) shows that people prefer to live and work in small cities because “mega cities have poor transport systems, indecent and expensive housing, and expensive life styles”. On the contrary, small cities are affordable and easy to invest in. For this reason, it seems logical to argue that a small city like Gaborone can potentially be branded into a successful African city.

Building a city brand is a very strenuous exercise when compared to building a product brand. A product brand is manageable because it has few stakeholders such as employees from different departments within the organizations. A city brand on the other hand involves an assortment of internal and external stakeholders who all have their own interests albeit divergently. The WTO (2009:57) suggests that stakeholders should form a steering committee to coordinate all city branding activities. Destination management organization (DMO), residents, academics, chamber of commerce, the government, municipality, visitors and the media are all stakeholders of a city brand (WTO, 2009:59; Wagner & Peters 2009:4).

According to Tayebi (2006:15) the media are one of the most important stakeholders in building a city brand. Tayebi suggests that print media, broadcast media and electronic media aid to market and promote the city brand.

The WTO (2009:57) states that to achieve a certain degree of cooperation in city brand building it is vital to involve all the stakeholders from the beginning so that there can be a sense of ownership. The Eurocities (2010:6) accentuates the WTO’s view by saying that key stakeholders should be engaged in all the stages of building the city brand. However, Wagner

and Peters (2009:4) caution that when dealing with a mixture of stakeholders it is important to guard against overplay power because it can antagonize role players and wreck everything. In fact Bhat (2009:74) emphasizes that there should be power balance between stakeholders, as well as trust, sincerity and self-regulation. The WTO (2009:159) for example mentions that the Norwegian Tourist Board (NTB) had to discontinue the branding exercise as stakeholders saw it as an exclusive NTB project. The NTB example teaches that a balanced empowerment of the stakeholders ensures that during challenges and criticisms the city brand practitioners could have backers who would support them. It is important to state in clear terms branding a city should consider the value that can be derived from the exercise and the crucial role each stakeholder should play in building a successful city brand.

Kasim *et al.* (2009:226) concur that city branding activities receive heavy criticism when stakeholders are not involved from the beginning. Kasim *et al.* give an example of Malaysia which failed to promote the country by using trade shows and overseas visits. The stakeholders used this failure to batter the concerned authorities. Pakistan, Turkey and Indonesia, according to Kasim *et al.* (2009:226), are good examples of successful place brands that attached value to the importance of inter-organizational collaboration and partnerships for tourism development. Klijn *et al.* (2012:503, 505) argue that sometimes stakeholders can exercise an unwritten “veto” power. This can be demonstrated by citizens of Cape Verde who felt Brand Cape Verde was not authentic enough and did not “encapsulate the Cape Verde experience” (Dos Santos & Campo 2014:97).

Figure 1 below reflects the city/place branding process and how stakeholders partake in city brand development. It also shows other aspects that should be taken into account when branding a place.

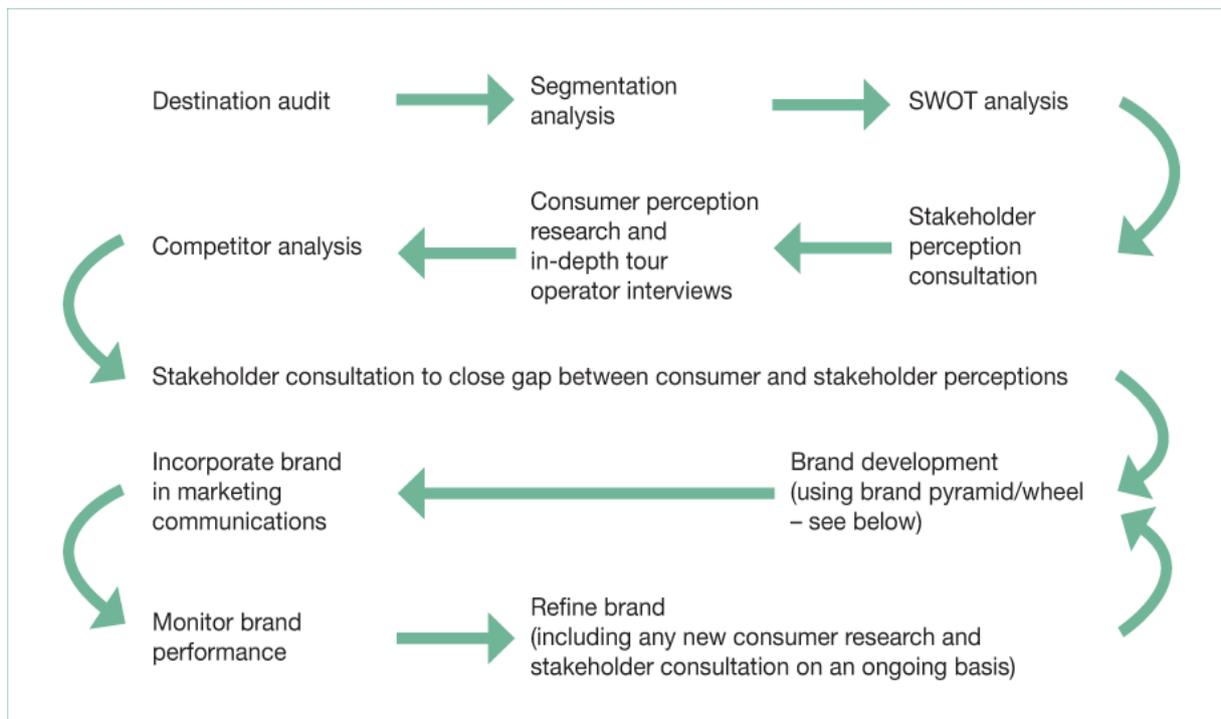


Figure 1: The branding process (Source: WTO, 2009:35)

Saraniemi (2009:374) reasons that lack of collaboration between critical stakeholders in place branding can kill the communication of the brand promise entirely. Stakeholders’ involvement can be the difference between brand success and failure. Tkaczynski and Rundle-Thiele (2009:397) highlight the importance of the stakeholder theory which “argues that the interests

of all stakeholders are of intrinsic value”. Therefore it is essential to know the thoughts of key stakeholders, what motivates them and what it is that they value dearly. When all stakeholders are engaged in every stage of city branding there is collective response when there are challenges and difficulties (Oliveira, 2015:23). Stakeholders, according to Oliveira legitimize a city brand and influence the meaning of the city (i.e. Barcelona is anchored around urban planning) because of their buy-in. For instance, in 1988 Barcelona, together with the main actors, adopted a strategic plan which resulted in an acceptable outcome of the whole branding exercise before and after the Olympic Games in 1992. In the United Kingdom, the city of Manchester used the partnership of the stakeholders to create an enduring city brand after the success of the 2002 Commonwealth Games.

Du Toit-Helmbold (2011) indicates that building a city brand firstly involves looking for the single-minded idea of the city brand and secondly establishing key pillars that must underpin the city brand. Thirdly, the city brand should identify the actual target market that it seeks to satisfy. Fourthly, it is important when building a city brand to know what makes your city different and competitive in relation to other cities. Finally, Du Toit-Helmbold mentions that it is fitting to establish the macro trends that the city should leverage. Cities must state why they want to brand as the following section explains. Figure 2 reflects how cities can build their brands using both internal and external assessments.



Figure 2: The five-stage brand pyramid (Source: WTO, 2009:45)

Hassan *et al.* (2010:275) stress that city brand positioning should be able to arouse consumer senses, touch their hearts and stimulate their minds. The city brand practitioners should make the city brand appeal to the consumers’ emotions and minds. Brands that evoke emotional responses have a compelling competitive advantage. Hassan *et al.* (2010:275) offer three ways in which city brand positioning should be done to attract tourists:

- Identifying a set of possible competitive advantages upon which to build a position.
- Selecting the right competitive advantage.



- Effectively communicating a delivering the chosen position to a carefully selected target market.

Method of Research

The purpose of this research was to explore practical ways that could be used to brand the city of Gaborone so that it can at least begin to become a competitive city destination. The study therefore asked the following questions:

- How do branded cities perform compared to unbranded cities such as Gaborone?
- What measures can be put in place to brand or make the city of Gaborone competitive?
- What are the potential benefits of branding Gaborone as a city destination?

Qualitative research was chosen for this study because it is flexible, probes to get clarifications and highlights issues that the researchers may miss. It is also more inductive. This qualitative study however, with more emphasis on the content analysis approach, investigated the lack of competitiveness of Gaborone as an unbranded city. Furthermore, the study explored several methods of branding the city of Gaborone. This was done by gathering opinions and recommendations from the relevant respondents at organizations in Gaborone. Semi-structured interviews were used in the study because they were more probing and not entirely restrictive compared to structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews perfectly complemented the content analysis and provided the ability to generate themes and ideas as the study progressed.

Reliability and validity in this study was achieved by a constant comparison and accuracy of data collected (Kolb, 2012:85 and Brink, 1993:37). Qualitative studies generally are difficult to generalize but the study findings could be generalized if similar conditions are present in another city in a developing country which is at an identical developmental stage as Gaborone. For this study directed content analysis was used to focus more on the data and allowed the themes to emerge. This finally resulted in a persuasive framework that could be adopted to brand the city of Gaborone.

For this study the population comprised of carefully selected marketing and branding practitioners in academia and from the private sector organizations that could play a pivotal role in branding Gaborone to be a tourist city destination. The inclusion of the academia and private sector was an attempt to have a balanced, credible and representative study. The study focused on both academia and private sector organizations to reduce biasness and improve the credibility of the study. The study used a total of five (5) respondents from academia and the private sector organizations. From academia a marketing practitioner and a tourism marketing practitioner were used as participants. From the private sector organizations a creative director and two marketing professionals were selected for the interviews. Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents and were identified as the key opinion leaders to provide credible and correct data.

The instrument used in this study was piloted with three selected participants so that if there were issues that needed modifications they could be attended to. Research experts were also used as part of the pilot study to find out if the study questions had been arranged correctly, did not infringe on participant's privacy and if the research instrument could competently unearth the wanted data. Ethical issues were also to be adhered to. The participants were interviewed in the study at varying stages. Follow-up questions yielded more information during the interviews. Semi-standardized or unstructured interviews were used as they allowed for pre-determined questions and questions that were generated by answers to pre-determined questions.



The study adhered to the concepts of trustworthiness according to Elo *et al.* (2014:2). For example the concept credibility, was adhered to by using only people with a marketing background. With transferability, the findings from Gaborone, a city in a developing country, could be cautiously used in another city at a similar developmental level.

Results and interpretation

This section presents responses to questions that were asked during the interview sessions. In total there were five interview questions administered face-to-face to the interviewees by the researchers. The responses are discussed in the following section and other results are presented in the form of tables.

Is branding Gaborone a beneficial exercise?

The first question wanted to establish if branding the city of Gaborone would be worthwhile and beneficial. All the respondents, except one, agreed with the interview questions although they gave different reasons to support their stance. Those who agreed stated that Gaborone could become more competitive if properly branded. This finding is in harmony with Linh's (2012:16) contention that city branding creates image differentiation, which leads to uniqueness and competitiveness respectively. Furthermore, Salman (2008), Prophet (2006:2), Clark *et al.* (2011: 3), Tayebi (2006:11), Zerrillo and Thomas (2007:90) again argue that a city brand must be unique with an enduring brand essence and inimitable identity. The findings of this study therefore suggest that the city of Gaborone should brand itself in order to have a competitive tourist identity and to stand out in a "sea" of rivals.

It is unfortunate that Gaborone cannot currently be associated with any unique brand, and is regrettably unknown and cannot thus begin to compete with branded cities. If properly branded, Gaborone may have an enduring brand essence and a specific target audience or market. The city of Gaborone should be associated with a particular characteristic that communicates what it stands for. For example, as indicated earlier by Prophet (2006:2), "Barcelona is culture, Tokyo is modernity and Rio is fun". This a clear manifestation that cities compete based on their strong characteristics. Branding a city in essence requires consistency, a sense of pride from the all stakeholders, and continuous brand refreshment that does not compromise the city's brand essence. When there is no buy-in from stakeholders the city brand cannot be a success. For instance, citizens in Cape Verde rebelled because they felt Brand Cape Verde was not representative of their country (Dos Santos & Campo 2014:97). Table 1 shows the different responses on how branding Gaborone will be a beneficial exercise.

Table 1: Is branding a beneficial exercise to Gaborone?

Category	Code	Quote to support category creation	Comment
Branding as beneficial to Gaborone	Unique selling proposition	"Yes, branding Gaborone is indeed a beneficial exercise. It results in unique selling proposition"	It might mean getting out of the comfort zone to look distinctively competitive.
	Commercial growth	"Most definitely! Branding Gaborone will result in sustainable multiplier effect and potential for GDP growth"	Growth of other sectors, livelihood improvement and increased production.
	Competitiveness	"Yes! Branding increases any place's	Again this may mean Gaborone doing away



		competitiveness. If Gaborone is branded it will be known for a particular competitive character”	with its usual basic tag and becoming known for something else.
	Existential expression	“Yes! Branding Gaborone will give the city or any other city an existential expression. Branding brings a sense of pride to citizens”	“...existential expression” means the purpose why the city is what it is.

How do branded cities outperform unbranded cities

The study also sought to find out the recipe for success for branded cities vis-à-vis unbranded cities. Irrespective of personal, product or place orientation, branding should have a purpose that is unambiguously communicated to the target audience. All kinds of brands carry memories and values cherished by customers.

Successful city brands possess unique elements that give them a competitive advantage. Salman (2008) and Prophet (2006:2) indicate that cities such as New York, London, Milan and Hong Kong are competitive because they have good marketing strategies, are devoted to elements that support their branding efforts, and have their identities associated with their characteristics. For example, London has its own Communications Strategy 2015-2018; and Melbourne has the Melbourne City Marketing Strategy 2013-2016. These documents promote and enhance the images of these cities and outline the direction for their marketing. In contrast, according to the interviewees of this study, Gaborone does not even have any strategic document whatsoever that guides its development.

Successful cities are also associated with particular visual elements or events. A mere mention of the landmark or visual element effectively brings into mind the name of the city. For example, Table Mountain and Robben Island represent the City of Cape Town and the Rio Carnival is synonymous with the city of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. The successful cities leverage on these landmarks and events and consciously make these landmarks or elements conspicuous in their marketing activities. For example, Paris uses the Eiffel Tower in virtually all its promotional initiatives and even uses the tower as its visual representation. However, unbranded cities like Gaborone cannot be successful if they do not have anything associated with them.

Furthermore, the interviewees in this study argued that cities with better facilities and attractions tend to outperform unbranded cities. This finding confirms The Guardian’s survey (Michael, 2014:1) which selected Los Angeles as a top city brand due to its clean beaches and infrastructure. The findings again correspond with the claim that city brands become successful when they have assets such as attractions, infrastructure as well as safety for the visitors. Cities with Blue Flag beaches such as Cape Town by far out-compete their rivals. For a city to compete internationally it must have proper signage, clean amenities at points of entry and so forth. The attractions have to be clean, pristine and sustainably managed like the Okavango Delta, Table Mountain and the like.

The findings of this study however show that Gaborone falls short of international branding standards due to below average facilities. For example, Gaborone currently does not have either a man-made or even a natural world class attraction for it to be competitive. Comparatively, Barcelona has the Museum of Contemporary Art and Sydney has The Sydney Opera House. The interviewees in this study argued that Gaborone City should be innovatively branded in order to compete effectively in the 21st century. City branding is all about being different and not being loyal to conformity. Properly branded cities are cosmopolitan and good



for staying, working and studying. The interviewees indicated that the city of Gaborone should benchmark from successful cities because branding gives a city a sustainable competitive advantage. The findings of this study showed that the city of Gaborone does not have an integrated identity that can receive required and desirable media coverage. Unfortunately the media cannot give Gaborone exposure as the city has nothing to show, and as a result the city is not internationally renowned. Table 2 shows the respondents' answers on how branded cities do better than unbranded cities.

Table 2: How do branded cities outperform unbranded cities?

Category	Code	Quote to support category creation	Comment
Performances of branded cities	Marketing strategies	"Cities like London and Cape Town have been in existence for a long time and embraced globalization quite early. And most importantly they have more resources and correct marketing strategies and consistency in brand promise"	Being proactive and correct marketing
	Association with visual element	"Branded cities i.e. Cape Town are successful due to their association with a particular element which is correctly positioned i.e. Table Mountain"	Selecting what works for Gaborone and enhancing a city's ability to compete
	Facilities and attractions	"Branded cities are able to outperform unbranded cities because they have better facilities, world-class attractions and information accessibility"	Branded cities are developed
	Creation of identity	"Branded cities have packaged their elements or characteristics competitively; the way they present themselves to their audiences and because they have an identity"	Knowledge of what the city has and must do to be successful
	Media coverage	"Branded cities have pronounced identity and have proper and patriotic media coverage. Secondly, these cities send correct content through correct channels"	The ability of the city to share with the audience who they are and what they have

What characteristics can be used in branding Gaborone?

The most successful cities have characteristics that have competitively helped them to outmanoeuvre the maze of competing rivals. These enduring characteristics are associated with the cities as enablers. For example, warmth, peace and safety are good elements that city brands exploit to remain competitive. The interview findings revealed that elements or characteristics on their own are not draw cards to destinations but provide conditions good enough for cities to excel. For example, Sydney and Los Angeles have a relatively good climate as an element and Istanbul has a rich culture as an attraction. The characteristics are an ignition that launches the journey to the city destination. Characteristics can be natural or



man-made. Climate for example, is a natural characteristic whilst investor friendly environment or policies, warmth, and safety are man-made characteristics. Successful city brands have these characteristics and meticulously and expertly exploit them to create competitive city brand personalities.

The interview findings also suggest that Gaborone does not have well researched specific characteristics or attributes that might be used as a competitive advantage. Again Gaborone is unfortunately hamstrung by centralism. Unlike semi-autonomous cities such as Kuala Lumpur and Cape Town, the city of Gaborone is not empowered to take responsibility of its own development. Unfortunately for Gaborone, its governance is highly centralized.

However, the findings positively revealed that all the respondents thought that Gaborone is blessed with peace and tranquillity, peace and security, and investment opportunities. Indeed the mentioned elements can be accentuated to brand Gaborone as a competitive modern city brand. However, it is important to note that elements alone are simply appetizers and are not the main ingredients of branding initiatives. Forty percent (40%) of the interviewees said peace and tranquillity are the right elements to brand Gaborone; twenty percent (20%) indicated peace and security are the bases that Gaborone can use to brand itself; twenty percent (20%) thought that safety alone was non-negotiable; while the remaining twenty percent (20%) were convinced that a combination of safety and investment friendly policies were sound characteristics needed to brand the city of Gaborone. The referred responses show that almost all responses lean towards peace and safety. This again validates the assertion by Michael (2014) that “the improving crime rate” helped Los Angeles to the top of the 2014 Guardian Cities brand barometer. A safe environment is good for students, visitors, local community and more essentially for investors. Similarly, the city of Cape of Town positions itself not only as a visitor friendly city but investor friendly city as well. The evidence shows that investment friendly policies are vital in helping cities to brand themselves. Table 3 captures the actual responses on which characteristics Gaborone can use to brand itself.

Table 3: What characteristics can be used in branding Gaborone?

Category	Code	Quote to support category creation	Comment
Gaborone branding characteristics	Peace and tranquillity	“Gaborone and Botswana by extension is a peaceful city. Batswana are warm and friendly and Gaborone can leverage the peaceful environment to brand itself”	Gaborone as a city has an advantage of being free of crime
	Peace and security	“Gaborone can use peace and security. However, peace and security on their own are neither services nor products; they just provide a supportive and enabling environment. People don’t come for peace. For example, Melbourne is peaceful but people do come for other things i.e. the Melbourne Cricket Ground”	Safe and secure environment is good for the city but coupled with attractions
	Peace and tranquillity	“Gaborone is a modern cosmopolitan city with peace as its strategic	The city is a safe place where people can visit and stay



		advantage. Gaborone has zero chances of mugging, terrorism and uncontrollable criminal activities”	
	Safety	“The city can use safety simply because safety is the cog in city branding. Secondly, people (Batswana) in Gaborone are hospitable, courteous and the country is stable politically”	Batswana prefer secure environment for people to visit the city
	Safety and investment	“Gaborone is safe unlike other cities in neighbouring countries i.e. Johannesburg. Again there are liberal economic policies making it a good place to invest in”	People can open businesses in safe places

Why should Gaborone use the selected characteristics to brand itself?

Cities around the world justify the decisions they make when choosing certain characteristics to brand themselves. In personal branding, individuals select certain characteristics about themselves that they sometimes commercially exploit to make a living. Likewise, cities select certain characteristics or elements that can brand them. Selecting those characteristics requires consultation and participation of all relevant stakeholders. City characteristics are the pillars that distinguish the city from others; make the city different; and are the unique strengths that the city exploits in order to compete with other cities. The characteristics help to distinguish the city from other competing cities provided there is consistency in these characteristics. In branding, consistency is a competitive advantage and it should be closely guarded.

The interview findings also point out that all the respondents believed that using the characteristics mentioned will give Gaborone a competitive advantage. For example, the respondents emphasized that Gaborone should use peace and tranquillity as its competitive advantage. They argued that a peaceful environment is an enabler for students, tourists, and for immigration. Peaceful cities are more competitive than cities with many incidents of crime. For example, Michael (2014) says that crime in Rio de Janeiro discourages people from going to the city. It should be noted, however, that peace with nothing for visitors, investors and students is also not economically beneficial.

The respondents to this study believe that Gaborone should use peace and safety to create an enhanced sense of belonging in the city. A safe and tolerant environment is an asset for the city; it creates a welcoming and homely atmosphere for visitors, students and investors. Safety does not only mean lack of crime but also refers to the absence of ills such xenophobia, racism, tribalism or any other circumstance that may cause anxiety or discomfort to the visitors. Policy changes such as a sudden introduction of strict visa requirements may unsettle students, visitors and investors. Investors prefer certainty but the absence of it causes jitters in the market.

Gaborone however, is doing very well when it comes to peace and safe environment. Gaborone does not experience high incidents of violent crime as compared to a city like Johannesburg in South Africa. The city of Gaborone enjoys policy certainty, stable currency and economy, and low labour unrest. It does not have any reported cases of xenophobia and



other associated kinds of discrimination and this is a characteristic that the city should use to brand itself. Table 4 shows the responses that were given on why the city of Gaborone should use the given characteristics.

Table 4: Why should Gaborone use the identified characteristics to brand itself?

Category	Code	Quote to support category creation	Comment
Characteristics justification	Comparative advantage	"Gaborone should use peace and tranquillity because that is its comparative advantage"	The city should emphasize what works in its favour
	Sense of belonging	"Safety and peace result in a homely environment and in a sense of belonging. Safety is an asset for any city brand. Los Angeles has greatly improved that and gone up in cities' competitiveness index"	Safe places are preferable to both citizens and visitors and increase competitiveness
	Competitive strengths	"The city has to use safety and peace as they are the city's strengths. Places select what works and then consistently provide that"	Gaborone should stick to what works for it to compete
	Competitive advantage and uniqueness	"The characteristics chosen give the city a competitive advantage and will make Gaborone unique"	Differentiation can be attained through the ability to stand out

What are the benefits of branding the city of Gaborone?

City branding brings immeasurable benefits if done correctly. Good examples can be cited of cities that have had spectacular improvements in their competitiveness after branding. London, Melbourne and Hong Kong are examples of cities that have grown in visitor numbers and as recipients of foreign direct investment because they got the fundamentals of city branding right. City branding brings different benefits to different cities depending on the city's positioning. For example, London is the world's leading financial capital and Hong Kong is known for trade. Cities should have brands that are well-researched and consistent and known by all stakeholders. City branding gives residents a sense of pride, helps guide city development or urban renaissance, improves quality of services, promotes the city's activities and attractions, gives the city an integrated identity and has potential for attracting investment.

Branding the city of Gaborone will help it to enjoy numerous benefits. Forty percent (40%) of the interview respondents in this study said branding Gaborone would improve the city's brand equity; forty percent (40%) said the city would experience value addition if branded; twenty percent (20%) were of the opinion that branding Gaborone would make the city identifiable among its peers.

Branding a city in many cases has resulted in the improvement of the city's brand equity. Brand equity is all about the value that customers attach to the brand. This value is based on the customers' perceptions on what the brand can do for them. Cities do not create brand equity but the consistent and constant rendering of services attach value to both tangible and intangible services. Customers' perception towards the services is the beginning of brand equity. Good brand equity is built over a long period of time after the consistency in delivering services and products. Cities as well are no exceptions. The brand equity of every city can



only soar if all sectors of the economy in the city and all stakeholders play their roles in consistently rendering exceptional and value adding services. This ranges from attractions, accommodation facilities, entry points, restaurants, immigration, police, banks, medical facilities and so forth.

Sadly, Gaborone is well known for what may be termed 'lukewarm' services in both the public and private sectors. For example, long queues at entry points, banks, retailers, and municipal offices are very common in Gaborone. For Gaborone to kick-start branding initiatives it has to improve a lot of things including the aforementioned shortcomings. Gaborone cannot have high value brand equity whilst it still renders mediocre services. Cities are aggressively competing to be at the top and like fishes in an aquarium those who are weak will be swallowed. Gaborone is no exception. The city must have a wide ranging consultative meeting with its stakeholders to improve service delivery and product quality. If the city addresses all its shortcomings and brands itself, its brand equity should improve as well. Strong brand equity can stand the test of time even when circumstances are tough; and it simplifies choices for customers.

Branding the city of Gaborone may result in value addition for the city and surrounding areas. If Gaborone is branded, its standing may definitely rise because peoples' perceptions would be correctly influenced by the city brand communication. An unbranded city does not know its value until it is branded and people start to look at it through different lenses. The perceived value of a place tends to improve when it is associated with a particular image or identity. A well branded city communicates quality, status, a certain reputation and city-specific perceptions. It might be safe to say Gaborone will have an upward swing in value if it is branded. Value addition will only happen when Gaborone gives customers good experiences and memories and consistently responds to customers' needs, wants and expectations as demonstrated by Holt *et al.* (2004:70).

A successful city tends to empower nearby places economically. For example, places such as Watford, Harrow, and Harlow benefit immensely from their physical proximity to London. By the same token, branding Gaborone would improve the city's surrounding areas economically. Places such as Mochudi, Ramotswa, Tlokweng and Molepolole would benefit from being in the vicinity of a well branded Gaborone. These places could piggyback on the success of a branded Gaborone and open new enterprises, engage in cultural renaissance, develop a supply chain, and embark on infrastructural improvements. Places in the periphery of a branded city or place are always recipients of trickle down advantages. It is envisaged that places around Gaborone would also see the benefits of being economically and socio-culturally linked to a branded city.

The findings of this study showed that branding Gaborone would result in easy identification of the city. This confirms the assertions of Kavaratzis (2004:62), Morrison and Anderson (2002:16) and Risitano (2005:4) that city branding is a conscious process of having a "unique and desired identity" or a process of "developing a unique identity and personality that is different from competing destinations". Without a doubt branding gives a city a competitive identity. It makes the city known and it gets it registered in the customers' minds. A city that does not have an identity is virtually unknown and cannot be marketed. Cities like Paris, New York, Tokyo, Milan, and Barcelona have identities that benefit their competitiveness. Paris is known for romance and ambience; New York for energy; Milan for fashion; and Barcelona for the Cataluña culture. Due to branding, the above elements have reinforced the identities of these cities. Identity is thus clearly a distinguishing feature of a city and helps it to uniquely present itself to its audience.

Gaborone, sadly, falls into the unwelcome category of cities that are virtually unknown. A city identity that exudes confidence, energy, value and memories makes the city competitive. A



specific identity and theme would arguably make Gaborone competitive. Branding the city of Gaborone may further well position it and make it a springboard for entrepreneurship and new industries. A city identity comes from the skilful packaging of its elements for differentiation purposes. Differentiation sells as it caters for a particular segment or niche. As the WTO (2009:7) puts it, branding is the “best psychological vehicle for delivering the meaning”. Table 6 shows the responses that were provided by respondents when asked about the potential benefits of branding Gaborone and Botswana at large.

Table 6: What are the benefits of branding the city of Gaborone?

Category	Code	Quote to support category creation	Comment
Branding benefits for Gaborone and Botswana	Gaborone brand equity	“Indeed the benefits are immense. Branding the city will create jobs but most importantly branding Gaborone will improve the city’s brand equity”	Branding can bring many improvements and shape perceptions about Gaborone
	Value addition	“Of course yes. If Gaborone is branded there will be addition of perceived value to the city and its periphery”	This can mean being able to compete because of branding
	Value addition	“Every place or city that brands itself will have enduring benefits. If Gaborone is branded there will be value addition to the city and surrounding places. And there can be supply chain improvement”	This can mean being able to compete because of branding
	Easy identification	“For Gaborone the benefits will be massive; the city will have a known identity with a theme. Again branding the city can act as a springboard for entrepreneurship and new industries”	If a city is not branded it is basically unknown. However, branding cities may re-invigorate other economic sectors
	Competitiveness	“Yes. Gaborone will be competitively unique due to correct packaging of its characteristics. And there is a possibility of other places nearest to Gaborone piggy-backing”	Means grouping all that the city has to help the city known and compete effectively.

Emerging themes

Except for Question 1, all answers from the respondents to the other four questions gravitated to one general theme. In Question 1 one respondent was unsure about his answer whereas the other four answers were unanimous. The discussion between researcher and the supervisor played a role in reducing researcher bias and improving trustworthiness of the study. All interview responses (both hard copy and recorded) were discussed and analysed until the core themes emerged. New categories did not emerge meaning that the data analysis was basically saturated.

Five major themes emerged. Firstly, the respondents believed that branding the city of Gaborone would be a beneficial undertaking as it would give the city a unique selling



proposition. The answers that were given centred on a unique selling proposition as a central theme. The second theme that emerged was that cities such London and Paris were competitive because of their identities' characteristics. Peace and security emerged as the third theme. All the respondents' unanimously said Gaborone should use peace and security to brand itself. Competitiveness emerged as the fourth theme. Here the respondents argued that peace and security could give the city of Gaborone a competitive advantage. The final theme that emerged is brand equity enhancement. All the respondents said branding the city would result in brand equity enhancement for the city of Gaborone. Table 7 below shows the emerged central themes of the study or saturation coding.

Table 7: Emerged themes

<i>Category</i>	<i>Central theme</i>	<i>Interviewee</i>
Question 1 <i>Branding as beneficial exercise to Gaborone</i>	Unique selling proposition Purpose is unsure	1, 2, 4 & 5 3
Question 2 <i>Performance of branded cities</i>	City brand identity association with city characteristics	1, 2, 3, 4 & 5
Question 3 <i>Gaborone branding characteristics</i>	Peace and security	1, 2, 3, 4 & 5
Question 4 <i>Characteristics justification</i>	Competitive advantage	1, 2, 3, 4 & 5
Question 5 <i>Branding benefits for Gaborone and Botswana</i>	Brand equity enhancement	1, 2, 3, 4 & 5

The above section discussed the findings of this study and the subsequent themes that emerged from the discussion. It has been revealed that cities do benefit immensely from being branded. Branded cities tend to outperform unbranded cities because they have good marketing strategies and are boosted by their association with some of their competitive characteristics. The findings showed that branding Gaborone would improve its competitiveness as it would have an existential expression like other brand cities. The findings also showed that Gaborone could use elements such as peace and security and investment friendly policies to become a competitive and unique city.

Finally, five major themes emerged that Gaborone can use as a possible framework for its branding efforts. Branding Gaborone would give the city a unique selling proposition due to characteristics it may select to use and give it a sound idea on how to market itself. The city should use peace and security as the core characteristic for branding competitiveness and brand equity enhancement.

Implications and recommendations

The following recommendations are presented based on the research findings:

- The researchers recommend that the city of Gaborone should develop a strategic plan pertaining to its own branding after a needed wide ranging stakeholder consultation process is effectively undertaken.
- It is recommended that Botswana and by implication Gaborone be anchored in the political organisation of federalism, as it gives cities autonomy in decision making. For



example the City of Cape Town has its own Economic Growth Strategy. Semi-autonomy or complete autonomy gives the city authority on its developmental agenda.

- The government of Botswana should consider partial or complete decentralization to enable cities such Francistown, Kasane, Maun as well as Gaborone to take control of their strategic developmental needs.
- It is prudent that the city of Gaborone should also improve its infrastructure and service quality, and should reduce bureaucratically driven red tape, and upgrade the state of attractions and facilities on offer.
- Another recommendation is to improve the quality of education, particularly tertiary education. Places or cities like Cape Town have universities, such as the University of Cape Town, that offer good quality education which is an attraction for international students to come and study in Cape Town.

Limitations

This study appears to be the first one of its kind although it may have its own inadequacies. The small number of respondents might compromise the representativeness of the study. However, the researchers are convinced the study carries reasonable credibility because suitable respondents were selected. It is for this reason that the researcher recommends that further studies with different methodologies or approaches be conducted to further understand how Gaborone could be branded to become a competitive city brand.

Conclusion

The study sought to solicit ideas on how Gaborone as the capital city of the Republic of Botswana, could be branded to become a tourist competitive city brand. It is reasonable to conclude that the respondents unanimously agree that the city of Gaborone has to be branded to become a competitive global city brand. The study has revealed that branding Gaborone would be a very beneficial exercise not only for tourist destinations, as the city would have a unique selling proposition. Secondly, it also came out from the study that branded cities are competitive because their identities are associated with the cities' characteristics or elements. Furthermore, this study has ascertained that cities around the world select certain characteristics and stick with them since chosen characteristics give cities competitive advantages i.e. this study showed that Gaborone should use peace and security as an anchor characteristic. Finally, the study has unveiled that if Gaborone is branded, its brand equity will be significantly enhanced in similar fashion to other branded cities.

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