

Developing a Green Brand Through Co-Creation Process of Krabi, Thailand

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This paper has shed light on how stakeholders participate in the branding process through the concept of co-creation, whereby a brand may be managed for sustainability. Data was collected by focus group interviews from tourism and environmental stakeholders, together with projective techniques from domestic and international tourists. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data. The results indicated that a brand culture of green tourism plays an important role in developing green behavior, whereby it requires the cooperation of, and co-creation by all stakeholders to develop a strong brand identity in a single message. The analysis provides a template for using destination branding to drive green tourism culture. This study did not investigate the success of the new brand identity in attracting tourists. Therefore, a longitudinal study should be conducted to follow up the brand development process, in order to demonstrate the success of the branding.

Key words: *Destination Branding, Krabi Go Green, Brand Culture, Brand Identity, Brand Co-Creation*

Introduction

In traditional perspective of branding, consumers play a passive role in branding process (Almeyda-Ibáñez & George, 2017; Day, 2011). Consumers only focus on their perception and feeling toward brand, products and services as communicated by the company. However, with the marketing revolution, many scholars have mentioned a new role of consumers in marketing and branding (Tajvidi et al., 2018; Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder, 2017; Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001; Fournier, 1998). For example, in the football fan community, ThisIsAnfield.com, Liverpool FC fans can co-create brand story and culture of the Liverpool FC through the social interaction (Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011). Many scholars in branding, e.g., Holt (2004); Schroeder (2009); Almeyda-Ibáñez & George (2017), do not only focus on consumers in branding process, but also pay attention to stakeholders. However, there are very few attempts to provide an empirical study to demonstrate how brand management can bring stakeholders in branding process.

As a product of tourism industry, the destination branding considers the importance of tourism stakeholders' role in branding process. Currently, there are many destination choices available to tourists, therefore, developing destination branding strategies are complex and challenging, partly related to the development of the experiential elements and the understanding of tourists' decision-making process (Almeyda-Ibáñez & George, 2017). The challenges come from: the multidimensional aspects of destination branding; differences in the interests of diverse stakeholders; the inconsistency of the brand message; the lack of control of the brand promise; the difficulty of measuring the brand equity; and the problem of funding (Pike, 2015; Buhalis & Inversini, 2014). Many researchers have attempted to develop destination branding models, in order to find the most appropriate managerial solutions by focusing on tourism stakeholders. For instance, García et al., (2012) proposed the development of a destination-branding model, based on stakeholders' interests, through the creation of an index that measures the success of destination branding by concentrating on the similarities and differences that exist in a particular brand. Wang (2019) focuses on multiple stakeholders by exploring brand perception toward green city brand. However, Wang (2019) has overlooked how destination branding can be employed in green tourism development.

Tourism stakeholders in Krabi, including the Governor of Krabi, Tourism Authority of Thailand, Tourism Association, Chamber of Commerce, Hotel Associations, Tourism Council, together with small tourism businesses and local tourism communities, had

collaborated to co-create the Krabi Declaration: namely, that Krabi would become a green destination with eco-friendly tourism activities, accommodations and services. The Krabi Green tourism brand has become the stimulus for eco-friendly tourists to visit Krabi, because tourists' attitude and environment responsibility play an important role to drive eco-friendly tourism (Patwary et al., 2020). However, different stakeholders in the Krabi Tourism Industry applied different brand concepts to attract tourists, especially international tourists, e.g., the Krabi Tourism Association with '*Miracle of Krabi*'; the Tourism Authority of Thailand with '*We are Krabi*'; and the Krabi Chamber of Commerce with '*The Best of Krabi*'. This situation caused problems in the branding process, because a brand should provide a single message and be communicated in the same direction (Schroeder, 2009). After several meetings with tourism stakeholders in Krabi, all participants were congruent in developing the Krabi '*Go Green*' brand.

Although many scholars are concerned about how stakeholders can co-create destination branding (e.g., Buhalis & Inversini, 2014; Neuhofer et al., 2014; Kotsi et al., 2016; Maheshwari et al., 2014; Yosof & Ismal, 2015), there is little interest in employing the concept of co-creation and brand culture in driving sustainability. Thus, the objective of this paper is to demonstrate how stakeholders play an important role in destination branding to drive green tourism. This research applies the concepts of destination brand, co-creation and brand culture to the process of destination branding.

Literature Review

Destination branding

Ritchie & Ritchie (1998, p. 103) firstly defined a destination brand as "a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination; furthermore, it conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; it also serves to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience". The definition has been revised by Blain et al., (2005, p. 337) as "the set of marketing activities that: (1) support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that readily identifies and differentiates a destination; that (2) consistently convey the expectation of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; that (3) serve to consolidate and reinforce the emotional connection between the visitor and the destination; and that (4) reduce consumer search costs and perceived risk. Collectively, these

activities serve to create a destination image that positively influences consumer destination choice". Recently, destination branding plays an important role as strategic marketing to deliver value proposition (Zenker, Braun & Peterson, 2017). This also includes brand image which affects the long-term profitability or tourist buying behavior (Foster & Johansyah, 2020).

Co-creation of a brand by stakeholders

Prior research into brand management has increasingly considered the roles of multiple stakeholders in creating brand value and culture, because brands belong to various groups (Wang, 2019; Kotsi et al., 2016; Maheshwari et al., 2014). These authors found that there are many stakeholders involved in the destination branding process including local people, investors, local and international tourists, government agencies, primary services of the core destination brand (e.g., hotels, travel agents and retailers), secondary services (brand infrastructure relationships) and the media (e.g., advertising, publicity and public relations).

However, there is a paucity of information on how multiple stakeholders engage in the branding of a destination to co-create brand value and culture. A few studies on destination branding have only involved some stakeholders. For example, Risitano (2006) investigated the role of tourism stakeholders in Campi Flegrei (Italy), including policy makers, entrepreneurs, and local and foreign tourists. These studies did not take local people into account; however García et al., (2012) developed a destination-branding model based on three groups of stakeholders (entrepreneurs, local people and visitors) in Spain. They found that multiple stakeholders, including local people, can play a role in constructing the brand identity of the destination. Thus, it is important to consider various stakeholders to widen the scope of destination branding.

Jones (2005) suggested using a stakeholder-brand equity model to brand a destination, which combines the stakeholder concept with brand equity and confirms that the interconnections of multiple stakeholders lead to brand equity. Additionally, Buhalis (2000) applied the stakeholder theory to tourism, analysing a perspective based on collaborative relationships among stakeholders. However, van Gelder (2008) highlighted the difficulty of bringing all stakeholders together to work as a group to develop destination branding. This is because, sometimes, the most powerful stakeholders try to impose their own interests on the branding process. They try to persuade and apply their power in many ways i.e. competent authority, legitimate authority, personal authority and induced authority (Marzano & Scott, 2009). Sheehan & Ritchie (2005) went

further by developing four types of management strategies i.e. collaborate, supportive, non-supportive and marginal, to deal with stakeholders.

Brand Culture: Co-Creation of a Destination Brand

Although Buhalis & Inversini (2014) mentioned a number of stakeholders in destination branding, including uncontrollable messages from tourists through technologies such as Facebook or eWOM, there has been scant interest in exploring how marketing can manage multiple stakeholders in the destination branding process. Neuhofer et al., (2014) discussed how technology can be employed in the process of co-creating a tourist experience. However, both Buhalis & Inversini (2014) and Neuhofer et al., (2014) believed that brand management and tourists have separate roles in the branding process. Although branding scholars have concerns about differentiation among stakeholders, they tend to focus on a typical branding model. Beckmann & Zenker (2012) employed the concept of Keller (1993), visualising a brand as a network of associations in customers' minds. Therefore, brand management requires the brand strategy to repeat the point of sell continuously, in order to implant a positive image within customers' minds. Yusof & Ismaili (2015) viewed destination branding as being the interaction between brand identity and brand image, and employed the branding concept of Aaker (1991) to develop a destination brand that consists of brand identity, brand positioning and brand image (Pike, 2012). Barnett et al., (2006) stated that brand identity is the collection of all the main characteristics of brand. Many scholars (e.g., Yusof & Ismaili, 2015), viewed brand identity as being the image desired by destination management, and brand image as being the perception which tourists have of the destination. Therefore, this is problematic, because it is very difficult to control tourists' perceptions as brand management would like.

However, the evolution of consumer behavior and the ecology of branding have been changing throughout the era of digital technology. Consumers are now more active than in the former wave of technology (Pongsakornrungrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011). Many scholars have demonstrated the revolution in branding in the last 30 years e.g., Fournier, 1998, 'the relationship between consumer and brand'; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001, 'brand community'; Holt, 2004, 'iconic branding'; Schroeder & Salzer-Mörling, 2006, 'brand culture'. Therefore, unlike the concept of a brand proposed by Aaker (1991), recent marketing research (Campelo et al., 2013; Yusof & Ismaili, 2015) has considered a brand to be not just a logo or a name, especially in relation to destination

branding, which tends to be influenced by the culture of the particular city or nation. The development of destination branding requires the co-creation process among stakeholders, in order to include the historical context, culture and tradition, myth, and story (Schroeder, 2009). Therefore, brand management needs a tool or framework for understanding the cultural perspective of a brand, which enables the co-creation of a strong brand.

As mentioned above, destination branding differs from service branding in terms of the relationship and collaboration among stakeholders. Destination branding is moving beyond just the relationship between the demand and the supply sides, but it should employ the concept of brand culture (ibid.) by co-creation of the brand via collaboration between consumers, employees, organisations and media. Within the concept of brand culture, a brand is not only defined by its identity and image (Schroeder, 2009) but is also considered to be a communication object that contains the meaning, history, myth and the characteristics of consumers. Therefore, destination brand management should focus on how tourists can perceive the meaning of a brand in harmony with other stakeholders, especially in the era of the active consumer. This requires the concept of value co-creation (Pongsakornrunsilp & Schroeder, 2011) to co-create a brand, because consumers tend to trust their fellows rather than marketing messages.

Methods

A brand is influenced by cultural perspectives (Pongsakornrunsilp & Schroeder, 2017), which require the application of an appropriate research method if they are to be understood. Unlike other product or service brands, destination branding management cannot be developed as a centralised process, because stakeholders in the tourism industry differ in terms of authorities, characteristics and operations. Because of the complex nature of destination branding, brand management requires the collaboration and provision of data by all stakeholders. The traditional research inquiry cannot provide the relevant data for the branding process, and so qualitative research plays an important role in supporting the branding process (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, not only does qualitative research contribute to the richness of data, but it also fosters the participation of stakeholders, in addition to providing the opportunity for researchers to access the different sources of data that need to be understood (Creswell, 2007).

A qualitative approach allows brand researchers to deal with social and cultural aspects of branding through an inductive approach (Blaikie, 2004). The method can provide the in-depth, rich data on the cultural meaning of consumption. It helps researchers to understand the tourism

identity of the destination through stakeholders' perspectives. The research aims to understand their collaboration in building brand identity and how the co-creation process can co-create destination branding.

Data Collection

In order to understand how the Krabi Green Tourism brand is co-created from various tourism stakeholders, data was collected using three methods: focus groups, in-depth interviews and projective techniques. Before developing these data collection tools, a meeting was held of the key stakeholders to discuss tourism in Krabi. These stakeholders were informed of the destination branding project and were requested to take.

Focus groups were employed throughout the whole data collection process. To include all groups of Krabi tourism stakeholders, the research team held five main focus group sessions. There were 75 participants from various stakeholders, including government agencies, tourism businesses, service providers, tourists and local communities. Each session contained 1-4 small focus groups, depending on the number of participants. For example, there were 29 representatives of Krabi County in the session involving Krabi's government agencies, who were then divided into 4 small focus groups. The Krabi Declaration of 2013 was also included in the discussions, to ensure that all participants understood this tourism identity by which Krabi tourism stakeholders would like to be perceived by tourists. Each session lasted 1-3 hours.

12 people were interviewed in-depth. These were the key players in the tourism industry in Krabi, the objective being to understand their perspectives of the Krabi brand identity and image. The interviewees included representatives from the Tourism Authority of Thailand, the Tourism Associations and an Eco-tourism organisation, together with the Krabi Governor, a Krabi municipality officer and a hotel manager. Each interview lasted around 45 minutes to 1 hour.

Additionally, projective techniques were conducted using 43 international tourists (see Table 1), so as to understand what types of value tourists seek in Thai tourism, and travelling in general, and how they specifically perceived Krabi. By focusing on green tourism, international tourists were the main target group for the green tourism campaign. 20 pictures were presented to the participants, who were then asked to select the best 3 pictures which represented the Krabi

destination brand. This set of data allowed the researchers to understand tourists' perceptions of the Krabi brand.

Table 1: Nationality of Participants in Projective Techniques

Nationality	Percentage
European	37.21
Chinese	34.88
American	11.63
Australian	9.30
Other Asian	6.98

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data collected from the focus groups and in-depth interviews, including the projective technique in order to contribute the deep understanding of the contexts (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The iterative process of interpretation (see also Thompson, 1997) requires experience and skills to interpret the data. To increase the validity and reliability of this study, all data was transcribed and inscribed into the document, and all notes were re-read in order to confirm that there was no data error. The first author assigned codes to the data before the re-reading by other authors in order to eliminate unclear and duplicate codes. After there was no additional code from the data, meaning was provided for each code. Pongsakornrunsilp & Schroeder (2011) and also Pusaksrikit et al., (2013) have applied the iterative process of interpretation to analysis data by re-reading data, codes and themes many times until completing the iterative process. To demonstrate triangulation, data was initially analysed by two authors, and then all themes and codes were reconsidered by another author to understand data from different perspectives, and the process was repeated until there were no additional comments. Finally, the Krabi 'Go Green' brand was presented to stakeholders drawn from different organisations, in both the public and private sectors, in order to recheck the data and brand concept.

Results

Developing destination branding is different from developing other brands, because a destination brand is influenced by multi stakeholders, from both the public and private sectors. Although many scholars have been concerned about how stakeholders can co-create destination branding, there is little interest in employing the concept of co-creation in the branding process, especially in Asian countries. Figure 1 shows the co-creation process of destination branding, in which stakeholders from both the demand and supply sides were included in developing brand identity. The findings show that co-creating a destination brand requires three processes: learning, exploring and developing brand identity. The learning process relies on researchers preparing all materials that are needed for the branding process. These materials are then employed to obtain and explore insights from both the demand and supply sides. Finally, all data is synthesised to develop brand identity. This model can demonstrate how a destination brand can be created with a single message from the input of various stakeholders.

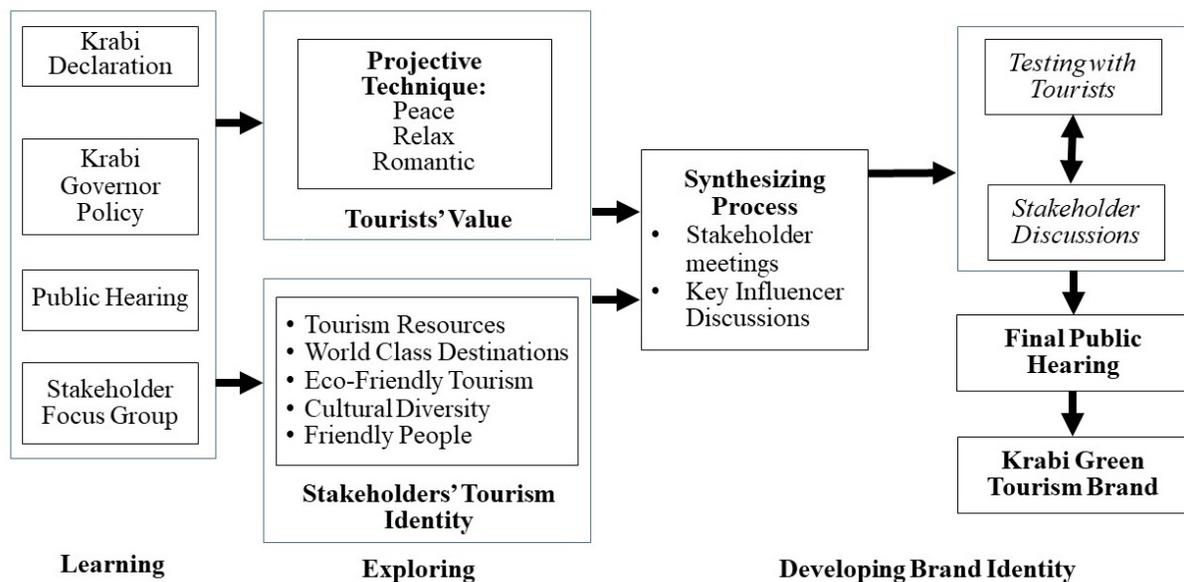


Figure 1: Co-Creation Process of Destination Branding

Learning Process

The process of learning is fundamental to destination branding, because it allows brand management to understand the branding ecology of a destination. The first step in the learning

process is one of accounting: whereby information is gathered from various sources, leading to an understanding of policy, participants, conditions and the limitations of destination branding. As mentioned earlier, the attention of stakeholders was drawn to the Krabi Declaration in order to fire up their determination to drive the concept of green tourism. At an earlier stage, the process and importance of destination branding were discussed with the Krabi Governor, in order to understand the policy of Krabi province regarding Krabi Green tourism. This step was essential to gain the cooperation of all government officers. The next step is understanding: by clarifying the branding process and introducing the brand building team to all stakeholders. As seen from brand literature, there are many models that can be applied to branding, and most stakeholders believed that developing a brand is only a logo design. Therefore, considering the different backgrounds of the stakeholders, they needed to be educated about the concept and direction of branding. This also helped to reduce any conflict among stakeholders arising from their unequal resources and experiences. During this process, the public hearing about the Krabi Green tourism brand was conducted, by inviting all stakeholders to take part in the meeting in order to gain data regarding how stakeholders in Krabi participated in the development of eco-friendly tourism activities. Before developing the data collection tools, the focus group with stakeholders was held to discuss the state of tourism in Krabi. Not only did the researchers gain data from these processes, but they were also able to inform all tourism stakeholders about the destination branding project, and to request the cooperation of all stakeholders. This was an initial process of co-creation, by enabling collaboration, because all stakeholders were recognised in developing the destination brand.

Exploring Process

The focus group interviews and projective technique were employed to gather all data relating to the branding process from stakeholders and also tourists. These methods play an important role in obtaining the data necessary for branding: i.e., tourists' value and stakeholders' tourism identity. The first step of the exploring process is reflecting: by discovering how tourists view or perceive tourism in Krabi. International tourists were found to consider eco-friendliness higher than domestic tourists; this was similarly found by research carried out in Koh Samui, Suratthane province (Pongsakornrunsilp, 2011). However, international tourists believed that the responsibility of taking care of the environment should be borne by all stakeholders: tourists, businesses and government.

This process employed projective techniques: using the data obtained for reflecting tourists' value toward travelling and tourism behavior. Participants were presented with 20 pictures relating to the images of Krabi held by tourists. After analysing the comments of the participants, three main themes of the Krabi tourism brand emerged: peace, relaxation and romance. Peace is an intangible aspect which tourists perceive during their stay in Krabi. A picture of a woman sitting on the beach, without any other tourists, was chosen as the one that best portrayed the experience of peace from visiting Krabi. However, this peace is not just about silence or quiet, but it is a peace which tourists can feel during their leisure time at Krabi tourist destinations, especially beach destinations where there are no deckchairs on the beach at all. For example, J, (34 years old Chinese Financial Manager), had only been to Phuket in Thailand. He likes the sea and beach, but needs peace and a quiet beach, rather than nightlife; therefore, he decided to visit Krabi. J. picked a picture of a white beach where there are no other tourists to represent peace.

Relaxation is an emotional aspect of the tourist experience. Compared to peace, tourists who visit Krabi can more readily feel or value the relaxation. The following quote is an example of relaxation:

"... beach makes me feel freedom and relaxation..."

R. (29 years old, German)

R. stayed in Thailand for a month. He loves rock climbing. Like other tourists who chose the picture of the beach as their favorite, he mentioned that this picture demonstrates how he feels about freedom and relaxation. Mostly, participants picked the beach to represent Krabi tourism because they feel it represents the beauty, unique experience, happiness and fun gained from visiting Krabi. Therefore, they can escape from the hustle and bustle of city life. A picture of food was chosen to represent another meaning of relaxation. The following quote is an example of relaxation by food:

"... Chinese has a saying 'Eating is the big thing' (民以食为天)...and here [Krabi] there are many delicious seafood menu..."

W. (26 years old, Chinese)

Like other Chinese tourists, W. enjoyed eating seafood during this, his second stay in Krabi. He talked about the Chinese culture of working hard and eating well; therefore, having a meal is the relaxation period when they can rest and get relief from their work.

The last theme, romance, is another emotional aspect of Krabi tourism. Mostly, a picture of a couple walking on the beach at sunset was picked to represent this aspect. Participants felt that they could experience romance from all beaches, because there are no deckchairs to obstruct their view, especially when they see a couple walking on the beach at sunset. This theme is in line with the other two (peace and relaxation), in that tourists can feel romance from a trip with their partner, family or friends. The following quote is an example of romance:

"... because beautiful and romantic sunset... sea and skyline, and a couple who walk together... It's really romantic..."

L. (68 years old, German)

According to C. (35 years old Indian), romance may also be experienced when visiting Krabi with friends. Remarkably, even a single tourist can also feel romantic in Krabi:

"... here [Krabi] is very romantic... even, I have no boyfriend, I come to see the sunset at the beach quite often..."

C. (23 years old, Indian)

The next step is identifying: by discussing the distinguishing aspects of Krabi tourism. The five focus group interviews were conducted with the cooperation of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, Krabi office. Participants were government officers together with representatives of the local community and tourism businesses. The focus groups concluded that the key aspects of Krabi tourism were: tourism resources, world class destination, eco-friendly, cultural diversity, and friendly people. The Krabi Governor stated that:

"Krabi, the living city – is full of friendly people. Krabi is not only about friendliness, but with globalisation, Krabi is also the global city because its diversity..."

According to the Krabi Governor, the main attributes of Krabi are friendliness, living city and diversity. These aspects are already contained in the Krabi Declaration of 2013. However, the

development of a destination brand using brand culture concepts requires the input of all stakeholders in the tourism industry. Consequently, the results of the focus group interviews demonstrated that there were five aspects to the identity of Krabi tourism:

1. Tourism resources: The Krabi tourism industry is varied and has plenty of natural resources, which are important tourist attractions, such as: beaches, islands, waterfalls, mountains, temples and hot springs; together with culture, art, local community way of life and history.
2. World-class destination: Krabi has many world class destinations, such as the Phi Phi Islands, Lanta Islands, Emerald Pool and Ao Nange. Tourism stakeholders in Krabi are proud of these destinations.
3. Eco-friendly destination: All stakeholders in Krabi are concerned about the environment and the impact on it from tourism. Therefore they have, over a long period of time, conducted sustainable activities in order to mitigate such impacts. One sentence is repeated, and reminded all stakeholders that:
"... They [tourists] come to Krabi because we do what we are..."
Viyada Srirangkul (Former Director, Tourism Authority of Thailand, Krabi Office)

Ms. Viyada Srirangkul said this in order to remind Krabi tourism stakeholders why they had to collaborate in promoting sustainable practice.
4. Cultural diversity: Krabi is a multicultural destination, where the way of life is bonded by different cultures and ethnic groups. This blend results in a beautiful and romantic destination.
5. Friendly people: By complying with the motto of Krabi province, 'Krabi Living City, Friendly People', local communities and businesses are able to welcome visitors from around the world, aided by the reciprocity and generosity of the Krabi people.

This data is the crucial material for developing brand identity, which requires the integration of tourism identity and tourism image.

Developing Brand Identity

All of the data obtained from the learning and exploring processes was brought to the process of brand identity development, which utilised the co-creation process among tourism businesses, government officers, local communities and tourists; because destination branding is not just about the development of a brand message and communication with tourists, but it is the process of co-creation (Pongsakornrungrungsilp & Schroeder, 2017). The first step is the synthesis process, in which all data sets were discussed with Krabi tourism stakeholders and other key influencers: Director, Tourism Authority of Thailand; President, Krabi Tourism Council; President, Lanta Tourism Business Associations; President, Krabi Tourism Business Association; and President, Krabi Hotel Association.

The Krabi province motto (Living City and Friendly People) was used during these discussions to stimulate interaction among participants. However, within the concept of value co-creation, this motto is merely the basis of co-creation (see also Pongsakornrungrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011). Therefore, in order to develop destination brand identity, tourism image, tourists' perspectives, and tourism identity were also included in the process, in order to co-create the unique identity of Krabi tourism for communication with tourists.

To develop brand identity, the concept of value proposition was employed in order to formulate a message that demonstrates how Krabi can enable tourists to achieve their life goals (Pongsakornrungrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011). After discussions, stakeholders concluded that tourists are seeking a unique experience by visiting Krabi, which they cannot gain from other destinations. This led to two possible brand identities: 'Krabi Experience' and 'Krabi: The Ultimate Experience'.

'Krabi Experience' is derived from the unique identity of Krabi tourism, which plays an important role in attracting tourists. Tourists increasingly visit Krabi because they believe it to be the only place where they can experience natural tourism resources, beautiful destinations, diversity and uniqueness. The President of Krabi Tourism Council, Mr. Amarit Siriponjuthakul, said the following about 'Krabi Experience':

"... I have to say we [Krabi] are lucky to live in a city where there are plentiful and fruitful tourism resources. The diversity of nature, culture, and way of life at this destination creates the uniqueness which differs from other destinations..."

As stated by Mr. Amarit, the uniqueness of Krabi tourism does not come from a few items, but it emerges through the blend of natural resources. This is in line with the second identity, 'Krabi: the Ultimate Experience'. This alternative identity sends a superior message to tourists. However, Mr. Amarit provided an additional perspective during the process of brand identity development:

"... Please do not ignore or abandon the traditional message or way we have ever been... we [Krabi] have used 'Miracle of Krabi' for many years. It's a shame if we overlook what we have done previously..."

Therefore, a draft concept of brand identity, as viewed by tourists, can draw on the three themes of peace, relaxation, and romance. As suggested by Mr. Amarit (a key influencer of tourism in Krabi), the three alternative brand identities were tested on tourists, so as to finalise the Krabi brand identity. However, in parallel with the projective technique, participants were also asked to choose the best Krabi brand identity. Figure 2 shows that more than a half (51.2%) believed that 'Krabi Experience' best represented the Krabi brand identity, followed by 'Krabi: the Ultimate Experience' (34.9%), and 'Miracle of Krabi' (13.9%), respectively.

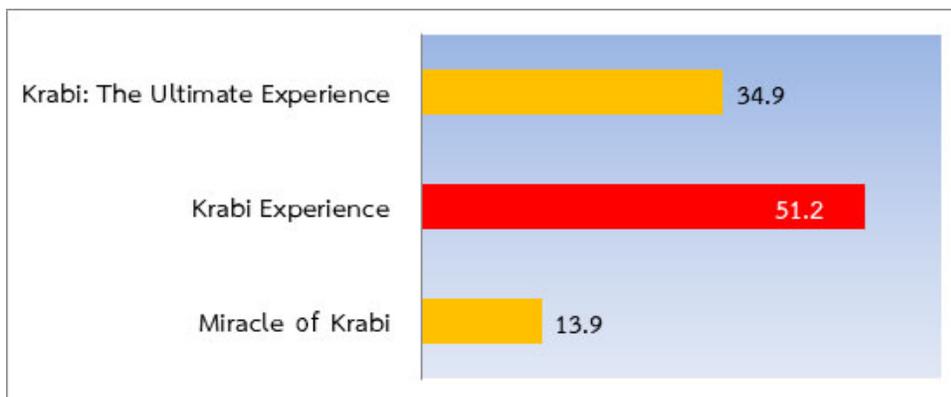


Figure 2: Krabi Brand Identity from Tourists' Perspectives (%)

As presented in Figure 3, more than a half of participants (53.66 %) stated that the uniqueness of the Krabi experience was the reason to support 'Krabi Experience', followed by special experience (19.50%), and relaxation (7.32%), respectively.

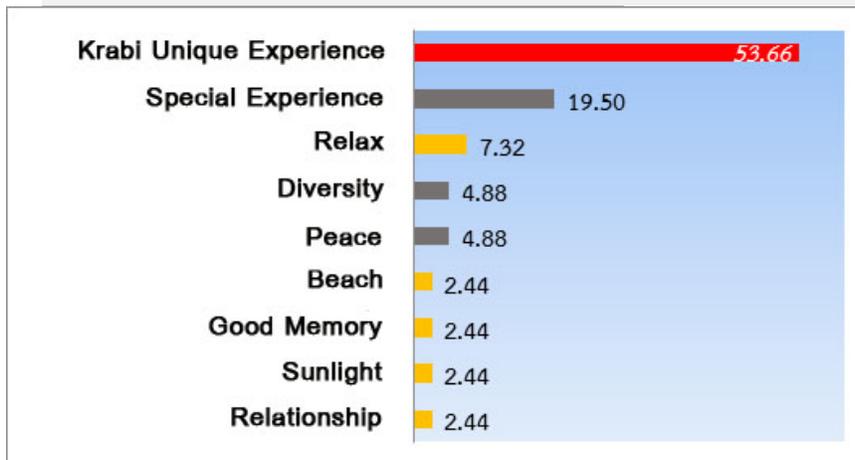


Figure 3: The Reasons for Choosing 'Krabi Experience' (%)

Some informants did not agree with 'Miracle of Krabi', e.g.:

"... I don't see 'miracle' from Krabi, but instead, I gain 'experience' because Krabi tends to conserve the traditional culture better than other provinces..."

W. (26 years old, Chinese)

W. did not sense a miracle at Krabi but, instead, he regarded the unique experience in Krabi as being the prominent one. This is in line with X. (22 years old tourist from Singapore), who enjoyed new experiences in Krabi:

"... visiting Krabi allows me to gain different experiences and to do new things..."

T. (26 years old British tourist), and M. (24 years old American tourist), also supported 'Krabi Experience' as demonstrating about the uniqueness of Krabi tourism experience. Many informants have also mentioned with 'Krabi: the Ultimate Experience' that they don't feel the ultimate or extreme, but they agree that they cannot gain these experience from other destinations.

"... because it is the unique destination and also experience which different from other destinations in Europe..."

T. (26 Years old, British)

“... here [Krabi] is special and unique that clearly differs from other destinations both in Thailand and aboard...”

M. (24 Years old, American)

So, because of its strong support described above, ‘Krabi Experience’ was chosen as the Krabi brand identity.

Public Hearing

The final step in the process of branding Krabi was to present the new brand identity to tourism stakeholders, in order to allow them to participate in brand co-creation, and also to triangulate the data. The Krabi brand identity ‘Krabi Experience’ was presented in two meetings: the Annual Krabi Hotel Association Conference, and Lanta Go Green. Because many stakeholders and other key influencers had already participated in the process of developing the brand identity, there was no argument or obstruction.

Discussion and Conclusions

This paper has shed light on how stakeholders participate in the branding process through the concept of co-creation, whereby brand may be managed for sustainability. Developing a destination brand is more difficult than developing brands for other services and products, because the process relates to many stakeholders, who have an important role in the branding process (Maheshwari et al., 2014; Kotsi et al., 2016). This paper has extended the research of Buhalis & Inversini (2014); Neuhofer et al., (2014); Kotsi et al., (2016); Maheshwari et al., (2014); Yosof & Ismal (2015), by describing how a brand was co-created by the collaboration of stakeholders, including tourists, tourism businesses, tourism management, and local communities as a strategic tool to drive green tourism and sustainability. This paper employed the concepts of brand culture and value co-creation to develop the destination brand. As mentioned by Pike (2012), branding consists of brand identity, brand positioning and brand image, the latter being the image which the destination would like to be perceived as by tourists. Therefore, developing a destination brand by traditional methods is difficult, because: 1. there are many different stakeholders who have their own goals and missions (Maheshwari et al., 2014); 2. tourists do not trust businesses’ messages and communications (Pongsakornrunsilp & Schroeder, 2011); and 3. tourists are more active consumers than in the past (Pongsakornrunsilp & Schroeder, 2017). For these reasons, destination branding must make use of brand culture.

Brand culture requires stakeholders to co-create the cultural perspective of a brand, i.e. its meaning, myth, experience and symbolical value (Schroeder, 2009; Pongsakornrungrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011). Currently, brand management cannot employ the old model (brand identity and brand image) to deliver communication messages to tourists, because active consumers are intelligent and do not trust marketing messages. Instead, the development of a destination brand identity requires the reverse process of brand co-creation. Rather than developing a brand identity and then communicating it to tourists, the process begins with the co-creation of a tourism identity through the collaboration of tourism stakeholders, to identify the prominent features of the particular destination. This is similar to the creation of a brand identity using the branding model of Aaker (1991) (see also Pike, 2012) but, in this process, the focus is on what stakeholders would like to present or demonstrate to tourists and the general public. The development of a strong brand identity requires the identification and analysis of the image that tourists have of a destination, and especially the emotional qualities and value perceived by tourists. From a cultural perspective, a brand identity within should be able to attract tourists' attention and desire by highlighting the prominent aspects that correspond with tourists' perceptions of value. For example, tourists visiting Krabi province value the peace, romance and relaxation that they experience. Therefore, to persuade tourists to visit Krabi, especially Scandinavian and European tourists, brand management should communicate the brand identity 'Krabi Experience', which represents those three themes.

This research applied the projective technique of Hofstede et al., (2007) in order to understand how tourists value Krabi as a destination. Those authors used the projective technique to compare two beer brands, whereas this study used it to understand tourists. There are many stakeholders in the branding process, each having different perspectives; therefore, brand management needs to search for acceptance by these stakeholders (Maheshwari et al., 2014; Kotsi et al., 2016). The participation of stakeholders in the process of value co-creation gradually created bonds between them and the new destination brand identity, leading them to fully support the destination brand identity, because they had co-created it.

This study solely described the process of developing a brand identity but it did not investigate the success of this brand identity in attracting tourists. Therefore, a longitudinal study should be conducted, as a follow up to the brand development process, in order to demonstrate the success of the branding. Additionally, the success of this brand does not only rely on the brand identity



itself, but it also on how good the brand management of 'Krabi Experience' is in communicating the message to tourists, including the monitoring of the brand situation.

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