Brand management and cocreation lessons from tourism and hospitality: introduction to the special issue

Introduction

Branding originated as a means by which a company differentiated its goods and/or services from those of its competitors (Cowley, 1996). In tourism and hospitality, the importance of brand management is naturally evident. People travel to destinations, which are effectively places, such as countries like Greece or Korea; regions such as Queensland or Tyrol; cities such as Rio de Janeiro or Cape Town; areas such as Lapland, the Mediterranean or the Alps. Equally they travel to landmarks and attractions such as the Acropolis in Athens, Greece; the Pyramids in Cairo, Egypt; Eiffel Tower in Paris, France; Disneyland in Orlando, FL, USA; Sydney Opera House, in Australia and the Forbidden City in Beijing, China. All those have become brands effectively creating emotional engagement and anticipation that these experiences will satisfy consumer needs and cocreate value. Equally in hospitality, international brands such as Marriott or Hilton hotels, TGIF or MacDonald restaurants as well as types of service such as Korean BBQ or Brazilian churrascaria restaurant are instantly recognizable brand types that communicate product attributes and create expectations. Tourism and hospitality, and particularly destinations, are incredibly difficult to brand, as there are so many factors that are not easily controllable by brand managers. Tourism and hospitality brands and experiences are being dynamically co-created in a very complex service ecosystem that is easily affected by elements of the external environment. The cultural and familiarity characteristics of consumers determine how brands are perceived, experienced, evaluated and appreciated.

As tourism and hospitality, as business ecosystems, have become mature, global and highly competitive, the branding process is becoming more complex. Initially, the creation of strong brands resulted from passive or responsive marketing engagement by brand managers with consumers (Brown *et al.*, 2003a). Increasingly, the emphasis is shifting to the notion that strong brands are generated through a co-creation process that involves active engagement from consumers (Boyle, 2007) and members of a wide network associated with the brand. In particular, "the consumer is an active partner with the marketer in brand-meaning formation" (Coupland

(2005), while "the brand is a milieu where marketing management and consumer commitment co-exist" (Brown *et al.* (2003b).

Brand co-creation has been given even further impetus by the COVID-19 global pandemic. Country-wide lockdowns and the global pause of tourism and hospitality have devastated these sectors affecting their brands, while also creating momentous changes in both customer and consumer behaviour. Some of these are meaningful accelerations of existing trends; others are emergent. The permanency of all these changes is uncertain but their implications for tourism and hospitality brands warrant careful consideration and two key changes appear to be here to stay, and two changes seem to be particularly influential.

First, while socially conscious values have been in vogue for some years, the pandemic crisis will probably hasten this trend. The lockdown constraints and suspension of travel have made neighbourhoods much more important worldwide and so brands trying to increase their consumer engagement can gain rewards by localizing their marketing. Consumer sentiment research suggests a growing focus on community and society and on consumers holding brands to account. Over 60% claim that how a brand responds during the crisis will determine whether they continue buying it when the crisis subsides (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2020). This means marketers must communicate a strong sense of their brands' purpose, what values it stands up for, and the areas where the brand seeks to make a difference (McKinsey & Co., 2020a), in short try to develop a consistent, profound and relevant to various audiences brand meaning. Brands can build their meaning through the way they treat their employees and communicate with customers, how they engage with local communities and societies at large, the projects they sponsor and the partners they select. Crucially, brands must follow-up their marketing statements with meaningful actions and those seen to be taking advantage of the pandemic or have unsympathetic attitudes to consumers or local communities have already suffered criticism.

Second, COVID-19 accelerated digitization, as consumers leapt forward five years in digital adoption in just two months of the pandemic (McKinsey & Co., 2020a). Significant numbers of consumers have made digital transactions for the first time, including 13 million in Latin America alone and 75% of those in the USA say they will continue to purchase online in the future (McKinsey & Co., 2020a). This means that brand managers must think strategically of how the engage smart tourism and ambient intelligence methodologies (Buhalis, 2019) and how to connect with consumers in real time (Buhalis and Sinarta, 2019) with an increased emphasis on direct-to-consumer (D2C) e-commerce channels. An in-depth understanding of different tourist interaction of social contacts determines the best communication and distribution channels (Fan *et al.*, 2019). Managers need to reimagine how to process the swelling wave of data and reset how they use it to personalize communications and individualize experiences, taking advantage of context (Buhalis and Foerste, 2015) to ever-narrower customer segments. Understanding geolocation data as part of context is critical for brand managers (Xu *et al.*, 2021). Data analytics will play an increasingly central role in facilitating rapid response to opportunities and threats and in tracking consumer behaviour at increasingly granular levels. Extant analytics models may need revising to optimize the new

behavioural data and to better predict consumer–brand interactions in the "next normal".

Both these consumer behaviour trends place even greater emphasis on brand co-creation Gonzalez-Mansilla, *et al.* (2019),. Tourism and hospitality deal with experiential products and are at the forefront of co-creation (Buhalis and Foerste, 2015). The integration of brand management and co-creation is a crucial issue for them (Buhalis and Inversini, 2014). In terms of inseparability, one service characteristic – the service environment – implies the involvement of consumers throughout the entire service process, including the production and consumption stages (Kandampully and Solnet, 2019; (Middleton *et al.*, 2009). The rapid development of information technology facilitates the sharing of consumer-service experiences and their positive or negative reflections as part of co-creation activities that potentially informs brand development and reputation (Binkhorst and Den Dekker, 2009; Au *et al.*, 2014), with brand reputation being of a particular importance, as it has a direct impact on competitiveness and profitability (Anagnostopoulou *et al.*, 2020; Viglia *et al.*, 2016).

Numerous studies in tourism and hospitality have discussed brand management and co-creation separately, but academic attempts to integrate two important themes have been more limited. Therefore, the purpose of this special issue of *Journal of Product and Brand Management* is to explore brand management and co-creation in tourism and hospitality contexts using a variety of issues, concepts and examples. Tourism and hospitality are at the forefront of branding development, and there are many transferable lessons than can be gained.

Progress in tourism and hospitality brand management

Brand management and place/destination branding

Competition among global tourism destinations requires destinations to strategically positioning themselves globally and to project their distinctiveness as great places to visit, as well as great places to live, work and study (Fyall, 2019). The branding of a location is a vital research area and an important instrument to develop the positioning of tourist destinations (Ruiz-Real *et al.*, 2020) and has been referred to by different terms, including "nation branding", "place branding" and "destination branding". Govers and Go (2009) defined place brands as "representations of place identity, building a favourable internal (public, private and civil society stakeholders) and external (tourists, investors, traders, migrants) image", leading to brand equity; that is, brand satisfaction and loyalty; name awareness; perceived quality; and other favourable brand associations (that is, positive image and reputation) attached to a name or symbol representing a country, city or region. The name of a place, being New York, Dubai, Mauritius, Moscow, Shanghai, Sri Lanka, Melbourne, Mombasa, Rome, Santorini or Machu Picchu, immediately raises brand awareness, feelings, anticipation, expectations and project an image.

The elements of the brand symbol are extensively used in tourism marketing. The logo, one of the key elements of the brand symbol, is often regarded as central in destination branding and marketing communication. Figure 1

Figure 1 Global tourism logos

demonstrates the tourism logos for several countries around the globe. Beritelli and Laesser (2018) argue that logo recognition is a proxy for estimating the success of international branding campaigns. However, Govers (2013) explained why tourism branding is not about logos and slogans, particular for destinations and places, which represent communities.

In addition to logos, tourism advertising is a key feature of destination branding strategies (Morgan *et al.*, 2007; Chen and Shih, 2019), as it signals to various audiences what the destination stand for, promotes a destination, stimulates willingness amongst travellers to visit the destination and also has a "bleed-over" effect on residents' attitudes and thus can be used as a tool of public diplomacy (Hasnat and Steyn, 2020). The brand name is another important element of the brand symbol. Other destination brand symbols include colours, landscapes or monuments. In tourism, the name of a destination being a country (e.g. Jordan, Slovenia, Morocco, Chile) or a city (e.g. Paris, Cairo, Jakarta, Toronto, Helsinki) is *de facto* the brand name of the tourism offering. When several destinations and organizational structures share one geographical resource, such as the Mediterranean Sea or the Alps or the Danube river, branding is more complex. Wang *et al.* (2020b) argue that when a destination promotional offer contains a branded premium, consumers respond more favourably to the brand name of the premium than the price value of the premium, which contributes to knowledge of destination promotion and branding.

The other aspects of the brand, namely the brand as a product and the brand as a person, are the ones that the symbol aims to reinforce and can be even more important for destination branding. The is very complex and incorporates various controllable and uncontrollable elements, such as infrastructure, services, weather and physical environment. Evidence suggests that destination brands adopt well-known marketing tactics to manage their destination "product" (Sainaghi *et al.*, 2019). They aim to enhance their image, influence the perceptions of quality and value to attract visitors and the intent to return (Molinillo *et al.*, 2018; Murphy *et al.*, 2000).

Destination personality is an important affective evaluation of the place and existing research has established that even in countries with cultural and physical proximity, such as countries in South America (Rojas-Méndez and Hine, 2017),

destinations may use social media (Bujosa *et al.*, 2015; Peco-Torres *et al.*, 2020) or their web sites (Rojas-Méndez and Hine, 2017) to project destination specific personality traits for their positioning amongst international tourists.

Govers (2020) identifies:

> [...] the problem with the practice of applying branding concepts to communities, cities, regions and countries is that branding is often misinterpreted and the focus is put far too much on superficial aesthetics. In simple terms, branding is about two things: making something identifiable and making it distinctive. The first deals with naming and visual design, the second with meaning (brand positioning, personality, promise, etc.). The most important decision in commercial branding is, of course, naming, which is linked to trademarking. For communities, these kinds of decisions are almost completely irrelevant, as communities have (often long-established) names and those names are usually very hard to protect with a trademark. Yet many communities are still obsessed with consistency in presentation: type fonts, logos, use of colours or slogans.

Destination branding is very complex issue that needs to reconcile place identity, projected image, product offering, consumption experience and perceived image (Govers and Go, 2009). Every actor in the ecosystem also brands their organizations independently and promote their services globally. Private enterprises across the world perform various direct marketing activities affecting the destinations' brand meaning. In the constantly changing environment with many involved actors, the most challenging role of the brand management in tourism and hospitality is to ensure that there is harmony in the diversity of campaigns and propositions offered in the marketplace. As diversity is inevitable, harmony needs to emerge from a relative consistent message across all campaigns and propositions. Although difficult to achieve, Costa Rica is a best-case example where all branding is focused on environmental resources and biodiversity, often protected jungles and wildlife.

Zenker *et al.* (2017) also propose brand complexity as part of place branding. In its broadest sense, the concept of identification can be understood as that which produces a meaningful connection between the self and the target of place identification.

> This connection involves the incorporation of the attributes of the identification target (i.e. the place brand) into the self-concept (Zenker, 2011), with other characteristics increasing the complexity of the place brand (Zenker *et al.*, 2017).

Place branding for residents is more complex than destination branding, but it is imperative that both are integrative parts of an overall destination brand and mutually reinforcing.

Brand co-creation

The destination brand meaning is very dynamic and constantly evolving during the various interaction of the members of the destination eco-system. While the extant tourism literature suggests that tourists contribute to the overall tourism experience, co-creation – and in particular value co-creation – primarily refers to the "during-trip" stage (Assiouras *et al.*, 2019; Rihova *et al.*, 2018). While travelling, tourists actively participate in experiences and interacts with others, such as local businesses, visitor organizers, residents and other travellers as part of a range of on-site activities (Buonincontri *et al.*, 2017; Garibaldi and Pozzi, 2018). In that sense, the destination eco-system co-creates the brand and its meaning. It also creates value, contributed from various parties involved with the destination brand, including

residents, attractions, cultural experiences, hospitality and other local businesses, employees and consumers, and not just the consumers.

Brand image and destination branding are also important for residents who directly interact with visitors. These interactions play an endogenous role that forms a brand image of the destination toward the visitors. As local residents' attitude and engagement are part of the destination experience, as well as often share common facilities and resources, it is critical that they are both addressed and engaged in tourism branding. Corporate (or destination) social responsibility as well as resident engagement and environmental sustainability have a significant influence on destination branding (Hsiao, 2018; Moise *et al.*, 2019).

In spite of their importance, research to understand residents' destination image and branding has been limited (Stylidis, 2020). Residents, in particular, possess an inclusive knowledge of the destination and make it hard to have the destination brands coincide in a simple way. When residents are part of tourism branding they can be place-ambassadors online and off-line supporting to reinforce destination brands (Uchinaka, 2019; Zhang and Xu, 2019; Wassler, 2019). Branding should stimulate an identity dialogue and interaction between stakeholders to fully appreciate the dynamics of place brands (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013).

In his seminal work, Govers (2018) suggests that imaginative communities make cities, regions and countries admired and that is the essence of place branding. Imaginative communities build the reputation of a place by sharing their sense of identity, belonging and purpose and creating relevant buzz, which reinforces and showcases identity in original, creative, innovative, captivating and inspiring initiatives. Based on policies, infrastructures, projects, investments or events, imaginative communities build a distinctive, relevant, authentic, consistent and memorable reputation (Govers, 2018).

Employees are responsible for fulfilling the brand promise and are vital in nourishing a successful corporate/destination image (Piehler, 2018). Organizations require committed employees who orient their passions and drive the company toward a shared vision. There is a comprehensive literature on internal brand management (Veloutsou and Guzmán, 2017; Koo and Curtis, 2020) and some research focusing on the role of brand supporters who act as employees in the co-creation of brand meaning (Black and Veloutsou, 2017). Piehler (2018) explains that employees ultimately are responsible for fulfilling the brand promise, and they clearly co-create the brand reputation, preferably in line with the destination managers' vision.

Consumers are also co-creating the brand through the co-creation of the brand meaning, the brand experience and the co-creation of value. Auh *et al.* (2007) defined value co-creation with customers as a process that entails "constructive customer participation in the service creation and delivery process" that requires profound and co-operative contributions. While consumers have more choices of products and services than ever before, value creation is becoming central for marketers. This is particularly the case for services, where the interaction between customers and service providers is critical for brand experience (Malone

et al., 2018; Ahn and Back, 2019). Value creation, in both its concept and process, has been rapidly transformed from a firm-centric proposition into a set of personalized customer experiences (Gentile *et al.*, 2007; Volchek *et al.*, 2020).

Co-creation with customers has been developed based upon service-dominant logic (SDL), which stresses the critical roles of value co-creation and dynamic resources (e.g. knowledge and skills) (Rihova *et al.*, 2018). As opposed to a goods-dominant logic, SDL views "the customer as an operant resource capable of acting on other resources, a collaborative partner who co-creates value with the firm" (Lusch *et al.*, 2007). SDL emphasizes the role of consumers in the co-creation process, which is critical to understanding competitiveness (Mohammadi *et al.*, 2020). This argument relates to absorptive and adaptive competences (Michel *et al.*, 2008). The collaborative competence of a firm, comprising absorptive and adaptive competences, is a key indicator of innovation ability (Lusch *et al.*, 2007). Value co-creation improves absorptive and adaptive competences, ultimately enhancing destination competitiveness through the inclusion of collaborative competence (Rihova *et al.*, 2013; Assiouras *et al.*, 2019).

The focus on the customer as an operant resource also opens different roles for customers in the co-creation process. Michel *et al.* (2008) proposed three roles for consumers in SDL, namely, value-in-use (the user's role), value-in-exchange (the buyer's role) and the payer's role, which embraces both value-in-exchange and value-in-use. A number of tourism studies have attempted to understand consumer-to-consumer co-creation behaviour in events (Rihova *et al.*, 2018), travel experiences in agritourism (Rong-Da Liang, 2017), smart tourism initiatives (Wang *et al.*, 2013), citizenship behaviour (Assiouras *et al.*, 2019) and the application of co-creation to explain customer engagement (Chathoth *et al.*, 2016).

SMART/technology/social media driven branding and co-creation

The advancement of information technology makes consumers more informed, networked, empowered and active in how they interact with service providers (Buhalis, 2019). The principle of technology facilitated with consumers co-creation in tourism is that as travelers are more empowered by advancements in technology (e.g. social media and mobile technology), they can easily engage and interact with destination marketers dynamically (Buhalis, 2020). The ubiquity of digital devices (particularly mobile technology) enables constant connectivity (Fan *et al.*, 2019).

Technology ultimately facilitates the involvement of consumers and service providers in dynamic and real time product and experience development (Buhalis and Sinarta, 2019). Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) defined this phenomenon as "co-creation," which refers to the "joint creation of value by the company and the customer". The notion of co-creation has been applied to tourism throughout the tourism supply chain (Räikkönen and Honkanen, 2013), influencing travel behaviours and experiences (Buonincontri *et al.*, 2017; Assiouras *et al.*, 2019), as well as developing innovative approaches to marketing based on nowness (Buhalis and Sinarta, 2019). In this sense, the role of travellers

change from product or service consumption to one in which they form their own experiences through the process of co-creation (Buhalis and Foerste, 2015).

The term "smart" has obtained enormous popularity in describing the characteristics and attributes of intelligent technologies and intelligent ecosystems (Buhalis, 2019). A number of emerging technologies provide the opportunity for smart networking (Xiang *et al.*, 2015), facilitating the interaction between human and non-human actors and brands to facilitate value cocreation. Smart tourism and smart city principles has been applied to destination branding providing efficient methods for networking and sharing coordinated approaches Tung *et al.* (2019),. Social media platforms reshape the customer–brand relationship by allowing direct interactions between consumers and service brands (Buhalis and Foerste, 2015; Pesce *et al.* (2019); Kiralova and Pavliceka, 2015). The power of social media to provide spaces for storytelling has been discussed in relation to destination branding (Lund *et al.*, 2018). Bujosa *et al.* (2015) empirically demonstrate the effect of social media on the formation of brand personality and establish customer brand engagement. Social networks increasingly empower review generation and place consumers in the driving seat of brand experiences (Kim and Hyun, 2021). Destination e-brands effectively become smart destinations brands Femenia-Serra *et al.* (2019), engaging all stakeholders in real time cocreation. These technological innovations create the consolidation of stakeholders in tourism services (Buhalis, 2019), as well as provide empowerment to travellers to co-create value (Wang *et al.*, 2020a). These smart environments transform industry structures and have a disruptive impact on destination marketing and competitiveness (Mehraliyev *et al.*, 2020). If managed properly the value co-creation process in online tourism review platforms Zhang *et al.* (2018), can enhance destination image, support travel experience through destination engagement and profoundly transform destination branding (Lam *et al.*, 2020).

Destination marketers can recognize visitors' preferences and behaviours and meet their needs by offering them customized information, such as personalized itineraries and suggestions, as well as location-based information (Buhalis and Amaranggana, 2014). Instant gratification can be facilitated in a "nowness" ecosystem to support real-time interactivity and co-creation (Buhalis and Sinarta, 2019). The system emphasizes the importance of collecting real-time information (or triggers) that can transform into value creation (Buhalis *et al.*, 2019). Real-time marketing, based on value co-creation within a particular context and spatial structures, can provide the right information to travellers at the right time so they can enjoy memorable experiences (Park *et al.*, 2020). Augmented reality can also support consumers to interact digitally with both destination brands and organizations and cocreate experiences (Park and Stangl, 2020).

Coordination of brand development activities

The branding activities need coordination. Govers (2013) suggests that for a place "a good brand strategy not only builds engagement with the outside world, but also among stakeholders and internal audiences. It should be built on a sense of belonging and shared purpose and hence generate the

kind of engagement that is desired and impossible to imitate elsewhere. By achieving that, internal stakeholders should be self-motivated to join the game and not forced. This is how 'INY' and 'I Amsterdam' became successful, not because they are clever design gimmicks (which they are), but because they represent something that people were already proud of or engaged with".

Teams supporting destination brands are using the branding principles aiming to establish favourable reputations. For example, the concept of destination branding is applied to smart cities/smart tourism. Trinchini *et al.* (2019) emphasize the importance of smart destination branding strategies that integrate information technology in terms of people's participation, creativity and innovation as drivers of smart tourism (Molinillo *et al.*, 2018). Blending smart destinations with creative initiatives and innovations reinforces novel branding strategies (Boes *et al.*, 2016).

Corporate brand management is also critical for tourism and hospitality marketing providing insights into "key features" of organizations (Balmer, 2008), supporting coordination and influencing performance. Chen and Mathews (2017) demonstrate how experiential brand deployment improves tourism brand evaluations. Sevel *et al.* (2018) investigated how a service firm (hotel) with a brand portfolio manages its corporate brand when compared with its portfolio of product brands. Corporate branding is therefore a strategic asset influencing competitiveness and profitability. However, as tourism and hospitality services are often cocreated with between inter-dependent organizations that belong to global alliances (Crotts *et al.*, 2000) consistent and coherent brand management is also complex Kallmuenzer *et al.* (2019).

Avraham (2020) investigated a multi-step model for altering place image, in terms of image repair theory, to assess the strategies to manage perceptions and stereotypes of nations in national images/branding. Place marketing and/or branding is often integrated with spatial analytics. Boisen *et al.* (2018) quantitatively identify the extent to which local authorities have used place promotion, marketing and branding and spatial patterns of popularity of local authorities. Recently, there has been a debate about whether place branding should be framed in terms of contextual conditions. Shahabadi *et al.* (2020) suggest an asset-based approach for Tehran that considers place branding, which consists of three identity types: tourism, inhabitation and bazaar. It is expected that the model creates added value for historic districts and influence the task of regeneration. Place/nation branding has been discussed not only in relation to tourism destinations but also in its application to national parks (Pizzichini *et al.*, 2020) and the food industry (Donner *et al.*, 2017). In particular, sport mega-events are catalysts for nation branding as they create unique opportunities for transformational development and global appeal while support internal brand building and public diplomacy (Knott *et al.*, 2017).

As employees are in the front line for fulfilling the brand promise, internal brand management is critical to brand management success. Satisfied employees contribute to the work environment culture, leadership and career opportunities that their organizations offer (Stamolampros *et al.*, 2019), and they reflect their positive attitude online and off line (Stamolampros *et al.*, 2020) supporting the organizational and the destination brand. Employees' brand understanding generates brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour (Piehler, 2018). Malik and Lenka (2019) suggest that employee behaviours strategies through leadership provide a foundation for projecting a consistent corporate image and fostering a strong corporate brand reputation and affects employees' brand commitment. Internal brand management often drives external communication. That is, the degree to which external communication is in line with actual products and services, actual values and internal communication, has positive influences on internal brand management with the strongest effect on brand understanding (Piehler *et al.*, 2019). Brand-specific transformational leadership has an impact on employees (i.e. brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour) and consumer (i.e. customer citizenship behaviour and customer-based brand equity) behaviour (Chiang *et al.*, 2020).

Brand equity

The strength of the brand is primarily measured via brand equity, a topic that has been given a lot of attention by marketing academics as well as tourism and hospitality researchers (Tasci (2020). When the focus is the strength of the brand to the minds of consumers, then one is referring to consumer based brand equity, while when the focus is monetary value elements, then one is referring to financial based brand equity (Veloutsou *et al.*, 2013).

Consumer-based brand equity has been approached from a number of perspectives (Christodoulides and de Chernatony, 2010). In the past few years marketing academics try to better understand how to capture the strength of the brand in the minds of consumers equity (Veloutsou *et al.*, 2013). The most widely used approaches to capture consumer-based brand equity originate from the conceptual work of Aaker (1991) and the evolving work of Keller (2016). In hospitality and tourism, the dominant conceptualization of consumer-based brand equity is based on Aaker's (1991) suggestions, and consists of four dimensions: brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty. High brand equity means that customers have high brand name awareness, maintain a favourable impression of the brand, perceive that the brand is of high quality and are loyal to the brand. Based on this principle, a number of tourism and hospitality studies have investigated how to achieve better results in the role and structure of brand equity (Chi *et al.*, 2020; Rodríguez-Molina, *et al.*, 2019). Tran *et al.* (2019) applied the four dimensions of brand equity (i.e. perceived quality, brand awareness, image and loyalty) and considered the impact of those elements on overall destination equity.

Appreciating that the thinking on consumer bases brand equity evolves, there are clear attempts in the hospitality and tourism literature to follow this trend and advance its existing conceptualization and operationalization. ekalina *et al.* (2018), Scholars have considered scale development to measure customer-based brand equity in the context of hotels. El-Adly and ELSamen (2018) identified nine dimensions of customer-based brand equity, including hotel awareness, overall hotel image and seven dimensions of customer

perceived value (i.e. price, quality, self-gratification, aesthetics, prestige, transaction and hedonism).

The overall strength of the brand in the minds of consumers can also be expressed through the feelings it generates to these consumers and their affinity. Swanson (2017) stressed destination brand love, based upon two perspectives, namely, experiential (e.g. agelessness, escape, feeling while there, mastery and senses) and relational (e.g. brand/visitor community, family/friends, relationship to home and self-brad integration) issues that influence destination attitude Williams et al. (2019). From the experiential marketing perspective, a number of factors, including multisensory marketing, brand experiences and perceived value (Wiedmann et al., 2018) as well as image (Sharma and Nayak, 2019; Manyiwa et al., 2018) directly and/or indirectly enhance brand strength. As a way to change from negative to positive attitude toward destinations, the concept of consumer affinity has been emerged in marketing literature. Asseraf and Shoham (2017) suggested the influences of traveller's affinity on destination brands, as customer affinity is particularly useful to diminish the effects of negative attitudes – animosity and ethnocentrism.

Recognizing the large amount of attention paid to CBBE, some scholars appreciate the importance of the financial-based destination brand equity and engage with the topic. Tasci (2020) proposed an analytical model to evaluate destination brands by considering both customer-based brand equity and financial-based brand equity factors, including the number of visitors, size of market share, level of tourist spending, volume of tourism taxes and number of tourism jobs. Recently, an innovative concept has been proposed – brand margin – to re-conceptualize brand relationship as a value exchange. Brand margin is another business outcome metric that can be used as a financial benchmark (Tarrant, 2018).

This special issue
This special issue and articles explore the importance of brand management in tourism and hospitality. Branding has become more important than ever as the sectors have become mature, global and highly competitive. This special issue addresses the complexity and exceeding challenges in branding for tourism and hospitality. It incorporates 12 papers that focus on three areas, namely, consumers; hospitality and events industries and destinations as places and ecosystems. Naturally, the tourism and hospitality service industries are at the forefront of brand and experience co-creation, involving consumer active engagement and brand-meaning formation. Digitization, information technology and smart tourism facilitate nowness and real time cocreation (Buhalis, 2019) bringing great opportunities and challenges for brand management and co-creation.

This special issue in *JPBM* explores brand management and co-creation in-depth by examining the tourism and hospitality contexts. It also contributes to the marketing and branding literature with experiential and transformational marketing cases showcasing excellence from these industries. We hope the special issue will bring knowledge and insights to marketing science and also that tourism and hospitality literature will attract more marketing expertise. Adopting a

multi-disciplinary approach can only benefit all areas and support cross fertilization.

The first four papers concentrate on consumer experience and engagement with tourism and hospitality brands.

Hussain, Jing, Junaid, Zaman and Shi explore the role of co-creation experience in engaging customers with service brands. They investigate customer co-creation experience in Chinese hotpot restaurants. The study demonstrates that customers' co-creation experience with a restaurant brand positively impacts customer brand engagement, emotional brand attachment and customer satisfaction. It also reveals that the hedonic, social and economic experience dimensions of co-creation experience positively influence customer satisfaction, emotional brand attachment and customer brand engagement's buying, referring, influencing and feedback dimensions.

Cheung, Ting, Cheah and Sharipudin examine the role of social media-based destination brand community in evoking tourists' emotions and intention to co-create and visit. They explore the impact of a social media-based destination brand community (SMDBC) on tourists' emotions, and the subsequent effect on the intention to co-create value and visit. The findings reveal that SMDBC plays a considerable role in shaping tourists' emotions, including joy, love and positive surprise, which, in turn, have a significant impact on consumers' intention to co-create value and visit.

Yousaf, Amin, Jaziri and Mishra evaluate the effect of message orientation/vividness on consumer engagement for travel brands on social networking sites. The study reveals that greater message vividness, with more interactive/audio-visual content, leads to higher engagement. A combination of high-vividness and socioemotional orientation generates maximum engagement. The study also invites brand marketers should not only design their SNS messages with appropriate vividness/orientation but also tweak them across cultures, for maximum consumer engagement.

Tjandra, Rihova, Snell, Den Hertog and Theodoraki examine the Mega-events brand meaning co-creation looking at the Olympic Games. The paper aims to explore a multi-stakeholder perspective on brand meaning co-creation in the context of the Olympic Games as a unique mega sports event brand with a strong brand identity, to understand how the brand manager may integrate such co-created meanings in a negotiated brand identity. It is evident that through their transformational and social experiences of the Olympic brand, stakeholders co-create brand meanings based on Olympic values of excellence, friendship and respect. However, they also offer their own interpretations and narratives related to competing meanings of spectacle, exclusion and deceit. Alternative brand touchpoints were identified, including blogs; fan and sports community forums; educational and academic sources; historical sources and literature.

The study provides exploratory evidence of how brand meanings are co-created in the relatively under-researched multi-stakeholder sports mega-event context.

When exploring branding in the tourism and hospitality industries there is evidence of global best practice on a number of cases. Value cocreation between all stakeholders has always been the norm and branding products and experiences towards wider market is a major challenge.

Chung and Byrom investigate how brand identity is co-created, with a specific focus on how employees contributed to the process in a five-star hotel setting. The focus of this study is on understanding how two hotels planned and executed their brand identity strategy simultaneously, differentiating one from the other, and how employees actively participated in this process. Employees that participated in brand co-creation enhanced their brand knowledge, developed emotional bonds with the brand and were motivated to deliver the brand identity. Those that immersed themselves in the new brand identities were able to enable positive guest perceptions towards the brand image, which consequently enhanced employees' pride in their work. The in-depth investigation of employee participation in brand co-creation, including their different roles and activities in the process, provide insights to successful branding processes that involve employees.

Lee and Kim explore brand tourism effect in the luxury hotel industry and examine the role of two emotions, namely, anger and pride in mediating the relationship between perceptions and behavioural intention. This study indicated that loyal customers perceive brand immigrants negatively, whereas brand tourists are comparably positively perceived by loyal customers. The study confirmed the brand tourism effect in luxury hotels by indicating a clearer relation between perception, emotion and behavioural intention. The study provides insightful guidelines for future studies regarding loyalty in luxury hotels and other service settings where loyalty is important.

Oh, Lee and Lee investigate how and why traveling consumers choose globally branded/operated, instead of locally branded, hotels when traveling to another country. Building on signalling theory, the authors adopt a model to explain the consumer process of selecting global hotel brands and test the model empirically with South Korean international consumers through a self-administered survey. The data support the relationships of selected brand signals, such as brand credibility, brand liability, decision heuristic and anticipated satisfaction, with brand attitude and purchase likelihood. The results illustrate how brand managers could manage local versus international brands.

Destinations are the epitome of tourism marketing as they incorporate a number of interdependent entities that need to adopt compatible marketing strategies, establish clusters and networks (Romeiro, and Costa, 2010; Breda *et al.*, 2006); create alliances (Crotts *et al.*, 2000); use smart tourism methodologies (Xiang *et al.*, 2015); and adopt a common brand approach to maximize brand equity.

Micevski, Diamantopoulos and Erdbrügger examine country stereotypes and country emotions with the intentions to visit a country. Drawing from the stereotype content model (SCM), it investigates the mediating role of country-triggered emotions on the relationship between country stereotypes and intentions to visit a country. The paper illustrates that country stereotypes of competence and warmth positively influence country-related emotions of admiration which, subsequently, transfer to consumer intentions to visit the focal country as a tourism destination. Policymakers should take into consideration both the country stereotype and related

emotions triggered by this stereotype when developing and promoting the country destination brand.

Quoquab, Mohammad and Mohd Sobri explore how psychological engagement drives brand loyalty, drawing evidence from Malaysian ecotourism destinations. The study examines the relationships between electronic word of mouth (eWOM), destination brand quality (DBQ), destination brand image (DBI), psychological engagement (PE) and DBL. Findings from this study revealed that eWOM and destination product quality affect DBI while establishing the mediating effect of PE between DBI and DBL. The study provides valuable insights for practitioners and policymakers on how to create a DBI to keep tourists psychologically engaged and retaining their loyalty to the ecotourism destinations.

Giannopoulos, Piha and Skourtis investigate destination branding and co-creation through a service ecosystem perspective. Drawing on the service-dominant logic and the institutional theory, this paper explores the value-creating mechanisms of branding in the destination context and the brand co-creation process at and between different levels of a service ecosystem.

The study proposes a stepwise process of strategic imperatives for brand co-creation in the destination context. The extended analysis of the value-creating ecosystem examines the role of institutions and brand value propositions across levels. The paper considers the significance of the various levels in the ecosystem and the underlying mechanisms of brand co-creation in a somewhat neglected branding domain.

Zelenskaya and Elkanova investigate place brand architecture exploring new approaches to a sub-brands strategy that builds on both the supply and the demand sides, and explores the benefits and challenges of the suggested strategy. Using a case study of St Petersburg, Russia the paper demonstrates that place brand architecture helps to design a differentiated system of sub-brands that are customer-focused and reflect the complexity of a place. Benefits include flexibility of the sub-brands strategy, the increased credibility of the brand and the challenges for strategy implementation. This paper proposes a new target-group-specific approach that incorporates both the supply and demand sides.

Finally, Tran, Nguyen and Tran examine the relationships between brand equity, customer satisfaction and cultural distance for a tourism destination. The mediating role of customer satisfaction and the moderating effect of cultural distance in these relationships are assessed. The findings support direct positive links between the dimensions of brand equity and customer satisfaction, except for the effect of destination brand awareness on destination brand loyalty. This work further demonstrates the mediating effect of customer satisfaction on the indirect relationships between the dimensions of brand equity. Cultural distance was found to moderate the connections between the research concepts. Using moderating variables through the lens of cultural distance, the paper proposes a mediated model and supports destination managers to improve brand equity and satisfaction based on the cultural characteristics of international and domestic visitors.

For this issue, the *Journal of Product and Brand Management* relied on the help of 146 reviewers based in 22 different countries and four continents. The authors would like to acknowledge the insights provided by Professor Nigel Morgan who contributed to initial conceptualization. They are grateful to the co-Editor Professor Cleopatra Veloutsou for her support and guidance throughout the process and for her active engagement in shaping the editorial.

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