Impact of place brand names on destination image

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Abstract: The theory and practice of place branding has been drawn on to build strong destination images and position them in the minds of consumers. The naming of a product or service is integral to the development and implementation of branding strategies; place marketers, however, seldom have the opportunity to rename locations and thereby build brands from scratch. The present study is unique since it investigates the evaluation of two different place brand names for the same geographic area among two different groups of foreign visitors. Specifically, it examines similarities and differences in tourists' images of a destination branded as either (1) 'Lisbon' or (2) 'Lisbon Coast'. This investigation confirms the need to highlight different attributes to appeal to different target markets and also demonstrates that the 'Lisbon' and 'Lisbon Coast' brands are evaluated differently with regard to almost all of the attributes investigated.

Keywords: place branding; place marketing; tourism; destination image.

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1   Introduction

Aware that tourists have a wide range of possible travel destinations, marketers for nations, regions and cities have adopted destination branding strategies to promote their client locales in general and position those locales in the minds of different target audiences (Papadopoulos, 2004). A successful campaign, per Quelch and Jocz (2004), will create a clear and unique brand for a place which will help to build a destination image. This task can be more difficult if target audiences have pre-existing perceptions of a locale, whether based on actual experience or not (Hospers, 2004; Anholt, 2005, 2006; Watkins et al., 2006). As a first step, then, place brand managers must inform themselves as to potential visitors' perceptions regarding the attributes of the place they are marketing. Many studies have demonstrated that a place that is viewed positively is more likely to be visited (Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Gertner and Kotler, 2004; Nebenzahl and Jaffe, 1993; Lebedenko, 2004; Rainisto and Wastberg, 2006; van Ham, 2002; Morgan et al., 2002; Papadopoulos, 2004; Supphellen and Grønhaug, 2003).

2   Literature review

In the words of van Keken (2015), place branding can be described as 'the process of discovering, creating, developing and realising ideas and concepts for reconstructing place identities, their defining traits and 'genius loci' and subsequently building the sense of place, by efforts and investments in hardware (e.g., infrastructure, buildings), software (e.g., events, stories), orgware (e.g., cooperative organisational structuring) and virtual ware (e.g., symbols and symbolic actions, websites)'. Freire (2009, 2014) provides a framework for analysing destination brands, such as products or service brands, which highlights two different dimensions: functionality and representationally. Regarding the names of geographic locales, a consensus has developed that they can be deployed to function in much the same way as brand names. An effective brand depends on first identifying what makes a product unique, most importantly in terms of the benefits it provides, and then constructing a clear representation of that uniqueness in order to appeal to target markets (Keller, 2013). In the highly competitive tourism industry, where destinations compete fiercely to attract different target groups, place branding's

major objective is to differentiate the experience of a place from those of other locales (Freire, 2016), and effective branding is a powerful tool for the building of positive destination images (Papadopoulos, 2004; Foroudi et al., 2011).

Complicating the practice of place branding is the reality that marketers have less control over the reception of the message than with new products or services, for example. The literature has shown that different place brands evoke different sets of attributes and imaginaries, even among people who have never visited a place before (Gertner, 2011). Kotler and Gertner (2002) observed that prospective tourists will respond to a place name just as consumers of any pre-existing product or experience respond to the associated brand name: "Country images, or knowledge structures related to places, or place schemata, are commonly used as short-cuts for information processing and consumer decision heuristics" (p. 251). Consequently, some scholars acknowledge the power of a place name but contend that the attempt to employ it as a kind of brand name faces unsurmountable obstacles because of the density of associations (Blichfeldt, 2005; Gudjonsson, 2005).

These doubts aside, Hankinson (2004a) among others has demonstrated that countries can leverage their own place brands to increase investment and the number of visitors, and in fact destination branding has been widely pursued. Accordingly, it has received a great deal of scholarly attention (Freire, 2016; van Ham, 2002; Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Lebedenko, 2004; Morgan et al., 2002; Nebenzahl and Jaffe, 1993; Papadopoulos, 2004; Rainisto and Wastberg, 2006; Supphellen and Grønhaug, 2003). These authors have explored the specific associations that impact the choice to travel to, invest in, or do business in countries for the most part, and have isolated their determinants as being knowledge of a country's natural and cultural environments, and notable citizens. For Gertner and Kotler (2004), the images created by the film and other entertainment industries carry a great deal of weight. Ayyildiz and Cangiz (2007) point out that people can develop associations without visiting through the consumption of goods produced for exports. Papadopoulos (2004) affirms that countries must take control of their brands. Place branding in his view is the job of government, the private sector and academic institutions, which must coordinate their efforts in order that the campaign is successful. This puts the onus on managers to establish the value of the specific brand as positive, since it is possible for prospective tourists to develop negative views of a place that will discourage them from visiting (Anholt, 2005, 2006; Hospers, 2004; Watkins et al., 2006). At the same time, several studies indicate that a place branding position need not limit its message to a single audience, but can be directed successfully at multiple audiences simultaneously, increasing the potential pool of tourists.

As a first step, managers should determine what the relative value is of the place in question, in terms of its functional and representational dimensions (Freire, 2009, 2014). The value which is based on, as with any other brand, the degree to which consumers are aware of the place and can articulate its associations and how strong the attributes of the place are. These attributes contribute to the formation of the place brand's functional dimension in the mind of consumers. Critical to the creation of a strong, distinct place brand is the highlighting of those unique attributes that enable a place stand out from the pack of competing destinations. Govers and Go (2003) argue that the image of a tourist destination is composed of distinct attributes. The vast majority of studies (>80%) concerned with destination image conducted from 1973 to 2000 sought to delineate the salient attributes, mostly using self-response questionnaires with lists of destinations. Ekinci (2003) used different groupings of attributes to formulate destination image

scores, and this approach has gained many adherents in subsequent years (e.g., Enright and Newton, 2005; Son and Pearce, 2005). In general, researchers have understood attributes to be tangible, but it has been recognised that they can be intangible as well. These intangible attributes refer do the consumers' image perception of a place, regardless its attributes—in other words, the representational dimension of the brand (Caldwell and Freire, 2004; Kavaratzis, 2004). The combination of the two types enables destinations to have a unique positioning in the potential visitor's mind (Hankinson, 2004b; Baker, 2007; Aaker, 2009; Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 2013).

Having established that destination image can be evaluated quantitatively, the next step has been to compare places in terms of destination image and thereby generate rankings. Countries have been the type of place most commonly ranked: the Anholt-GMI Nation Brand Index (2005) is one of a number of instruments that are utilised to determine how people perceive different countries. This and other indexes are based on composite scores generated by a country's performance according to a wide variety of indicators of perceptions and brand images. Since the goal of place branding is to make that place appear particularly attractive and thereby draw more visitors and business, brand image ranking can be considered a measure of the degree of success achieved by a country's brand managers.

2.1   The case of Lisbon

Lisbon, Portugal, has in the current decade experienced a substantial rise in the number of tourists, the culmination of two decades of effort to bring this about. In 2015, the city had the fourth-highest growth rate in Europe for foreign visitors; prior to the 1990s, however, Lisbon was barely on the radar as a destination. That decade saw the initiation of a place branding effort by the city to support its designation by the European Union as the 'European Capital of Culture' for 1992 and its hosting of the World Exhibition in 1998. Both the branding campaign and concomitant upgrading of infrastructure raised the profile of Lisbon as an attractive place to visit and in which to live (Freire, 2016). The local government restored cultural sites and promoted them along with the city's other cultural attributes. Furthermore, Lisbon's image as a major tourism destination was bolstered by the successful organisation and promotion of the World Exhibition (Metaxas et al., 2011). Visitors are attracted to Lisbon due to its old imperial charm, availability of an international airport, having new infrastructure, having a number of monuments and interesting tourist sites, proximity to beaches and good climate (Freire, 2016).

In the 2000s, the Portuguese government also made efforts to promote Lisbon as a destination as part of a streamlining of its support of place branding on a national scale. In 2008, it decided to divide the country into eight major tourism regions and only finance the promotion of the corresponding eight brands, one of which was 'Lisbon'. As a result, the Estoril Coast, which refers the cities in the surrounding area of Lisbon (i.e., Cascais, Estoril, Sintra, Mafra and Oeiras) and which was formerly heavily promoted by the government, was incorporated into the Lisbon region/brand. But the branding of Lisbon faces its own challenges. Freire (2011, p.7) questioned: 'What is the brand Lisboa [Lisbon]? How can the brand Lisboa be defined? Which geographical area does the brand Lisboa cover?' Freire (2011, p.8) concluded that '[f]or Portuguese consumers, apparently the brand Lisboa covers an area larger than the city of Lisbon. When consumers were asked to define their image of the brand Lisboa, they repeatedly used variables, such as, art galleries, restaurants, nightlife, shopping, beaches and sea.

These last two variables, beaches and sea, consumers used to define the brand indicate that, in fact, brand Lisboa is composed not only by the city of Lisbon but also by some of the cities surrounding Lisbon'. Thus, it made no difference to Portuguese tourists, understandably the most knowledgeable, that the Estoril Coast was not mentioned specifically. They simply associated it with the brand Lisbon and continued to view it positively.

But the much larger group of international tourists cannot be expected to be as knowledgeable as Portuguese nationals. Therefore, this new brand structure raises the following questions: When promoting this new region defined by the brand Lisbon to foreign visitors, should the government finance the promotion of the already well-known brand, 'Lisbon', or support the further development and promotion of a little-known brand, 'Lisbon Coast'? What are the images these two brands evoke among foreign visitors? Are they similar or different?

The present paper explores the assumption that consumers may construct their own images about places whether or not they have actually visited them. In addition, it investigates the impact of place brands on consumers' perceptions regarding specific place attributes. The vehicle by which the study seeks to answer these questions is a survey of the differences and similarities in consumers' perceptions regarding attributes and associations of a widely known place brand, 'Lisbon', and another, 'Lisbon Coast', deployed on such limited scale that foreign visitors were very unlikely to have firsthand knowledge of it. Furthermore, does consideration of the little known brand alongside the widely known brand alter how the latter is perceived? As a second control, this paper surveys two different subject groups, Spanish and British nationals, with regard to attributes and associations of these two place brands. These specific subjects were chosen because they constitute the largest groups of foreign visitors to Portugal (Freire, 2016).

3 Methodology

This study aims to examine similarities and differences between tourists' perceptions of the brand 'Lisbon' and the brand 'Lisbon Coast'. 'Lisbon', referring to Portugal's capital and largest city, is a widely used place brand, while 'Lisbon Coast' is used on an extremely limited basis. In addition, this paper investigates whether British and Spanish tourists can to be shown to differ in their perceptions of the brand 'Lisbon' and the brand 'Lisbon Coast'.

Research question 1: Are there significant differences between tourists' perceptions of the brand 'Lisbon' and the brand 'Lisbon Coast'?

> *H1 Null hypothesis: There are no significant differences between tourists' perceptions of the brand 'Lisbon' and the brand 'Lisbon Coast'.*

Research question 2: Are there significant differences between British and Spanish tourists' perceptions of the brand 'Lisbon'?

> *H2 Null hypothesis: There are no significant differences between British and Spanish tourists' perceptions of brand 'Lisbon'.*

Research question 3: Are there significant differences between British and Spanish tourists' perceptions of the brand 'Lisbon Coast'?

H3 Null hypothesis: There are no significant differences between British and Spanish tourists' perceptions of the brand 'Lisbon Coast'.

The data used in this study was collected using an online survey of British and Spanish tourists who had in the prior year made at least one trip to another country. Spain and the UK send the most visitors to Portugal. In 2012, they accounted for 20% and 11%, respectively, of total nights spent in Portugal. The final sample consisted of 2018 valid questionnaires, 1104 from UK subjects (51% women and 49% men) and 1012 from Spanish subjects (48% women and 52% men). The ages of the participants ranged from 25 to 65, consistent with the ages of the majority of tourists to Portugal.

A survey instrument with a list of attributes and associations commonly evoked in relation to Portugal was assembled to establish the levels of knowledge of the brands of 'Lisbon' and 'Lisbon Coast'. Borrowing from Freire (2016), the survey instrument sought to measure five image attributes:

- suitability for family holidays

- variety of activities

- easy accessibility

- good value

- glamour and style

and five associations:

- Golf

- Sun and Beach

- Culture

- Business

- Gastronomy.

A five-point Likert type scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5), was employed to measure participants' evaluations of each destination in terms of the five attributes and associations. Using SPSS, *t*-tests and χ^2 were used to assess the significance of the differences between means and proportions of the evaluations of each destination brand, 'Lisbon' and 'Lisbon Coast', as well as the image perceptions among Spanish and British sample.

The degree of familiarity with and the strength of attributes of the place brand 'Estoril Coast' were also investigated in this study because it is within a geographic area near to Lisbon that is referred to, on an ad hoc basis, as the 'Lisbon Coast'. The inclusion of 'Estoril Coast' was deemed necessary in order to gain an understanding of how the word 'Coast' influences tourists' perceptions of a place brand and because the geographic area defined by the brand 'Estoril Coast' is now included under the brand 'Lisbon'. Hence, differences between perceptions of the brands 'Lisbon Coast' and 'Estoril Coast' were also analysed.

4 Findings

As shown on Table 1, 'Lisbon' is evaluated significantly better than 'Lisbon Coast' in terms of four out of the five attributes investigated. Compared with 'Lisbon Coast', 'Lisbon' is perceived as having more glamour and style, being a better value for the money, being more easily accessible, and as being more fun and offering a lot of things to do. On the other hand, 'Lisbon Coast' is perceived to be a more suitable destination for family holidays than 'Lisbon'. Therefore, the study results suggest that participants perceive 'Lisbon' and 'Lisbon Coast' as two distinct brands. The differences assessed can be attributed solely to the inclusion of the word 'Coast' after the term 'Lisbon'. Apparently, the simple presence of the word 'Coast' alters the perception about image attributes and what the destination offers.

Table 1 Lisbon vs. Lisbon Coast

	Total sample		Spain		UK	
	n = 2016		*n = 1012*		*n = 1004*	
	Destinations					
Attributes	*Lisbon*	*Lisbon Coast*	*Lisbon*	*Lisbon Coast*	*Lisbon*	*Lisbon Coast*
The destination has glamour and is stylish	*3.55***	*3.36*	*3.55***	*3.43*	*3.55***	*3.26*
The destination is good value for the money	*3.55***	*3.54*	*3.70***	*3.61*	*3.37*	*3.46***
It is somewhat easy to get to the destination	*4.11***	*3.86*	*4.16***	*3.89*	*4.05***	*3.83*
The destination is appropriate for family holidays	*3.52*	*3.94***	*3.71*	*4.03***	*3.30*	*3.82***
The destination is fun. There are a lot of thing to do	*3.96***	*3.86*	*4.09***	*3.94*	*3.80***	*3.5*

| | Total | | Spain | | UK | |
| | *n = 2016* | | *n = 1012* | | *n = 1004* | |
Among other things, I also associate the destination with:	*Lisbon (%)*	*Lisbon Coast (%)*	*Lisbon (%)*	*Lisbon Coast (%)*	*Lisbon (%)*	*Lisbon Coast (%)*
Golf	*8*	*11***	*5*	*9***	10	12
Sun and beach	*21*	*67***	*21*	*79***	*20*	*55***
Culture	*49***	*16*	*77***	*27*	*22***	*4*
Business	*38***	*11*	*23***	*6*	*53***	*16*
Gastronomy	*37***	*23*	*55***	*35*	*19***	*10*
None of the above	*16*	*21***	*5*	*8*	*26*	*35***
I have visited the destination	*48***	*35*	*68***	*52***	*27***	*16*
I associate the destination with						
Exile Kings and Queens	*6***	*3*	*12***	*6*	*0*	*3***

**95% confidence level; **99% confidence level.

Spanish and British participants have similar perceptions of both 'Lisbon' and 'Lisbon Coast' with regard to four out of five attributes. 'The destination is a good value for the money' is the only attribute concerning which British and Spanish study participants disagree. While British participants perceive 'Lisbon Coast' as being a better value, Spanish participants perceived 'Lisbon' as being a better value for the money. In addition, as Table 1 shows, it is interesting to observe that 35% of the participants (52% of the Spanish sample and 16% of the British) claimed that they had visited the Lisbon Coast despite the fact that this brand is not at all well-known. A possible explanation for this sizeable gap may rely on the fact that 'Lisbon Coast' is more associated with Sun and Beach than Lisbon. Among the Spanish respondents, 'Lisbon Coast' is also associated more with Golf than Lisbon. A possible explanation for these differences between the perceptions of Spanish and British participants may be that 68% of the Spanish respondents had already visited Lisbon compared with only 27% of the English respondents. Thus, it is reasonable to infer that the Spanish respondents had more likely formed their image about Lisbon based on their actual experience with the city, while the British sample may have formed their perception of 'Lisbon' based on their imaginary.

Table 2 presents study participants' perceptions of 'Estoril Coast' and 'Lisbon Coast'. Recall that the 'Estoril Coast', a well-known, formal designation commonly used up until 2008 is now a portion of the informally designated 'Lisbon Coast' area. Yet, 'Lisbon Coast' received higher scores than 'Estoril Coast' with regard to the attributes of being a good value for money, a destination of easy access, appropriate for family holidays and fun, and with a lot of things to do. On the other hand, 'Estoril Coast' received a higher score for having glamour and being stylish. In addition, 'Lisbon Coast' also received higher scores in five out of the seven researched associations. This means that more respondents associate 'Lisbon Coast' with Sun and Beach, Culture, Business, and Gastronomy than they do 'Estoril Coast'. 'Estoril' was not mentioned as having any of the investigated associations by 35% of the total sample – 13% of the Spanish sample and 58% of the British sample. Once again, results may be impacted by the fact that more Spanish than British study participants had visited the coast of Portugal. In addition, the King of Spain was once exiled in Estoril. Thus, the Spanish are more familiar with the area and associate it with the movie *Exile Kings and Queens*.

Lastly, Table 3 compares Spanish and British participants' evaluations of 'Lisbon', 'Lisbon Coast' and 'Estoril Coast'. More Spanish than British participants agree that the three destinations are a good value for money, appropriate for family holidays, and are fun with lots of things to do. No differences were found between Spanish and British participants' evaluations of 'Lisbon' in terms of glamour and style, and of 'Lisbon Coast' and 'Estoril Coast' in terms of accessibility. More British participants associate 'Lisbon' with Golf and Business than Spanish, while more Spanish participants associate 'Lisbon' with Culture and Gastronomy and 'Lisbon Coast' and 'Estoril Coast' with Sun and Beach, Culture, and Gastronomy than British participants. In addition, a large percentage of British respondents did not link any surveyed associations with these three destinations while the majority of Spanish respondents did. These findings may again reflect the fact that fewer British than Spanish participants had visited Lisbon and the Estoril Coast.

Table 2   Estoril Coast vs. Lisbon Coast

| Attributes | Total sample | | Spain | | UK | |
| | n = 2016 | | n = 1012 | | n = 1004 | |
	Estoril Coast	Lisbon Coast	Estoril Coast	Lisbon Coast	Estoril Coast	Lisbon Coast
The destination has glamour and is stylish	3.61**	3.36	3.77**	3.43	3.36**	3.26
The destination is good value for the money	3.37	3.54**	3.44	3.61**	3.23	3.46**
It is somewhat easy to get to the destination	3.60	3.86**	3.62	3.89**	3.56	3.83**
The destination is appropriate for family holidays	3.75	3.94**	3.83	4.03**	3.61	3.82**
The destination is fun. There are a lot of thing to do	3.71	3.86**	3.76	3.94**	3.63	3.75**

Among other things, I also associate the destination with:	Total sample		Spain		UK	
	n = 2016		n = 1012		n = 1004	
	Estoril Coast	Lisbon Coast	Estoril Coast	Lisbon Coast	Estoril Coast	Lisbon Coast
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Golf	13	11	16**	9	10	12
Sun and beach	55	67**	76	79	33	55**
Culture	8	16**	13	27**	3	4
Business	8	11**	6	6	9	16**
Gastronomy	15	23**	24	35**	5	11**
None of the above	35**	21	13**	8	58**	35
I have visited the destination.	25	35**	39	52**	10	16**
I associate the destination with:						
Exile Kings and Queens	17**	3	34**	6	0	3**

*95% confidence level; **99% confidence level.

Table 3   Spain vs. UK

Attributes	Destinations					
	Lisbon		Lisbon Coast		Estoril Coast	
	Spain	UK	Spain	UK	Spain	UK
	n = 1012	n = 1004	n = 1012	n = 1004	n = 1012	n = 1004
The destination has glamour and is stylish	3.55	3.55	3.43**	3.26	3.77**	3.36
The destination is good value for the money	3.70**	3.37	3.61**	3.46	3.44**	3.28
It is somewhat easy to get to the destination	4.16*	4.05	3.89	3.83	3.62	3.56

Table 3   Spain vs. UK (continued)

	Destinations					
	Lisbon		Lisbon Coast		Estoril Coast	
	Spain	UK	Spain	UK	Spain	UK
Attributes	n = 1012	n = 1004	n = 1012	n = 1004	n = 1012	n = 1004
The destination is appropriate for family holidays	3.71**	3.30	4.03**	3.82	3.84**	3.61
The destination is fun. There are a lot of thing to do	4.09**	3.80	3.94**	3.75	3.76*	3.63

	Destinations					
	Lisbon		Lisbon Coast		Estoril Coast	
Among other things, I also associate the destination with:	Spain	UK	Spain	UK	Spain	UK
	n = 1012	n = 1004	n = 1012	n = 1004	n = 1012	n = 1004
Golf	5	10**	9	12	16**	10
Sun and beach	21	20	79**	55	76**	33
Culture	76**	22	27**	4	13**	3
Business	23	53**	6	16**	6	9
Gastronomy	55**	19	35**	11	24**	5
None of the above	5	26**	8	35**	13	58**
I have visited the destination.	69**	27	53**	16	39**	10
I associate the destination with:						
Exile Kings and Queens	12**	0	6**	0	34**	0

*95% confidence level; **99% confidence level.

5 Conclusions

In summary, this investigation confirms the importance of place branding and the need to address different attributes to appeal to different target markets. Considering that 'Lisbon Coast' received significantly higher scores with regard to most of the attributes and associations, the Portuguese government should consider rebranding this Portuguese region.

The study results also indicate that Spanish and British participants evaluate the 'Lisbon' and 'Lisbon Coast' brands differently with regard to almost all of the attributes investigated. Prior studies (Konecnik and Gartner, 2007; Tasci, Gartner, and Cavusgil, 2007) reported similar findings: the consideration of attributes of a destination brand can be influenced as much by intangible factors as by tangible ones. Also, this study supports the conclusion of Zenker and Beckmann (2013) that different target markets view the same attributes of a destination brand differently. This suggests that different communication strategies might be necessary.

In addition, the results regarding the 'Estoril Coast' and 'Lisbon Coast' brands evidence that the latter is regarded more favourable by both Spanish and British participants. This represents a field of opportunity for place branding managers in the

Lisbon region. It became apparent that the 'Lisbon Coast' brand, despite the fact that it is in very limited use, has achieved a surprising degree of recognition. The 'Lisbon Coast' brand would be capable of referencing both the city of Lisbon and the municipalities of the Estoril Coast.

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