Tourist destination brand image development—an analysis based on stakeholders’ perception: A case study from Southland, New Zealand

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Abstract
While tourist destination brand development is well documented, there is little research on the process of brand image development concept. The aim of this study is to examine what is the concept of tourist destination brand image development based on a case study from the Southland (SL) region of New Zealand (NZ). A qualitative approach was adopted using face-to-face interviews with stakeholders within the SL, NZ. Participants considered that brand concepts, such as the name or symbol that represents the region, should be based on local geographical attractions. Furthermore, the uniqueness of product, place, and local attributes and experiences should be used in creating a brand image; finally, the events and festivals held by locals annually. This study contributes to a destination marketing strategy and indicates that those involved in brand development should seek to understand how attribute–holistic, functional–psychological, and common–unique help in destination brand image development. It makes a managerial contribution by better understanding the way to implement the destination brand image and hence improve marketing effectiveness by maximizing the benefit to all stakeholders, including customers, employees, shareholders, suppliers, and nonprofit organizations.

Keywords
Brand image, destination brand image, stakeholder management, stakeholders perception, tourism destination branding

Introduction
Destination branding is a central topic for academic research and is practically important for all destinations because it is intended to identify and differentiate one destination from others. For example, 100% pure New Zealand (NZ) is unique around the globe (Balakrishnan, 2009; Hankinson, 2001; Hosany et al., 2007; Keller, 1993). A brand is considered as a powerful instrument in creating a successful destination (Leisen, 2001). Branding is an important concept that is being applied in a range of destination contexts from a country to a region to a city (Hankinson, 2001). Anholt (2010) asserts that once the country’s brand campaign has been launched one must consider sustainability of the resources on which a brand is based to maintain product value in the marketing strategy. Branding is being applied around the world and most
studies concentrate on tourists' perceptions (Gras, 2008; Zehrer et al., 2007: 572). Among earlier studies in this category, the focus is on, for instance, the role of branding in international advertising (Pitcher, 1985); advertising perceived quality and brand image (Kirmani and Zeithaml, 1993); image formation process (Gartner, 1994); cooperative branding for rural destinations (Cai, 2002); destination Alps and its communicated brand image (Zehrer et al., 2007); destination brand image from a business tourist perspective (Hankinson, 2005), while other emphasis is on the poetics and politics of destination branding (Ooi, 2004).

As delineated above, destination branding development has been studied in several contexts, but to date little research focus on tourist destination brand image development concept, especially from the stakeholder’s point of view in the Southland (SL) region, NZ (Hankinson, 2001; Richards and Wilson, 2007; Tasci and Kozak, 2006). Tourist destination brand image has become one of the substantial investigation areas, and rare studies have proposed to capture the main idea impacting tourist destination choices (Cai, 2002; Gartner, 1994; Hankinson, 2004a; Knox and Freeman, 2010; Zehrer et al., 2007). For instance, Richards and Wilson (2007) make the point that the source of brands or images being developed for creative destinations is one of the destination campaigns with the aim to differentiate from competitors. Additionally, for the development of tourist infrastructure, the concerned stakeholders must not overlook to develop a good brand image to help create a new experience for tourists on their visit, particularly activities and events (Bornhorsta et al., 2010). For this reason, understanding destination brand image helps all relevant stakeholders to gain knowledge and is one of the factors that determine the success of the brand image campaign (d’Angella and Go, 2009; Morgan and Pritchard, 2010; Ooi, 2004; Piggott et al., 2010).

To overcome this shortcoming, this research sought to address the gap by examining ‘what is the concept of tourist destination brand image development based on a case study from the SL region, NZ?’ The study determines to seek information from stakeholders to elicit what they believe are the main components of tourist destination brand image development. The information from stakeholders certainly helps to obtain the most accurate information in achieving the research aim for several reasons. First, they are involved in almost every important area and in every stage of a brand management strategy through collaboration with businesses owners/managers (Jamal and Getz, 1995; Yaghmour, 2008). As supported by Pinto and Kastenholz (2011), in implementing tourism destination branding the involvement of stakeholders is critical for the success of destination branding development, for instance in helping a region to conciliate short-term with long-term benefits and to balance benefits to all relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, they also involve and manage in several aspects, including economic, social, environmental situation, and sustainable resources of regions (Buhalis, 2000; Wang and Fesennmaier, 2006). Within this vein, the stakeholders should always be aware of the product and service quality and always be supportive and responsive, where appropriate (Hager and Sung, 2012; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Sheehan and Ritchie, 2005; Wang and Fesennmaier, 2007; Wang and Xiang, 2007).

It is crucial to bridge this gap as Pike (2007) supported that an image is one way to compete considering the intangible nature of destination experience and will help tourist decision making with their destination plan (Gartner, 1994). Once an overall tourist destination brand image is formed, a tourist is able to make a destination vacation choice, and it directly affects tourists’ intention to visit (Gras, 2008). Predominantly, tourism destination brand image development helps to improve marketing effectiveness and attract visitors, hence increasing employment and boosting economic growth (d’Angella and Go, 2009; Hankinson, 2004a; Morgan and Pritchard, 2010; Piggott et al., 2010). As a result, a successful destination brand image can provide reduced search costs for consumers, reduced risk perceptions and higher perceived quality, most importantly it increases the ability to market competitive advantage (Dayanand, 2009; Hosany et al., 2007).

A review of the literature
Tourism destination is defined as a geographical region, political jurisdiction, or major attraction, which seeks to provide visitors with a range of satisfying to memorable visitation experiences (Bornhorsta et al., 2010: 572). Hankinson (2001) considers branding requires visual/verbal triggers that focus on the name or logo indicating a distinctive product or service. In this way, tourist branding is to ‘add value in such a way that the buyer or user perceives relevant unique added values which match their needs most closely’.
Ashton (2001: 128). In an attempt to provide a solid foundation for this study, the literature review in this article pertains to the importance of tourism destination brand image development based on the stakeholder’s point of view. The following section discusses collaborative destination marketing and the relevance of stakeholders on branding implementation; the subsequent section discusses brand image and tourism destination; and finally, conceptual measurement of destination brand image.

**Collaborative destination marketing and implementation of tourist destination brand image**

It is important to understand collaborative destination marketing because it is a key strategic tool in managing community-based tourism destinations. Several scholars have discussed this in the literature within this context, such as Buhalis (2000), Cai (2002), and Pinto and Kastenholz (2011). They concluded that destination marketing can be set as the way to develop products and service to customers and ultimately recommended offering local experiences to the tourist through cooperative destination branding. Thus, it can be said that stakeholders will be involved in the entire destination marketing campaign in a variety of areas. An example of these is such as destination marketing involves different functions and can be in a context of environmental forces evolving consecutively through the expressions of problem setting, direction setting, implementation, evaluation, and outcome (Park et al., 2009). Buhalis (2000) also expresses that marketing of destination should not be merely to differentiate their tourism products and services, but the strategic objectives of all stakeholders to consider in sustaining local resources. As argued by Wang and Xiang (2007), collaborative destination marketing stakeholders will be involved in four stages: First, preconditions for marketing; they have to adapt their products or service to suit their environments, including a relevant physical product, social factors, and technological. As said by Buhalis (2000), in the main market and destination management, stakeholders will match certain types of demand and develop an appropriate tourism products brand destination for the potential target markets. Second stage, they motivate to enter into such a strategy to achieve their specific goals. For instance, the Community Trust of SL aims to support cultural heritage, education, and protecting environmental resources of a region, hence they work closely with community groups and organizations to get help and support to achieve their aim successfully. Third stage, the process construct that captures the dynamics of the collaborative marketing processes; and the last stage, the outcome construct, which describes the consequences of the collaborative marketing activities (Wang and Xiang, 2007).

At present in almost every organization, stakeholders mostly collaborate and play a crucial role in response to the needs of the customer. A stakeholder is responsible in building a once in a lifetime experience for tourists, which will be one of the goals for tourists when they travel to a destination, for example, those who haven’t seen snow before, but when they go to a ski resort and have an experience at snowboarding or skiing, this unique experience will be in their memory for life (Morgan and Pritchard, 2010; Mueller and Peter, 2008). In terms of creating experience, it can refer to a holistic experience that stakeholders must provide: the right and relevant experience for the tourist target, including an overall excellent product, service quality, and tourism infrastructure. In contrast, poor roads, inconvenient transportation and bad hotel services can degrade the tourist experience (Dasgupta, 2011).

Additionally, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) and d’Angella and Go (2009) contended that stakeholders have an awareness of all issues within the industry and are responsive where appropriate. For instance, ski tourism products are offered in some countries, including in Queenstown, NZ, which has the potential to be one of the best ski resorts attracting tourists who seek for a skiing or snowboarding experience (Mueller and Peter, 2008). The regional tourism organization (RTO) Queenstown has played a significant role in developing destination branding (Tourism Research Council, n.d.). Notably, Westgate (2009) revealed that the strong growth outlook of international visitors to Queenstown has increased; a total of 858,000 overnight visitors in 2003, and by 2010 the totals were expected to increase by 28%. This arises from the support and responsiveness of the Queenstown RTO toward a branding development destination (Tourism Research Council, n.d.). Thus, tourism organizations at different levels are involved in marketing this destination and are in charge of developing an image that will position their destination’s branding (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2006).
Finally, in today’s tourism destination branding development, the ability to collaborate with stakeholder helps to create an awareness of destination marketing and provides an important competitive advantage (Wang and Xiang, 2007). Consequently, the ability of the destination management organization to interact effectively with stakeholders in the destination is important to its success (Bornhorsta et al., 2010). Stakeholders work together because they help to give more power to control the destination development (Reed, 1997). Naipaul et al. (2009) pointed out that forming partnerships among business owners is valuable for all partnerships, especially when implementing a product portfolio, to spread the cost of marketing activities between several destinations with more efficiency. In brief, stakeholders act in a professional manner including viewing brand image management associated or linked with business tourism destinations. The section below discusses tourism and brand image linking together in developing destinations.

Tourism destination and brand image

Brand image has been discussed previously by a number of scholars, including the work of Dobni and Zinkhan (1990), Echtner and Ritchie (1991, 1993), Grewal et al. (1998a), Hankinson (2001), and Pike (2007). For example, Crompton (1979) defines a destination image as an attitude, and comprised of belief, ideas, and impressions that a tourist possesses towards a destination. Similarly, brand image is defined as the ‘feelings, ideas and attitudes that are given by the brand’ (Hankinson, 2001: 128). These perceptions about a brand reflect associations existing in the memory of the consumer (Keller, 1993).

Brand image is a perceptual phenomenon that is formed through consumer interpretation, whether reasoned or emotional (Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990: 118), and the concept is often used to express consumers’ interpretation of the actual intrinsic characteristics (brand name, familiarity, firm’s reputation) and extrinsic characteristics of a product (product attributes) (Kirmani and Zeithaml, 1993). Perceived brand image affect consumers in a number of ways, such as through information that consumers receive from the store’s name; an attractive brand name increases consumer perceived brand image significantly (Grewal et al., 1998a). Furthermore, brand image is formed through consumer attitude and involvement with physical products, or how familiar the consumer is with the brand (Zeithaml, 1988). As a result, this suggests that the perception of a brand’s image influences consumer perceived value and hence leads to consumer intention to purchase (Dodds et al., 1991; Grewal et al., 1998b).

As discussed above, an image is relevant in a destination brands’ development because both concepts are linked (Garcia et al., 2012). For example, an image associates people with a destination and links between their perceptions and brand associations (Ivanov and Illum, 2010). Likewise, tourism destinations play two important roles; one is enhancing the social and economic well-being of the locals who live within its area, and another is providing a variety of tourist experiences and activities for visitors (Bornhorsta et al., 2010). A variety of ways to develop a successful tourist destination and branding image have been discussed in the work of Hankinson (2001), Mueller and Peter (2008), Crockett and Wood (2010), Morgan and Pritchard (2010), Ryan and Zahra (2010), and Blain et al. (2005). For example, Pike (2007) contends that an image is the only way to compete, considering the intangible nature of destination experience. While Alvares and Campo (2011) concluded that tourism promotion information improves a country’s destination image. Ryan and Zahra (2010) assert that to develop a tourist destination brand, one must respond to consumer demand; this response often includes an emotional appeal whereby the destination improves its perceived value relative to the price paid (Morgan and Pritchard, 2010). Additionally, the image of a destination is usually predetermined by the local geographical name of the place (Cai, 2002) and from the uniqueness of local geography, tradition or culture, including events or festivals. Hence, attracting tourist destination brand image arguably involves creating a differentiation, emotions, ideas, and a memorable experience provide by stakeholders.

The conceptual model of brand image

Image formation processes have been investigated for a number of years (Gartner, 1994). Different models within this context have been proposed extensively; some examples are such as a model by Gartner (1994), advocating that brand image formation purposely proposes the recognition of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors that help tourist motivation to travel to their destination. Another model, a brand image concept is used to express consumers’ interpretation of the actual
intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics of a product (Kirmani and Zeithaml, 1993). Extrinsic cues include product attributes, whereas intrinsic cues include brand name, familiarity, manufacturer’s reputation, and popularity of a brand image or theme (Agarwal and Teas, 2001; Olshavsky, 1985; Zeithaml, 1988). Whereas, Hankinson (2004b) said that the brand image can be categorized into two or three dimensions. The two dimension model refers to functional or symbolic or functional and representational appealing to reason and emotion, while the three-dimension model adds an experiential dimension that appeals to the senses.

Echtner and Richie (1991) argue that a brand image conceptual framework should be based on three components; attribute–holistic; functional–psychological; and common–unique. Firstly, the attribute–holistic; this component refers to specific attributes and consumer perceived overall products information and impressions. Destination image refers to human-related attributes, for instance, the type of accommodation; tourism infrastructure; friendliness of the locals; natural attributes such as climate or geological features.

Secondly, the functional–psychological; this component refers to characteristics ranging from more observable or measurable attributes, such as a mental picture of physical characteristics, such as mountainous, village, and price level (functional), to less tangible attributes or those that are difficult to observe and measure, such as atmosphere or mood of the place (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993). As emphasized by Hankinson (2001), brand image is affected by information that consumers receive, especially that with a clear message about feelings, ideas, attitudes, and impressions toward a destination. Lastly, the common–unique; refers to the individual perception about different characteristics of a destination and can range from being common to unique, for example; events (functional characteristics) and such as Nepal, Mt. Everest or auras (psychological characteristics) (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003).

As discussed above, it can be concluded that there are several models used to measure a brand image development depending on research contexts. However, a conceptual framework developed from Echtner and Ritchie (1991) will be used in this study for a number of reasons. Firstly, the conceptualisation of brand image in this study is arguably a part of a set of ideas or beliefs, feelings, and attitudes given by the brand currently similar to the brand image concepts of this study (Hankinson, 2001). Alternatively, the conceptual model developed from the associations of overall product information and impressions, including mental picture or scenery of a product; the uniqueness of the tourism product and service, and perception of experience when tourists arrive at the destination. As Cai (2002) said that this information is a crucial perception that the consumers hold in their minds about a particular brand. Furthermore, it is most current because the three components of brand image have been mentioned extensively in brand image studies (Crompton, 1979; Echtner and Ritchie, 1991, 1993, 2003; Gartner, 1994; Gras, 2008).

As mentioned in the introduction, including the justification of the research aim, this study examines ‘what is the concept of tourist destination brand image development based on a case study from the SL region of NZ?’ To achieve the research aim, three research issues were raised; firstly, ‘what is the specific attribute of the destination that helps to create brand image?’ Secondly, ‘what is the attitude or feelings or ideas that can be created for tourists on brand image perception?’ Thirdly, ‘what are some truly unique features that help to create a brand image in your region?’

Methodology

This research utilizes an in-depth interview because free flowing conversation is needed to obtain the desired answers. It strongly relies on the relationship between the interviewer and the respondent and the need to obtain an individual experience and cannot be directly observed by the researcher. The participants answered a series of open-ended questions and were encouraged to talk and further explain their answers, so that the researcher could develop a comprehensive understanding of the stakeholder’s viewpoints, because there has been little formal discussion concerning brand image within this region, prior to this research.

The participants of this study were stakeholders, including government and private agencies, travel and tourism, businesses, hotel managers or owners from the SL region of NZ. This area has been chosen because the study aims to elicit the information from the stakeholders who work around this area. These stakeholders were considered to hold in-depth knowledge of this tourist destination (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). A study should be explored from a stakeholder point of view for a number of
reasons; firstly, stakeholders are focal people when developing a tourism destination brand image, because they are managing and building an attractive destination and have the ability to solve the problems at hand, interdependent on other groups (Sheehan and Ritchie, 2005). Nowadays, stakeholders are no longer working alone, because they believe that ‘the go it alone’ policy of many tourism sectors is a well-known problem leading to unsuccessful destination branding development (Jamal and Getz, 1995). Hager and Sung (2012) confirmed that strategic marketing, development of products and organizational is learned through collaborative partnership. Thus, it can be said that, stakeholders are the essential people who can provide inside information especially when the study contexts are involved within a destination brand image development.

The study area is located on the coast of SL and includes Invercargill, Gore, Bluff, Riverton, South Catlins, Te Anau, Lake Manapouri, Doubtful Sound, and Stewart Island, the third largest island of NZ after the North and South Islands (Statistics New Zealand, 2011). The potential participants for this study were identified by using local information, including tourist information, brochures, accommodation guides, and referrals from the SL region tourist operators. The respondents were selected based on participant profiles, especially if they manage a company or organization relevant to the hotel, tourism or event industry. At the beginning of the data collecting process, a total of 40 stakeholders were identified and contacted to arrange an interview. This contact was by e-mail or phone call and one week was allowed for operators to confirm whether or not they were willing to be interviewed. Some participants (23) were willing to be part of the research project and allowed the researcher to conduct an in-depth face-to-face interview (see Appendix 1 for participants’ details).

The interviews took place between May and July 2011, with each taking approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyze data because this technique help to compress many words of text into fewer content groups based on the rules of coding and is one of the appropriate techniques applied to data that are durable when conducting face-to-face interview (Stemler, 2001). As supported by Patton (2002), this technique helps to group the keyword for each transcript and helps to identify the key issues and answers to the research question. In this study, the key words for each transcript were coded with different colors and the transcript records were kept confidential with identification (ID) numbers given to each participant.

Results

The results revealed that three components were applied into tourist destination brand image development. The results will be revealed according to three research issues: firstly, ‘what is the specific attribute of the destination that helps to create brand image?’ Secondly, ‘what is the attitude or feelings or ideas that can be created for tourists on brand image perception?’ Thirdly, ‘what are some truly unique features that help to create a brand image in your region?’ The results for these three issues are discussed below.

Research issue 1: What is the specific attribute of the destination that helps to create brand image?

It was found that brand image development is based on several components. One component is based on specific attributes of the place, local product, locals’ character, and consumer perceived overall products information and impressions. Several respondents said that the specific attribute of the place helps to create a destination brand image, such as the specific place that represents its region. For example, the image of Stewart Island, the third island of NZ, is a great tourist destination that represents SL region in NZ. Similarly, the stakeholder from one of the hotels agreed that when creating a brand image the iconic features of the destination must be created in the tourists’ mind once they represent the region. For example, if a SL region has uniqueness as a green environment, this can be used to represent a greenland destination. On the other hand, another respondent who works within the event organization expressed that to build a destination brand image the concerned stakeholder must not forget to seek for the uniqueness of a local product. For example, the SL region represents the world’s most famous oyster from Bluff and typical local seafood, particularly ‘Blue Cod’ and ‘Crayfish’ which can be found only in the South Pacific Ocean. As agreed by respondents from the hotel industry, for example a general manager, an executive assistant manager, and a hotel owner all said
that tourist destinations will need to have a strong brand image by presenting the icon of the region and the international image, for instance, ‘Bluff Oyster and Seafood Festival’, which has been used to promote and create destination image because of its reputation and the uniqueness of the local products.

Interestingly, one of the hotel top management (general manager) revealed that the uniqueness of the locals’ character should be included when developing brand image. They said that there was a need to raise an awareness of tourism and encourage the locals’ appreciation, and have pride in themselves and the region. They also expressed that there was a need for ‘images that help to develop the tourist destination by raising awareness of the local and region’s uniqueness’. This uniqueness means the character of the locals that represent it. For example here in SL, the locals are well known as the friendliest people in NZ. The general manager from a four-star hotel said that ‘when the tour leaders arrive we greet them like long lost friends and so too our guests; we welcome them more casually rather than with formality.’ Moreover, several participants, such as hotel owners/manager, event organizers/chairperson, gave opinions that local uniqueness is one of the key aspects in increasing brand image perception and a selling point for the region. One example, a general manager from a top star hotel at Te Anau said that the southern locals are the friendliest people in NZ, as evidence from previous visitors, they said, ‘the further south you go the more friendliness you get.’

A participant highlighted:

The images that will help to develop destination branding I believe are bringing up and developing the potential features that represent the place, such as the town called Bluff has a high potential to be one main brand image of Southland, NZ. There are several reasons for these, for instance a massive number of visitors pass this little town because of amazing destinations like Stewart Island. Furthermore, there is the potential to capitalize on Bluff as being the South Island’s land’s end of NZ. Particularly it is a place where a ferry departs for Stewart Island apart from air travel. Bluff is renowned for the best oysters in the world.

One interviewee mentioned:

When creating the brand image at a tourist destination, the iconic features of the destination must be brought up and created in the tourists mind. For example, SL was named as the greenest and clean land in NZ. The beautiful scenery, unique environment, and fantastic resorts and natural parks are at our doorstep, including Stewart Island and Milford Sound.

Research issue 2: What is the attitude or feelings or ideas that can be created for tourists on brand image perception?

The results revealed that the stakeholders considered brand image must be created based on the feelings, ideas, and experiences at the tourist destination. Feelings or ideas can be created through several categories, such as growing the idea of saving the environment, sustainable tourism, and health tourism. One participant who works as a chairperson in one of the SL trust associations expressed that we should be protecting the natural treasures at the present and for future generations to appreciate it. She said that, ‘we want to keep our environment as it is and we want to show the real nature of NZ to the world’.

Within this vein, while other respondent are concerned about environmental friendly and sustainability, other respondent have slightly different idea, especially about living within a safe environment and eating healthy food. This is evident from one farms owner who is actually concerned about living without chemicals and who produces organic products. He said that, ‘healthy tourism is at the top of the list as more people around the world take an active interest in their health. A travel segment known as health tourism has evolved to fill customer needs. I manage an organic farm as my career and also open it for tourists to visit, in this way they can see how I feed animals to produce a healthy product and meat, including vegetable, beef, lamb, pork, and other poultry’. Another participant from the hotel industry (executive assistant manager) also expressed that appreciating and helping to protect nature would be a main component for destination brand image development so that we can all live within a healthy and green environment. He said that,

Since I have been in SL, I appreciate the natural, I change the image myself, and I think the image of SL is to create a feeling of saving the environment and create more tourism culture or to plant some more ideas of tourism atmosphere. I changed myself to be involved as a person, I don’t think I am a green person
myself, but I want to help to protect the resort. To save the environment, we need to have great compromise among each other and those who are involved within this area. We need to change negative to positive images on seasonality, particularly in Southland, such as during Christmas, people leave the region, and we need to embrace the people to appreciate or create the feeling of appreciation in our region.

Furthermore, brand image should be based on feeling or idea of cultural appreciation, and respondent believed it would help to gain a perception of a destination brand image clearly; for example, giving an idea about a region’s history, local art, museums, and important culture. One participant from the backpacker hotel’s owner expressed that:

The image we have here for tourists is being at the end and the start of the country really (Bluff); it is quite unique historically and the old town on the same site which is quite a surprise to some people. It has a big history in the early days, when a person came by boat from Australia we were the port of entry a long time ago. All the mail for SL came here first at this building, where we have our motel.

Finally, the respondents believed that a destination brand image development creating an experience at the destination would in turn be in their memory for life when tourists return to their hometown. The tourist can gain experience at the destination by participating in any one of the activities, such as skiing, fly-fishing, bushwalking, or tramping within a unique environment. The same opinion of one of the respondents (hotel manager) highlighted that when creating a brand image one must offer tourists related experiences within the region, for instance, activities, such as trekking, tramping or hunting stag/doe and wild pigs; appreciation of the beautiful scenery; the unique environment and fantastic resorts by visiting Stewart Island; or boarding a cruise to appreciate Milford or Doubtful Sounds, one of the most unique Fiordland in the world.

One of the interviewees from a hotel (GM) said that, ‘the majority of guests to our hotel are from Germany, and they like to have an experience, to feel, to see, and walk through our unique environment, such as the Catlins National Park and the forests on Stewart Island’. Additionally, they said that ‘the image that will help to develop the destination brand image should also provide a typical product that represents our region for tourists to have an experience when they arrive. Another hotel manager said that, ‘in my hotel I always make sure that my guests can experience our local or famous food/seafood, and is a must-have on our restaurant menu, including Bluff oysters, crayfish, and venison and blue code (local fish)’.

Additionally, when asked about what is the important component of a tourist destination brand image; ‘a good life style and experience at the destination is a priority that needs to be created’. A hotel’s owner and manager revealed that, ‘we have to create a solid value to the destination when creating a good brand image, for instance Stewart Island is one of the solid values for SL’. While a hotel backpacker’s owner said, ‘we should be creating several activities for tourists and I believe that it is happening here within our region, so why we have a lot of people visiting our destination. For example, a number of people visit Steward Island frequently when they travel to the South Island because they can gain experience from activities available here in our region, such as bush walking, bird watching, fishing and hunting’. On the other hand, some respondents give different ideas. One key aspect to the region is it is easy to get around, particularly for accessing tourist destinations and outdoor activities. Evidence from a hotel manager (ID 2) said that ‘the value of SL is being able to do any activity within a short distance. The activities here are different from any other region in NZ. I am actually the most proud of being able to show tourists what SL has to offer’. Similarly, respondents from event organizers give similar opinions to those who came from the hotel and tourism industry. They also believed that a good brand image is to have a reputation for a great outdoor life style, where people can go hunting, tramping, and interact with the friendliest locals in the country. SL was also noted as famous for fly-fishing or brown trout fishing at the town of Gore, and visitors can travel short distances to everywhere within the region (ID 7).

Research issue 3; What are some truly unique features that help to create a brand image in your region?

To create a brand image at a tourist destination, the respondents from different industries believe
the same thing. They revealed that the features that will create destination image must be very unique and can’t be found in any other region, and should include unique local products, places, and event/festival. For example, SL is the home of the world’s most famous wild oyster industry located in Bluff, the ‘Lands-End’ of the South Island. The locals have organized the Bluff Oyster Seafood Festival every year since 1997, attracting both international and domestic tourists. A member of one of the event committees said that, ‘the world’s most famous oyster brings tourists to NZ, and Bluff locals give it a unique SL flavor’. Another event respondent said, ‘Bluff was named as the place where the world’s most famous oyster comes from; seasonal oysters are collected (dredged) from the sea bed (for only six months per year)’. Similarly, the deputy event chairman said that, ‘Bluff is one of only two places, the other being France, where wild oysters are collected from the ocean floor, in most places oysters are farmed’. A respondent working as an event publicity promotion officer, said that, ‘Bluff Oyster is the big one and is a world iconic image. The Bluff Oyster Festival is a unique image event for SL, especially for the Bluff community. The first start was to celebrate the oyster season, but we saw the potential when we found people still coming to the event from further in the field, even though we were just a community-based celebration’. Hence, recognize the potential; if it can become a unique event the community members should help each other to create an event image into a destination.

Additionally, stakeholders believe presenting place images will help to promote developing tourist destination brand image, and one of the brand images that represent the SL region is ‘The PowerNet Tour’. It is one of the iconic events that come within the SL package, as said by the organizer. The organizer believes that this is a well-promoted event, and it will help to create a good brand image. This event is one of the major activities of the region and the officials try their best to produce a good event image. They believe they represent one of the major events that SL people are proud of. Why does the international cycling event represent both place and event uniqueness? Firstly, the cycling touring route will take them through several major cities or towns within the South Island. They believe visitors as well as the cyclists would enjoy many places, including friends and relatives who follow the race and the viewers from the media, such as television. The route they travel is mainly to the destinations that already stand out as icons of the region, including Invercargill, Bluff, Te Anu, Queenstown, and Arrowtown. Secondly, this event is an international event where several well-known cyclist look forward to participate this event.

Media attention is an important component for a destination to become unique; an example is an event or festival. The respondent said that, ‘in our region we have hero and they made a film based on his real life, and it’s become famous’. Hence, the local community organizes an event based on this local hero. This unique event in the SL region is ‘The Burt Monroe Challenge’. The World’s Fastest Indian movie is a famous brand image for SL, Invercargill where Burt Monroe lived. The Burt Monroe Challenge event is something to do with the spirit of Burt himself, especially as he was a grassroots type with a can-do attitude. A lot of competitors build their own motorcycles or modify and design them to be up against the latest or the fastest models. A can-do attitude allows the competitors to highlight the BM spirit and is rewarded by Burt’s family. There are restrictions with the licenses and rules and the most important concern is safety. This event is a main target in NZ and Australia. The audience is mainly the baby boomer generation and hence there are several channels to promote suited with each target market group, such as word of mouth, posters for the workshop, website, social network, and brochure drop or by sending mail to previous participators (as said by event organizers).

In summary, the important features that help a destination to become unique and create brand image are the uniqueness of product, place, including events or festivals that are iconic to the region only. Once it has the potential to become unique, the stakeholder must try to set the aim and goal of how to create interest in the tourist mind, for instance, if it gets media attention when the event or place has been visited by famous people, such as celebrity or government top management. Additionally, heavily promote those unique products, especially if they for example have been in a famous film or if the place used to be the home of a hero, and it is well known to people around the world.

Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this study is to examine what is the concept of tourist destination brand image
development based on a case study from the SL region of NZ. It was found that the brand image development comprises of three main components. First component, provide overall product attribute (attribute–holistic) for consumer to perceive overall information and impression, particularly places, local product, locals’ character, and tourist infrastructures. For example, create the appreciation of a destination based on local environment, seeing endangered fauna and flora, meeting locals, all of which add value to tourists who may therefore spend more money on their trip. This is embedded in a statement by Cai (2002); the image is represented by the local geographical name of place, local, traditional, or culture.

Another important component is growing the idea and attitude about a destination into the tourist mind (functional–psychological). Provide a mental observable or measurable attributes image or picture of the destination, for example, growing the idea of a destination of tourism sustainability, cultural heritage, and health tourism. The findings in this study agree with a study conducted by Buhalis (2000) and Wang and Xiang (2007); marketing a destination should aim to sustain local resources and adapt products and services to suit with current circumstances, including the tourist demand and trend, such as the green environment campaign. Moreover, creating the actual experience at the destination is considered as one of the specific attributes of a strong brand image in developing tourist destination branding. Respondents suggested that brands help tourists perceive the value of their visit and gain experiential memories. These results support the Hankinson (2001) study which notes that brand image is a symbolic aspect of a brand and should be based on feelings, ideas, and attitudes that are believed by the business owner. To create a personal perception, the information of the destination brand image must be perceived by tourists, and one crucial aspect is by providing a clear understanding of stakeholders’ feelings, ideas, and attitudes to tourists (Merrilees et al., 2005). The experiences include a warm welcome feeling by locals, treating the tourist like a long lost friend, and a willingness to go the extra mile if needed. Similarly, Blain et al. (2005) also said that the promise of a memorable travel experience derives from pleasurable memories of the destination experience.

Finally, an important feature that helps to create a destination brand image is to seek for unique products, ranging from being common to unique depend on the individual perception, for instance the uniqueness of local (Maori), events/festivals and place (e.g. Stewart Island). Furthermore, typical local food or events/festivals that stakeholders/locals have discovered has high potential. The way to success in creating the unique features are to promote and try to attract media and top management attention. The results provided are similar to Cai’s (2002) statement that brand image is usually predetermined by the uniqueness of locality, event, or festival. Alvares and Campo (2011) supported that the tourism promotion information improves a country’s destination image, thus the same as with the results on creating events or festivals; to create the uniqueness one must seek the potential of the event or festival and promote from regional to international.

Hence, it was found that the results in this study support the conceptual framework proposed by Echtner and Richie (1991); the first components of brand image are based on the attribute holistic, including the overall tourist infrastructure. Secondly, provide a clear image and picture of the destination attributes that can be created in tourist’s mind; finally to seek or create the uniqueness, including the actual experience with the place, local and event that a tourist can experience or be part of the activities.

**Theoretical and managerial implications**

This study provides additional knowledge on destination brand image development within a region. In terms of theoretical contribution, this study provides three components of destination brand image development. The first component providing sufficient tourist attribute, especially the appreciation of local attributes, such as tourist infrastructure both made by human and nature. The second component, providing a clear image and picture of the destination attributes that can be created in tourist’s mind (functional–psychological); for example, the perception of the place, atmosphere, and experience at the destination. The third component refers to providing the unique experience, such as experience with typical local product, meeting with ethnic groups or locals, special events/festivals, selecting the event that caught media attention, and convincing government to be part of this unique
experience (Crompton, 1979; Echtner and Ritchie, 2003; Hankinson, 2001; Morgan and Pritchard, 2010).

From a practical point of view, this study is useful for managers as it provides the concepts that stakeholders may use and be aware of when developing a destination brand image. They should initiate efforts to gather information about the most unique features within a region, the potential features of product and place, culture/historical festivals and local activities. Importantly, SL local authorities and business owners or managers should support destination development projects, such as environmental protection projects or events and festivals. Additionally, creating destination activities is also crucial because tourists design their trip for the experience to be part of their holiday (d’Astous and Colbert, 2007; Morgan and Pritchard, 2010). Lastly, the stakeholders must acquire a clear understanding of the feelings, attitudes, and impressions of the tourist (Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990; Hankinson, 2001).

However, this research has limitations due to the limited selection of respondents in one region with a small population and few stakeholders. In fact, this is a supplier perspective rather than a visitor perspective, and future research should explore and measure the destination brand image based on the usefulness of findings. Moreover, this study provides a useful conceptual framework that in the future a researcher should study with a larger number of stakeholders and in different regions; one, for example, is Queenstown, one of the fastest growing regions in the South Island, NZ.

Appendix 1

Participant profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NO.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Motel owner</td>
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<td>Hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>General manager</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tour manager</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Event management company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>General manager</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Hotel manager/owner</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Chairman of events</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
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<td>F</td>
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<tr>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Event management company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Event publicity promotion officer</td>
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<td>10</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Campervan playground and accommodation</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Organic farm-accommodation and tour owner</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Hotel and tourism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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