SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE AND BEHAVIOURAL SUPPORT TOWARDS DESTINATION BRANDING: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF DESTINATION IDENTIFICATION: THE STUDY OF TANZANIA TOURIST DESTINATION

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ABSTRACT
In recent times, destination branding has emerged as an imperative tool for tourist destinations that strive to survive in the current competitive setting in the tourism sector. However, despite the potential role that destination branding is expected to play in building destination competitiveness, very little is known about the factors which constitute the process. This study explores social media usage in influencing behavioural support towards destination branding from a supply-side perspective. It involved 302 respondents who are owners-managers of the selected business firms that operate in Tanzania's tourism sector. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used for inferential statistical analysis and the findings show that social media usage influences behavioural support towards destination branding when mediated with destination identification. Thus, social media should be considered a tool influencing stakeholders' attitudes towards the tourism sector and tourists' destination.

Keywords: Social media usage, destination identification, tourist destination, behavioural support towards destination branding.

1.0 INTRODUCTION
Following hyper-competition in the tourism sector, most tourist destinations have recently include branding as part of their major strategic decisions (Moro & Rita, 2018). Statistics shows that 65% world tourism market share is owned by less than ten tourist destinations in developed economies and many tourist destinations in developing economies competed for the remaining 35% (UNWTO, 2012). Evidence shows that branding in the tourism sector gained popularity in the late 1990s; hence it is still a growing body of branding knowledge (Hankinson, 2007). Despite being in its infancy, destination branding has sought to be a strategic resource in building destination competitiveness (García *et al.,* 2012). Therefore, most tourist destinations adopted approaches used to brand products, despite its limititation in fueling local residents support as the key determinants of success in destination branding (de Noronha *et al.,* 2017). It is widely accepted that, tourist destination consists of local residents,tourists, places, ideologies, etc., (Hankinson, 2007). Therefore, by embracing product branding, local residents are ignored and hence they reject to offer support towards the process which strategically is very important in achieving success in destination branding (Zhang and Xu, 2019).

Although tourist destinations consists of various elements, yet local residents with a multiplicity of interests are the most important in achiving inclusive successful destination branding (Campelo *et al.,* 2014). In this view, branding in tourism falls under corporate branding which considers internal branding a tool for success in destination branding (Cox *et al.,* 2014). Internal branding emphasize on inclusive

destination branding which consider local residents as key actor in destination branding(Zhang and Xu, 2019). Basically local residents has specific role in successful inclusive destination branding by translating destination brand into actions during encounter with visitors (Braun *et al.,* 2013). Therefore, internal branding belive that, demand side perspective which emphasises on involving tourists in destination branding can be achived properly when local residents have been prepared to support the brand during encounter with tourists (Wassler *et al.,* 2019). Although local resident support is popularised to be crucial in inclusive successful destination branding, Braun *et al.,* (2013) commend that there is key unresolved theoretical and empirical issues about local resident support in destination branding. In this line, Zenker *et al.,* (2017) comment that, the driving force behind local resident support towards destination branding is still under-researched and unclear.

Evidence shows that previous studies in tourism branding focus on demand-side, i.e., exploring tourists' perception towards the destination brand with very little attention on the role of local residents in building inclusive successful destination branding (Campelo *et al.,* 2014). According to Zhang and Xu (2019) this lead to branding myopia, a situation in which the brand fail to focus on needs of its key stakeholders. Furthemore, literature shows that local residents perceive the demand side as an attempt to import destination brands which reduce behavioural support from them (Cox *et al.,* 2014; Kemp *et al.,* 2012). Literature suggests that destination branding is a socio-cultural and political process; therefore the process should start from within by engaging local residents to translate the brand during encounter with visitors (Kalandides *et al.,* 2013). Therefore, destination brand messages cannot be delivered consistently to external marketplace unless such brand message has been well constructed and supported internally by involving local residents in an inclsuived destination branding process (Zhang and Xu, 2019).

Furthemore, in socio-cultural and political context, destination branding become more inclusive process in which local residents are recognised by specific role which they have to play in an exchanged based process (Klijn *et al.,* 2012). This means unless tourist destinations execute destination branding process, which offers mutual gains local resident will not offer support to the process and its expected outcomes *(Chen et al.,* 2014). Social exchange theory and identity theory suggest that, in building destination identification, tourists' destination should emphasize destination branding as an exchange process, which provides room for each local resident to develop unified identity through role-based identity (Cox *et al.,* 2014). This study theorises that destination identification is the most important driver in building behavioural support towards destination branding. In this view, internal branding as a tool in the supply-side perspective suggests that brand messages should not be communicated outside unless the expected brand messages in well communicated, understood and supported inside (Cox *et al.,* 2014).

Literature shows that social media is among the tool for enhancing the exchange process used in tourism to change local residents' attitude towards the tourism sector (Chen *et al.,* 2014). In the context of destination branding, social media usage can help local residents to share the information which is necessary for building a unified identity (Hays *et al.,* 2013). The social exchange and identity theory suggest that destination branding is exchanged relationship process, and hence each local resident should play a specific role to build behavioural support towards the destination branding (Nunkoo and Gursoy, 2012; Coulson *et al.,* 2014; Nunkoo et al., 2010). In this view, social media usage has been an important tool in ensuring local residents assume different roles that eventually prompt support towards destination

branding (García *et al.,* 2012). From theoretical context, this build the basis for brand tourist destination (Wassler *et al.,* 2019).

However, despite the emphasis of viewing destination branding from supply-side perspectives i.e., undertaking an inclusive approach in destination branding little has been done on exploring destination branding in this context (Medway *et al.,* 2015). Therefore, this study attempts to examine the role of social media usage on behavioural support towards destination branding. The study theorises that from supply-side, social media usage can elicit destination identification to local residents and finally influencing them to develop behavioural support towards destination branding.

Identity theory suggests that identification is behaviour expressed by a person who would prefer to be known or recognised by his/her specific roles in a given specific social group (Stets & Burke, 2000). Thus, destination identification is a role-based behaviour expressed by residents given their role in tourists' destination development (Vong, 2015). Theoretically, its specific roles motivate residents to develop a strong sense of identification with their respective tourist destination (Choo *et al.,* 2011). Other scholars consider destination identification as behaviour related to mutual benefits, common understanding, shared benefits, which exits between residents and the tourist destination (Konecnik Ruzzier & de Chernatony, 2013). In other words, it is behaviour expressed by residents due to expected mutual or shared benefits accumulated or accrued by residents due to the roles played by them in ensuring tourist destination development (Vong, 2015).

Literature indicates that destination identification is an outcome of social group cohesion that minimises individual identities by building strong group identities (Barnes *et al.,* 2014; Choo *et al.,* 2011). From a supply-side perspective, and given the nature of the tourism sector and tourist destination, destination identification requires building a cohesive identity among stakeholders or residents (Rather *et al.,* 2020). This is opposite to demand-side perspective that believes in an individual perception towards the tourist destinations. The study theorises that social media usage may influence group cohesion necessary in building destination identification as a group based behaviour.

2.0 SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE
It is widely accepted that social media usage implies using technological-based forums to share information, opinions, ideas, experiences, perception, attitudes, etc. In recent time, social media has been the most powerful communication tool and builds cohesive social communities (Roque and Raposo, 2016). Like other social and economic activities, the tourism sector has been affected by developments in technologies that allow consumer-generated content and producer-generated content (Chernysheva *et al.,* 2011). In this era of advancement in technology, consumers believe more on consumer-generated content than producer-generated content (Leung *et al.,* 2013). For instance, in tourism, most tourists use consumer-generated content to explore different tourist destinations before deciding which tourist destination. From supply side perspective, social media usage helps tourist destination, seeking to shape a positive attitude among potential stakeholders operating in the tourism sector (Nunkoo *et al.,* 2020). Evidence indicates that tourists have used social media usage to cultivate residents' participation in tourism activities by building strong social identification and social relationships(García *et al.,* 2012).

Social media usage is theoretically explained by factors such as information-seeking behaviour, hedonic behaviour, sustaining strong ties and extend weak ties (Scheepers *et al.,* 2014).

2.1 Information Seeking Behaviour

Social media usage is a very important tool in facilitating information-seeking behaviour. It is believed that information-seeking behaviour is very crucial in shaping individuals behaviour towards something. Nunkoo *et al.,* (2020) reported that social media usage is an important tool in changing individual behaviour towards tourism. However, the attitude of residents changes due to consistent messages which they receive from social media (Nunkoo *et al.,* 2020). Furthermore, other scholars suggest that social media usage may motivate residents participation in tourism development through building social identity towards tourism (Palmer *et al.,* 2013). According to social exchange theory and identity theory, information-seeking behaviour creates a sense of exchange relationship that specifies mutual benefits obtained through role-based identity. This study hypothesised that,

H1: There is a significant relationship between information-seeking behaviour and destination identification.

2.2 Hedonic Behaviour

It is believed that hedonic behaviour is related to an individual's tendency to express his love towards something by sharing things that bring fun, enjoyment, happiness, etc. It is further indicated that hedonic behaviour is the outcome of feelings of either social benefits or economic benefits that a person gains from particular things he/she tries to connect with them (Shakeela & Weaver, 2018). The literature on tourism shows that hedonic behaviour can develop residents' sense of social identification or relationship that may drive local residents identification towards tourism sector and tourist destination (Chang *et al.,* 2014; Zhang *et al.,* 2019). Thus, the study hypothesised that;

H2: There is a significant relationship between hedonic behaviour and destination identification.

2.3 Sustaining Strong Ties

Strong social ties are very crucial in tourism. It has been documented in the literature that, strong social ties can create environments that facilitate the development of a unified identity that suppresses individuals or persons' identities (Orth *et al.,* 2012). To realise the high level of commitment towards the tourism sector, it is suggested that stakeholders or local residents should develop a common understanding that promotes group-based identity (Quinlan, 2008). Social media usage is highly connected with building strong ties in social networking, or online social community to build group-based behaviour (Cai, 2009). It is an influential power of group-based behaviour that motivates each stakeholder to develop behaviour favouring tourism development. Thus, it is hypothesised that;

H3: There is a significant relationship between sustaining strong ties and destination identification.

2.4 Extend Weak Ties

Although the literature suggests that social media usage is more powerfully in creating and sustaining strong social ties, some scholars have emphasised the role of social media usage in extending weak ties

(Luo & Zhong, 2015). In this context, social media usage is perceived as a tool to acquire information beyond the circle of strong ties (Li, 2020). Usually, weak ties provide room for social media users to acquire information that could not be accessed in strong ties. Like strong ties, weak ties can help residents develop special meanings from information accessed from weak ties (Strzelecka & Wicks, 2010). This means weak ties may contribute towards changing behaviour of residents towards tourism. Thus, it is hypothesised that;

H4: There is a significant relationship between extend weak ties and destination identification.

2.5 Behavioural Support towards Destination Branding

Martín *et al.,* (2017); Kladou *et al.,*(2017) defined destination branding as a process of building a unified destination brand by integrating the efforts and commitment of different stakeholders with the multiplicity of interests in tourist destination. Thus, destination branding requires involvement and participation of all important stakeholders or residents by motivating them to develop a common understanding of the tourism sector and tourist destination (Lucarelli & Olof Berg, 2011). In this view, the process can be effective when key stakeholders or actors develop a high commitment to the process itself and its outcomes. Theoretically, supply-side is proposed as the most appropriate approach to examine how stakeholders and residents can develop a high level of commitment to destination branding (Zenker *et al.,* 2017). However, despite this particular emphasis, little has been said on the factors that can constitute the process to build commitment while putting stakeholders or residents in the centre of the process (Zenker *et al.,* 2017).

Zouganeli *et al.,* (2012) suggested that in a theoretical context, behavioural support towards destination branding can be realised when local residents are involved in establishing brand values and encourage to incorporate those values into their routine operations. This process of developing brand values and incorporating values can be effective when local residents are well identified with the tourist destination (Jabreel *et al.,* 2018). In other words, it is impossible for local residents to develop those brand values if they are not well connected with tourist destination to the extent of developing destination identification (Wassler *et al.,* 2019). Therefore, behavioural support towards destination branding implies commitment which local residents may offer to achieve their personal and tourist destination development and growth.

H5: There is a significant relationship between destination identification and behavioural support towards destination branding.
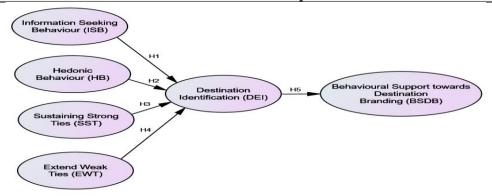
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
Source: Researcher own construction after literature review

3.0 METHODOLOGY
3.1 The Study Area
The study areas were Arusha, Kilimanjaro, Dar-es-Salaam and Zanzibar. Specifically, Arusha and Kilimanjaro were selected, given statistics which indicate that 40% of tourists entered Tanzania through these regions (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2016). Also, Dar-es-Salaam was selected because 20% of tourists use the regions as their gateway. Finally, 30% of tourists entered Tanzania through Zanzibar, which positions Zanzibar as a potential place for tourism development(National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2016).

3.2 Research Design
Cross-sectional survey research design was adopted for this study and was suitable because the intention was not to trace constant changes that could happen over time(Lavrakas, 2013). The study also collected data at a particular place and time and from dispersed population and geographical areas(Moutinho *et al.,* 2014).

3.3 Sampling and Data Collection Procedures
The study involved 302 respondents who are owner-manager of various services organisations in the tourism sector. The sample size was obtained from 702 service organisations operating in the tourism sector in Tanzania. The sample size was obtained using proportionate stratified sampling techniques, where first, the service organisation were categorised into their specific sub-sectors in the form of the stratum. Thereafter, the sample was derived randomly from each stratum to represent each stratum's fraction in a given population.These services organisations are responsible for offering various services in different sub-sectors in the tourism sector, such as tours operators, travel agents, hotel operators, etc. Data were collected using a semi-structured questionnaire that was self-administered to owners-managers of the selected service organisations. The data were analysed using Structural Equation Model, a multivariate data analysis technique effective for estimating both direct and indirect effects of variables measures by a couple of items (Hair *et al*., 2010).

3.4 Operationalisation of Variables

The study hypothesised six-factor model. Social Media Usage (SMU) is the exogenous variable which is defined by Information Seeking Behaviour (ISB), Hedonic Behaviour (HB), Sustaining Strong Ties (SST), and Extend Weak Ties (EWT). Social Media Usage (SMU) is a second-order construct and measurement scales were adopted from (Scheepers *et al.,* 2014). Also, Destination Identification (DEI) is a mediating variable and is defined by Identity Fit (IDF) and was measured by scales adopted from (Hultman *et al.,* 2015; Japutra & Japutra, 2020; Mithat Üner & Armutlu, 2012). Finally, Behavioural support towards Destination Branding (BSDB) is an endogenous variable and was defined by Brand Commitment (BRC). To measure this variable measures suggested by (Zenker *et al.,* 2017) were adopted. To ensure all measures capture suitable and relevant information modification was done to fit the tourism sector in the Tanzanian context. Finally, all variables were captured using 5 - Point Likert Scales 1 - Strong Disagree and 5 - Strong agree.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Assessing Measurement Model Properties

CFA indicate acceptable fit of the hypothesised model the value of the following model fit indexes: Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.974, Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = 0.884, Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) = 0.856, Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = 0.973, Normed Fit Index (NFI) = 0.843. It is recommended that the value of these indexes should be close to 1(Hooper *et al.,* 2008). Also, the value of x^2/df is 1.179, and recommended value is < 3 (Hair Jr. *et al.,* 2017). Also, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) value is 0.025 within the threshold of < 0.1(Hair *et al.,* 2010). All items factor loadings are above the acceptable threshold of 0.5 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The Cronbach alpha coefficient for all variables is > 0.7, indicating a high level of internal consistency (Santos & Reynaldo, 2013; Ursachi *et al.,* 2015). In addition to that, MaxR(H) for all variables ranges from 0.7 - 0.8, indicating a high-reliability level (Santos, 1999). Composite Reliability for all variables ranging from 0.7 - 0.8 above the recommended value of 0.6 (Said *et al.,* 2011). On top of that, AVE of all variables ranging from 0.5 - 0.6 above the required threshold of 0.5 implies good convergent validity in the data (Valentini *et al.,* 2016). To establish discriminant validity, the value of the square root of AVE for each variable were compared with inter-correlation between the variable and other variables. Discriminant validity is achieved when the square root of AVE is greater than the value of inter-correlation between the variables and other variables(Fornell & Larcker, 1981). CFA results indicate that this condition was achieved, and hence discriminant validity was good.

4.2 Structural Model

The structural model indicate perfect fit as indicated and supported by the value of model fit indexes: Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.840, Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = 0.810, Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) = 0.800, Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = 0.843. The recommended value of these indexes is that it should be close to 1(Hooper *et al.,* 2008). This allows further analysis for establishing the causal relationship between endogenous variables and exogenous variables.

4.3 Testing Hypotheses

The results of path analysis as indicated in Table 1, shows that four out of five tested hypotheses were accepted. The findings indicate that, Information Seeking Behavior (ISB) is influencing Identity Fit (IDF)

with ($\beta = 0.092$; $p < 0.05$). Also, the findings show that there is a positive relationship between Hedonic Behaviuor (HB) and Identity Fit (IDF) with ($\beta = 0.120$; $p < 0.05$). It is further indicated that there is a significant and positive relationship between Sustaining Strong Ties (SST) and Identity Fit (IDF) with ($\beta = 0.097$; $p < 0.05$). However, the results indicate that there is an insignificant relationship between Extend Weak Ties (EWT) and Identity Fit (IDF) with ($\beta = 0.068$; $p > 0.05$). Finally, the results revealed that, Identity Fit (IDF) influence Brand Commitment (BRC) with ($\beta = 0.719$; $p < 0.05$).

Table 1: Tested Hypotheses

Tested Hypotheses	Variables			Estimate	p-value	Comments
Hypothesis $_1$	IDF	<---	ISB	.092	.044	Accepted
Hypothesis $_2$	IDF	<---	HB	.120	.035	Accepted
Hypothesis $_3$	IDF	<---	SST	.097	.019	Accepted
Hypothesis $_4$	IDF	<---	EWT	.068	.189	Rejected
Hypothesis $_5$	BRC	<---	IDF	.719	***	Accepted

Further analysis was conducted to test the strength of the mediation effect. The condition for testing simple mediation suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986) was used to establish the strength of mediation effects. According to Baron and Kenny (1986) in testing the mediation effect: 1), there should be a significant relationship between the independent variable(s) and dependent variable. 2) there should be a significant relationship between the independent variable(s) and mediating variable(s). 3). There should be a significant relationship between the mediating variable(s) and dependent variable, in the presence of the independent variable (s). 4). There should be insignificance or reduction in the effect of the relationship between the independent variable(s) and the dependent variable in the presence of mediating variable(s). Given these conditions and the results in table 2, destination identification partially mediates the relationship between social media usage and behavioural support towards destination branding.

Table 2: Sobel Test Statistics

Variables	Coeff	s.e	t	Sig(two)
SMU→BSDB	.1840	.0269	6.8474	.0000
SMU→DEI	.1190	.0141	8.4199	.0000
DEI→BSDB	.9562	.0735	13.0052	.0000
SMU→DEI→BSDB	.0703	.0248	2.8278	.0049

The study finding's has unveiled that from a supply-side perspective, social media usage is recommended to shape local residents' attitudes towards the tourism sector. The findings show that social media usage plays a significant role in building destination identification en route to behavioural support towards destination branding. In this view, the findings confirm that destination branding from a supply-side perspective is a socio-cultural process involving the exchange relationship between local residents and tourist destinations. As an exchange process, destination branding is constructed by sharing resources between local residents when they perform different roles in realising a unified destination brand. The findings suggest that sharing resources through social media usage creates supportive environments for local residents to build destination identification, which reduces the power of individual identities among local residents. This implies that the findings suggest that, to achieve commitment towards destination branding, local residents should develop unified identification towards the destination, which reduces the possibilities of having multiples identities.

Specifically, the findings show that when local residents develop a high level of information-seeking behaviour as part of social media usage, it may influence them to develop self-identification with the destination. This means that destination identification is an outcome of constant individual effects of developing knowledge or understanding about the destination through consistent information-seeking behaviour. The more local residents invest in information-seeking behaviour; the more local residents may influence their attitude or perception towards the tourism sector and tourist destination as a whole. The findings also indicate that social media usage creates opportunities for sustaining strong social ties between local residents themselves and their respective tourist destination. In the context of social media usage, sustaining strong social ties transform individual identities towards group identities fueling very strong destination identification. It is articulated that, destination identification is behaviour express by local residents due to group-based influential power that motivates local residents to define themselves based on group characteristics instead of individual characteristics. Thus, strong social ties motivate local residents to develop identification towards the destination as responses to group-based influences.

It is further articulated that, social media usage influences local residents to develop identification towards tourist destinations due to consistent hedonic behaviour. The findings proposed that hedonic behaviour creates a sense of self-gratification towards the destination, manifested through a very strong sense of destination identification. Theoretically, hedonic behaviour is psychological behaviour expressed by a person, as a means to express his/her love towards something. It involves sharing of anything that brings joy, fun, memorable experience, etc. According to the study findings, expression of love towards the tourist destination can be through developing robust destination identification. It is also indicated that consistency destination identification may motivate local residents to commit high level of behavioural support towards destination branding. In other words, behavioural support towards destination branding can be realised when local residents develop consistent behaviour focusing on identifying themselves with the tourist destination. The more local residents develop identification with the destination, the more they will be raising their commitment or support towards the tourist destination and its programs, including destination branding.

The findings concur with Nunkoo *et al.,* (2020) who investigated social media's effect on residents' attitude to tourism. The study intended to explore the most critical challenge documented in the literature regarding the negative attitude that residents developed towards tourism. They discovered that social media usage provide room for residents to read and express their opinions about tourism development. This tendency to read and express their opinions about tourism development gradually change the tourism sector's attitude and prompt favourable perception of the same. The study by Senyao & Ha, (2020) examined the influence of social media in promoting residents' participation in rural tourism development and discovered that social media usage has significant influences on re-shaping residents' social identity, structure and relationship towards tourism. This means social media can be used as a tool to re-shape residents' level of identification towards the tourism sector to ensure they participate fully in rural tourism development. On the same arguments, Uchinaka *et al.,* (2019) investigated the residents' roles as online place ambassadors and found that social media usage has transformed the role of residents in supporting place marketing. They argued that social media usage does not provide room for residents to be primary sources of place marketing messages; rather, they become passive actors addressing the challenge of anti-tourist sentiments that may arise worldwide.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The use of social media in the management of tourist destination is of great importance, therefore it is important to consider social media in strategic measures and policy development of the tourist destination. Given the role of social media usage in building a unified destination brand, tourist destination should strengthen social media usage in all strategic areas in the tourism sector's operations, particularly tourism marketing. It should be noted that the tourism sector involves stakeholders with the multiplicity of interests, therefore there must be a mechanism that could reduce these differences. It is recommended that social media usage can be used by tourist destination in their attempt to reduce stakeholders differences and building common understanding towards the sector and tourist destination as a whole.

Literature indicates that the most critical challenge in achieving behavioural support towards destination branding is stakeholder differences. This means individual differences are not healthier to tourist destination striving to cultivate stakeholders identification towards the destination. Thus, deliberate measures particular on policies should be taken to incorporate social media usage as part of tourist destination strategic decisions. When destination branding is viewed as an exchange process, it implies that collaboration and coordination among stakeholders can be realised through the special forum. This means that social media usage can help destinations establish a specific forum that brings stakeholders together to share information and resources to achieve common goals, which are the commitment to destination branding. It is articulated that, social media can be used as a social forum to execute collaboration and coordination among stakeholders, which create the likelihood of building destination identification en route to behavioural support towards destination branding.

This study adopted a quantitative approach. Therefore, further studies can be done on the same subject matter by adopting a mixed approach to enrich knowledge about the topic under the study. It can also be more useful to adopt a longitudinal research design to track changes regarding the topic under the study over a specific period of time. This is necessary to get a different picture of the topic under the study over different periods. Finally, further studies can be done by involving stakeholders who do not directly contact tourists or do not engage directly in the sector's routine operations. The intention to enrich knowledge about the subject matter, as documented, destination branding from the supply-side perspective involves a huge number of stakeholders or actors.

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