DEVISING A BRANDING MODEL FOR MEGA-PROJECTS IN ENTERTAINMENT, RESIDENTIAL, TOURISM AND SPORT IN IRAN

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ABSTRACT

While it seems that there are very few studies on the branding process for mega-projects in entertainment, residential, tourism and sport, branding is one of the most important factors in these types of projects. We have particularly tried to devise a branding model for these types of projects that corresponds to Persian characteristics. Since in Iran there is no special model in this field, the grounded theory approach was used to hypothesize and outline the aspects of the model. In-depth interviews corresponding to grounded theory were conducted. The main phenomenon is branding process for mega-projects in entertainment, residential, tourism and sport. Causal, contextual, and intervening conditions are all explored, and the results are introduced as an intact model. The primary goal of this research is devising a model for branding these mega projects with respect to the Persian characteristics.

Keywords: *branding process, mega projects of tourism, project distinctive identity, place making, synergistic composition of subprojects*

INTRODUCTION

During a time in which place and multipurpose tourism and entertainment projects are widely competing to attract tourists, finances, talents, and other assets, branding concepts are being increasingly borrowed from the business world. These naturally synthetic projects are extended around big cities. From the start of such projects, from budgeting and considering operational trends to producing added value, an appropriate image should be formed for stakeholders. The primary challenge of multipurpose project branding is considering how we can establish a consistent powerful brand that takes into account the different aspects of a place and the different kinds of stakeholders. At the same time, branding communications relating to the sector in question must be produced. The theory of entertainment and residential branding is still in the emergence phase. This research primarily focuses on the following question: what are the aspects of branding models for mega-projects in entertainment, residential, tourism and sport, and which factors influence the branding of these types of projects, which are also called satellite cities? Since the purpose here is to hypothesize and devise a branding model for multipurpose mega-projects, we have used the grounded theory approach; the final model will ultimately be introduced following the conceptualization of different stages.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   The place branding concept, reasons and challenges

Each of the different studies on this subject has considered a different point of view; for instance, urban planners have focused on furthering the social and economic activities of places, where the duty of place marketing is to extend a brand so as to help in achieving this goal. From another point of view, the impact of country of origin is considered. Moreover, current place-branding researchers are stressing the multi-functional personality of places, and emphasize the role of the brand when, for example, tourism, retailing and sporting events are improved (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009).

Places or cities may be branded for the following reasons: getting domestic investors' attention; attracting foreign tourists; building a sense of authenticity and trust between investors; increasing domestic (national) and foreign (international) political penetration; finding better and more effective global partnerships in other cities; increasing collaboration with private or governmental universities and research institutions and organizations; increasing the positive effects of country-of-origin for products and services, and thus increasing national pride; and increasing internal coordination and trust.

Branding a place/destination is very different from branding a product. The differences can be explained in terms of the following areas. First, place branding entails new concepts and new applications; concepts like product, price, sales promotion and distribution have to be re-explained and adapted. Second, place marketing has a collective character; the main difference between place marketing and product marketing lies in what is being branded. In place branding the brand subject is a multi-aspect and intricate identity; a complicated group whose members are participants, and who often have their own individual objectives, resources and abilities. Essentially, a place consists of a combination of products and services, along with the physical characteristics of the location itself (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998). Third, place branding entails difficulties in control (Morgan, Pritchard, & Piggot, 2003; Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2002; Pritchard & Morgan, 1998); the marketing manager has very little control over the elements of the marketing mix. Forth, in place branding the customer builds the product experience; the product of entertainment-residential projects is offered in a place and especially in a set of products and services, but this set is almost selected by customer (Ashworth & Goodall, 1990).

Fifth, place branding entails a limited possibility to opt out, or a "forced network"; unlike with corporate networks, the opportunities to select the best strategic partners are highly limited. Sixth, the definition of the brand's objective in a network differs in place branding compared to product branding; the many independent actors who are working in a place may have different objectives. Reaching a consensus can be a challenge, but is a vital part of creat-

ing a brand identity. Seventh, place branding is proximally related to politics; different governments make different political decisions, and changes in governments will also lead to different policies. From a branding perspective, these political changes are usually so short. Eighth, the participants and factors (for instance, companies) involved in place branding are not equal, and so decision making cannot be based on the concept of democratic vote. Ninth, product development in place branding differs from that of product branding; places as products are always changing and extending, and thus the brand identity has to allow this gradual improvement and can even benefit from it. Tenth, place branding can be subject to seasonal changes, which therefore change the product. Eleventh, financial resources are limited in place branding; successful place branding will provide value for all the groups involved, instead of just one special group. Definitions of who is going to benefit and the fair division of investments between beneficiaries are highly challenging areas.

2.2 Different models of destination branding

Most important models of place/destination branding are as follows: Middleton model (2011): based on this model, components and stages of an ideal place branding are explained as followings: Embody a clear, distinctive, ambitious and yet realistic brand position, Base the brand positioning on the population's values, attitudes, behaviors and characteristics, Reflect a clear place/city strategy and it's points of emphasis regarding skills, resources and capabilities, Effective offering of benefits to targeted groups, Successful communications with key domestic influencers, Integrate efficiently between different marketing communications media and consistency over time.

Destination celebrity matrix: the image of a place is central, and effective communication of this image can motivate people to visit and return. The celebrity of a place is not shaped in a vacuum, and is not just based on tourists; marketers have to specify how the place image is going to be made comparable with main rivals. Within this model, each place has a position in the "Wish you were here, appeal" and "Celebrity value" indexes. Figure 1 explains this.

Figure 1: Destination celebrity matrix (Coshall, 2000; Tapachai & Waryszak, 2000)

Destination brand fashion curve: Weinreich (1999) suggests that instead of thinking in terms of the traditional product and brand life cycle, brand managers should consider the brand S-curve, which shows a brand's life and development. Initially the market is small, and few places will be fashionable; however, because the place is unique, there are no advertising activities, and the place brand is at the first of its "fashionable stage", and the viewers are trendsetters, however this number is low, they can influence the ideas. When the place becomes famous and loses its unique attractiveness and freshness, these tourists will change their destination and go to new places; in fact they tend to not being seen in a public place. In the "famous stage", consumers expect the market to be constantly renewed; otherwise, the place may fall into the "familiar stage", in which everyone knows about the place and it begins to lose its attractiveness. The familiar stage can push the place into the "fatigued stage". If the brand faces serious damage, marketers will probably need to reassess the core values of the place and redefine their communications with targeted markets. A schematic explanation of this model is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Weinreich's destination brand fashion curve (Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2002)
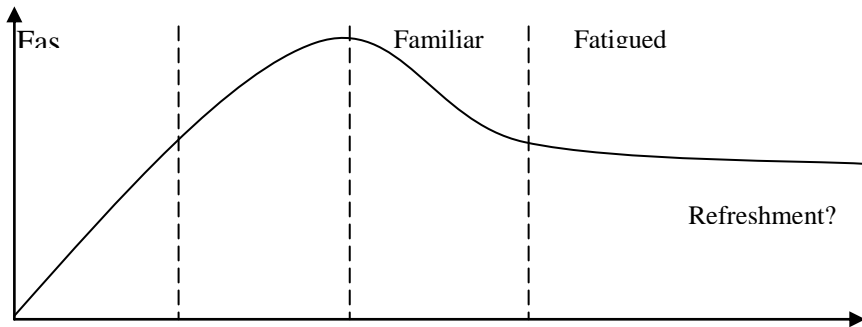
Five-phase model of destination branding: the five phases of this model are as follows (Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2002). (1) Market investigation, analysis and strategic recommendations; (2) brand identity development; (3) brand launch and introduction and vision communication; (4) brand implementation; and (5) monitoring, evaluating and review process.

Brand communications model: Base on this model the branding is a communicating mode and communications are always mutual. Kavaratzis (2004) believes that the communications related to the brand can be implemented in two ways (Kavaratzis, 2004): first, primary communications: relates to the communicative effects of a city's actions, when communication is not the main goal of these actions, and is divided to four subcategories: (A) Landscape strategies: refer to fields of actions and decisions that are relevant to urban design, architecture, green spaces and generally public spaces in the city. (B) Infrastructure projects: refer to projects developed to create, improve or give a distinctive character to the various types of infrastructure that are needed in a city. (C) Organizational and administrative structure: refers to the effectiveness and improvement of the city's governing structure with emphasis on extension of social networks and citizen participant and private and public sector in decision making. Destination marketing organization (DMO) is also in this sector. (D) City's behavior: refers to such issues as the city leaders' vision for the city, the strategy adopted or the financial incentives provided by the city to various stakeholders. The offered services and events (like festival, and other cultural, sporting and en-

tertaining events) are also in this group. Second, secondary communications: are the formal, intentional communications that most commonly takes place through well-known marketing practices like advertising, public relations, graphic design, the use of a logo etc.

Brand relational network: Hankinson divides these relationships to four subcategories (Hankinson, 2004): First, primary service relationships: Services at the core of the brand experience, like retailers, events activities and hotels. Second, brand infrastructure relationships: Accessibility to service, environment, brandscape, hygiene and different facilities. Third, media relationships: Organic and marketing communications with Medias. Fourth, consumer relationships: The relationships with residents and employees of local organizations as well as the targeted tourists. In Hankinson's framework the starting point is brand (place identity and place development map) which can be defined by brand personality, position and reality. This communicates to stakeholders through mentioned relationships. Branding operational plan: the details of this model are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Main stages of the operational plan & preliminary time table (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009)

First stage: Start-up and Organization (approximate time: Months 1 – 4)
Generating commitment
Creating organization
The project's visibility and broad communications

Second stage: Research Stage (approximate time: Months 5 - 8)
Stakeholder discussions
Research on destination brand images held by consumers
Research on destination brand images held by staff members
Completing the informational base if needed
Analyzing and interpreting the results
Choosing elements of brand identity. Core idea, identity, positioning, and a promise of value.

Third stage: Forming Brand Identity (the most critical stage) (approximate time: Months 8 – 11)
Interest groups discussion about the concept.
Destination level strategic decisions. Creative concept.
Brand's structure, organization and distribution of work.
Financing.

Consulting and testing.
Fine adjustment.
Co-ordination between the operations and actors

Fourth stage: Making Execution and Enforcement Plan
(approximate time: Months 11 - 12)
Developing well-functioning internal communication
Establishing integrated external marketing communication plan
Arranging monitoring
Ending the planning stage and reporting

Fifth stage: Implementation and Follow-up
(approximate time: Months 13 - …)
Transformation of service processes to support destination brand identity where appropriate
Transformation of physical infrastructure to support destination brand identity where appropriate

2.3 Summarizing the models

By summarizing the different models, the following factors may be mentioned as affective aspects of place or tourist-destination branding: (1) committing to meet stakeholders' needs; (2) conducting strategic surveys of social and economic environmental trends; (3) providing a common vision for the future of the place/destination; (4) engaging different stakeholders in the branding process, or conducting consensus-based branding; (5) hosting major events; (6) establishing an appropriate identity for the place/destination brand; (7) establishing an appropriate image for the place/destination for customers; (8) leadership; (9) enabling the participation of private and public sectors in place/destination branding; (10) including appropriate landscape strategies in the project; (11) preparing appropriate infrastructures for the project; (12) creating a department or organization for the project branding; (13) offering appropriate services to customers; (14) communicating consistently and continuously with the media; (15) including landmarks in the project; (16) incorporating distinct and unique designs in the project; (17) including distinct and exclusive districts in the project; (18) including new and exclusive green spaces in the project; (19) paying due consideration to existing businesses in the project; (20) promoting the attractiveness of the place/destination brand to domestic residents; (21) attracting well-known and popular brands to the project; (22)

creating association with the place/destination through famous people and personalities; (23) finding long-term financial resources; (24) using brand-based human resources management; and (25) creating a brand culture.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Grounded theory is a qualitative research approach that tends to produce theory. Grounded theory processes were developed to offer a combination of consistent concepts in order to comprehend theories surrounding social phenomenon. Grounded theory has specific procedures for data collection and analysis, which consist of interviews and observations, along with other resources such as governmental documents, video tapes, newspapers, letters, books and whatever else provides enlightenment around the subject (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). According to the systematic approach that we used in our research, there are three main stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

3.1 First stage: open coding

In this type of coding, events/actions/interactions are compared with others for similarities and differences. Open coding is the part of the analysis in which the phenomenon (here the branding process) is given a name, conceptualized and categorized through the analysis of data. Each of the events/actions/interactions is given a label. In the next step, the concepts are categorized based on their similarities (categorizing stage).They are also given conceptual labels. In this way, conceptually similar events/actions/interactions are grouped together to form categories and subcategories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Different methods of qualitative data collection, such as conducting observations, interviews and analytical interviews, and studying documents and case studies, are carried out. In open interviews, interviewees demonstrated the branding process for these kinds of projects (

Table 2).

Table 2: Details of interviewees

Experts	Number of interviewees	Education	Number of interviewees
Founder/CEO of mega project	3	PHD	7
Marketing/brand manger of project	4	Master	13
Project manager of a subproject in a mega project	2		
Urban design/ sales/ finance/ investment manager of mega project	2		
International/superior consultant of project	3		
Urban manager	2		
Architecture specialist	1		
Professor of tourism/branding	2		
Tourism manager of **Iran Tourism Board**	1		
Total	**20**		**20**

The label given to a category is more abstract than the concepts that produce that category. The identification and conceptualization of their characteristics and aspects provides a basis for establishing communications between categories and reaching a theory. The results of the open coding process and their characteristics and aspects are shown in Table 3. In the open coding stage, the 478 extracted codes from 20 interviewees are summarized into 95 more abstract concepts.

Table 3: Categories extracted from concepts

Concept	Category
Branding behavior	Branding dyna-mism
Branding in competitive situations	
Branding differences in two stages of development and operation	
Project's distinctive image	Persian unique identity
Unique identity of the project	
Local and Persian identity of the project	
Considering the historical aspect of the place	
The objective of the master developer	
Existence of mass customer base	Mass market
Non-competitive market	
Turning the project into a potential destination for people	Potential destina-

Building an appropriate image for the project	tion
Conducting eminent events	Event hallmarking
Employees' beliefs with regards to the project idea	Team's belief
Building belief in employees	
Subprojects' synergies	Synergistic composition of subprojects
Appropriate combination of applications	
Creating trust among stakeholders before operation	Diverse stakeholders
Providing benefits to different stakeholders	
Coordinating between consultant, employer and operator	
Creating trust in customers about the quality of services	Stakeholders' trust
Physical progress of the project	
Existence of a collaborative framework	
Communicating with potential residents and opinion leaders	
Dynamic strategic planning	Dynamic and holistic planning
Project development planning	
Holistic view of project planning	
Motivating employees	Internal marketing
Internal assessment of organization	
Using professional managers	
Innovative concept of the project	Innovation
Innovative theme of the project	
Using creative people	
Famous developers in infrastructure stage	Leveraging well-known brands in early stages
Leveraging well-known brands in infrastructure stage	
Operator celebrity in operation stage	
Using well-known operators in project operation	
Appropriate administration and operation of applications	
Service quality	High-quality complete service package
Offering a complete service package	
Offering high-quality services to permanent residents	
Favorable experience for customers	
Appropriate accessibility to project	Project location
Located on urban development path	
Conflict in project environment	
Governmental support in terms of investing in project	Governmental support
Lack of tourism policy	
Political changes	
Consultation and interaction with governmental politicians	
Defining project concept for government	
Using and learning from international specialists	Using international consultants and operators
Systematic patterning from similar places	

Project awareness and introduction advertising	Marketing com-munications
Culture-building advertising	
Time to market	Time to market
Benefits of market entrance time	
Prolongation of the project	Delay in operation
Gap between generations	
Keeping the project alive with permanent residences	Keeping the pro-ject alive
Keeping the project alive with business growth	
Keeping the project alive by adding training, fun and en-tertainment	
Religious moderation	Religious princi-ples
Relative and legal freedoms in the project	
Social acceptance of the project	Culture
Cultural acceptance of the project	
Culture-building for the project	
On-time financial support	Financial re-sources
Investment in building	
Investment in operation	
Investment in marketing and advertising	
Barriers to investment	
Flexible organization	Destination mar-keting organiza-tion (DMO)
An organization for project marketing and branding	
Managers' branding mentality	Managers' branding mental-ity
Research-based decision making	
Market investigation	
Impact of economic factors on family consumption	Economic situa-tion
Impact of economic factors on project finance	
Economic stability	
Dependency of project identity on mega-factors	
Domestic standards of project	Place making
Place making	
Diversity of project attractiveness	
Distinctive element of project	Distinctive land-marks or signature buildings
Exclusive designing and architecture of project	
Famous landmarks	
Distinctive theme of project	Project distinctive theme
Using brand elements in landscape	
Implementing the role of trademarks into the brand	
Attracting tourists	Income
Creating income for project	
The need for entertainment in the country	Country's need for entertainment growth
Increase of per capita green space	
National acceptance of the project	

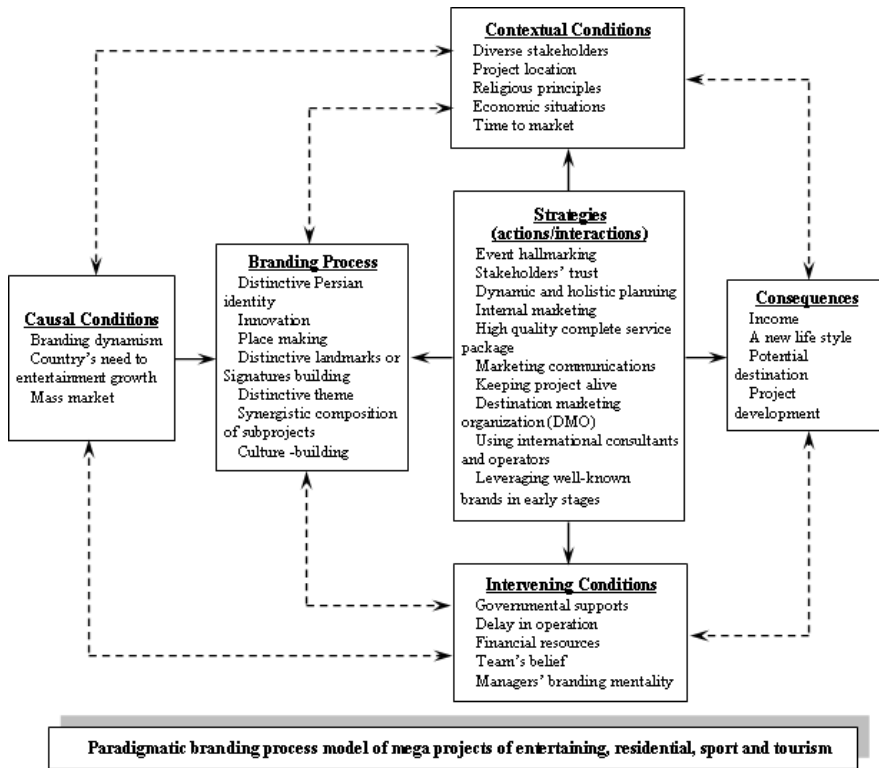| Offering a new lifestyle	New lifestyle
Branding of project development	Project develop-ment
Separate branding at the stage of project creation	

3.2 Second stage: axial coding

In axial coding, categories are related to their subcategories and the relationships tested against data. The generalization of a grounded theory is partly achieved through a process of abstraction that takes place over the entire course of the research. The more abstract the concepts, especially the core category, the wider the theory's applicability (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Figure 2 shows the results of the reanalysis of data and the axial coding in this research. Our core category is "the branding process of mega-projects in entertainment, residential, tourism and sport in Iran".

3.3 Third stage: selective coding

At this stage, all the categories are unified around a "core" category, and categories that need more explanation are addressed. The core category is the central phenomenon of the study (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Figure 2: The paradigmatic model and research model

Contextual Conditions
Diverse stakeholders
Project location
Religious principles
Economic situations
Time to market

**Strategies
(actions/interactions)**
Event hallmarking
Stakeholders' trust
Dynamic and holistic planning
Internal marketing
High quality complete service package
Marketing communications
Keeping project alive
Destination marketing organization (DMO)
Using international consultants and operators
Leveraging well-known brands in early stages

Branding Process
Distinctive Persian identity
Innovation
Place making
Distinctive landmarks or Signatures building
Distinctive theme
Synergistic composition of subprojects
Culture -building

Causal Conditions
Branding dynamism
Country's need to entertainment growth
Mass market

Consequences
Income
A new life style
Potential destination
Project development

Intervening Conditions
Governmental supports
Delay in operation
Financial resources
Team's belief
Managers' branding mentality

Paradigmatic branding process model of mega projects of entertaining, residential, sport and tourism

FINDINGS

As shown in

Figure 2, the core category, causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies and consequences can be split into the following subtitles.

4.1 Core category

The core category of research is the branding process for mega-projects in entertainment, residential, tourism and sport. In addition, from the 95 concepts generated, seven categories including 21 concepts derived from the axial coding, shape the main phenomenon. *Defining the distinctive Persian identity of the project* is the first element of core category. Defining a distinctive identity is probably the most important step in the branding process. Respecting the region's historical past and the local situations of the country in question also help. Since there are different stakeholders involved in the project whose needs and demands are diverse, a main step in branding is to achieve a single identity definition. Considering Persian identity would lead to project popularity world-wide, and nationally a stable situation and a well-communicated one with customers. "Respect to the historical past of the project is highly important in identifying the project's identity. We considered the Naghshe Jahan square [a historical place in Iran] in our polo project, while the traditional hotel/resort reminds us of an Iranian garden" (Urban design expert of a mega-project).

The next and second element is *project innovation*. This refers to the fact that the primary master plan of the project needs to be innovative and developed by creative experts. "Attractiveness comes from difference, every distinctive object is attractive, and [a] project needs to be able to induce a differentiation, and create a distinctive diversity" (Natural geography professor and climatologist). The third phenomenon is *place making* that is a novel paradigm in urban design, in which the space is changed into a place, and consequently becomes full of activity and memory. The designation of these factors is attractive enough that customers tend to want to re-experience them. Applying and implementing this paradigm in a project will help with the branding process. "Residents' collective memories about streets and avenues will lead to the generation of brand identity" (Urban expert of a mega-project).

Fourth element is *distinctive and unique landmarks*. Almost all the famous mega-projects in the world have become well-known by incorporating a unique structure which has been considered in the literature of the subject. It is better to introduce these types of projects using an icon that remains in the minds of all people who come into contact with the place. The existence of a distinctive structure will help with branding. "The project architecture must be unique, beauty is relative, but people will understand" (Project manager of a sub-project within a mega-project). Fifth element is *projecting a distinctive theme*. An appropriate theme which incorporates the preferences of the target market and demographic, as well as the place characteristics of the project is highly important. Sometimes the project itself may not stick in minds, but the appropriateness of the theme in terms of the local climate is sufficiently memorable.

Synergistic composition of subprojects is the sixth element of core category. Mega-projects usually consist of different subprojects and applications. The composition of these subprojects can be incredibly effective with respect to branding, and therefore it is necessary to carefully create a synergistic composition; subprojects that conflict must not affect each other. "Subprojects' mutual synergy is so important, for water parks that have become brand, like Atlantis Water Park, it is not just because of the park itself, but … also because of its relationships with other subprojects, [such as] Atlantis with Hotel Atlantis, for instance" (Subproject manager of a mega-project). The last and seventh element is *culture-building*. The advent of these mega-projects and their different subprojects is a novel phenomenon in Iran. In this situation, culture-building is a fundamental step. Building culture must be done for both sides –developers and operators, and customers and people. "In my view, the cultural factor is [the] most effective factor in the project. Culture-building and training must be conducted, and when the project is done, over a long term period, services should be developed" (Founder of a mega-project).

4.2   Causal conditions

Causal conditions are events which generate situations, debates and issues related to a phenomenon, and somehow illustrate why and how people attend to these. Essentially, causal conditions are events and happenings that impact and cause the phenomenon. From the 95 concepts extracted, three categories consisting of 11 concepts were found to shape causal conditions.

Branding dynamism is the firth casual condition. Developing a multipurpose mega-project consists of different phases, and in each phase there are diverse stakeholders. The essence of branding in two phases of development and operation are relatively different. In the development phase, the objective of project branding is mostly to create trust in investors, and also provide necessary guarantees for them, while in the operation phase the end user is the audience, and the objective of branding is to convey this sense to the customers receiving high-quality services. Branding is necessary in each phase, but the audiences, stakeholders, and branding objectives differ. "In these kinds of projects, unlike with products, the brand has a more dynamic identity; life cycle is so important, at different phases the brand has different meanings … In the investment-absorbing phase the residents are less important, while in the presale phase, they become critically central" (Funding manager of a mega-project).
Country's need to more entertainment and fun is the second causal condition. These projects have significantly grown in regional countries around Iran, where many Iranians have invested huge amounts of money. On the other side, there is a mass market in the country, some of which are non competitive, so that a project can rapidly attract attention. Regarding the priorities of countries in recent years, it seems there is a national willingness to accept these types of projects. "If the business can eliminate the barriers, it will face with a huge and non competitive market" (Founder of a mega-project). Finally, third and the last causal condition is *mass market*. People need entertainment and fun; on the other side, these projects need to have a mass market to grow. The existence of customers who need such entertainment and fun is the basis for the project's branding.

4.3 Contextual conditions

Contextual conditions are those that affect the strategies and actions used to administer the phenomenon. We asked our interviewees about this subject, and five categories consisting of 14 concepts were determined.

The contextual conditions start with *diversity of stakeholders*. Mega-projects have different stakeholders, as well as a huge impact on society. Within each diverse phase of the project there are different stakeholders, and it is necessary to build identities for each of them. During the project development stage, the benefits are permanently defined for stakeholders. Second element is *project location*. Multi-purpose mega-projects are emerging outside of big cities, especially capitals, all over the world. This is happening for the following reasons: one, there is not enough space inside the cities themselves, or if there is, the spaces are too expensive. Two, they are intentionally constructed outside of cities so as to give people a place for entertainment in suburban areas. Three, extension spaces are located only outside and in the countryside. In terms of projects in Iran, they are always built outside of the main cities. This has some benefits, but also problems that should be addressed via appropriate strategies. Unofficial residences and suburban areas around such projects can significantly damage the brand. "The problem is that projects are constructed in a low income region for wealthy people which can lead to social conflicts" (Superior advisor of a mega-project, and former minister).

The third contextual condition is *religious principles of the country*. Iran is a religious country in which most people commit to religious principles. On the other hand, however, many people do not like to be subject to so many extreme limitations. When developing mega-projects these issues have to be considered. Applications and services should not contradict religious principles. However, by eliminating many extreme limitations, we can prevent from entertaining trips to neighboring countries. "In branding, internal beliefs and thoughts should be considered" (Superior advisor of a mega-project, and former minister).

Fourth element is *economic situations*. The economic stability in developing countries is low, and projects are emerging in unstable

situations. This factor is important for two reasons: first, it is related to people's buying power and how much they spend on entertainment and amusement. Second, the economic situation of banks and institutions for finance affects these projects. "For us, the economic source does not matter, but the economic stability does. In a stable situation, you can rely on governmental laws and rules and know they will not change" (Founder of a mega-project). Ultimately, fifth condition is *time-to-market*. One of the most important contextual conditions relates to the time that project is going to be introduced. In a situation where there are few projects, the one launched soonest is likely to be the most successful. "In my view, in Iran, starting sooner is more important than branding; the project that starts soonest will succeed" (CEO of a mega-project).

4.4 Intervening conditions

Intervening conditions include public, wide-ranging conditions like culture and space, and these can act as facilitators or barriers to strategies. Here, five categories consisting of 17 concepts were identified.

The first intervening condition is *governmental support*. For mega-projects, there has to be national willingness and governmental support. Governmental support is one of the most important political influencers of a project. Many investors are reluctant to start projects because they are not sure if their ownership will last or not. Furthermore, some governmental rules and laws prevent projects from being as innovative as they could be. For these reasons, investors are often reluctant to put money into such projects, or they do so knowing that special communication with the government is needed. Moreover, in Iran there are no special frameworks in place for these projects and investors. "From formation to operation, political structures of country change and this even affects the social structure of the country" (Founder of a mega-project).

The second intervening condition is *delay in operation*. Delays in projects can disrupt the project's operation; the project research is conducted for current generation, while delays would lead to operation in next generation. The current generation's demands typically

differ from next generation's. Also the political, economical, and even social structures of a country may change during the project's operation time. Third element is *on-time financial support*. Mega-projects can only become brands when enough investment is available. Scheduling financial resources is crucial, and a huge, sudden financial supply can damage the project. The owners and founders of projects should bear in mind that enough investment is needed for project branding, building, operation, marketing and advertisements. On the other hand, because of limited financial resources, resources must be allocated very precisely.

Team's belief with respect to the project idea is the fourth intervening condition. Project branding and development is time consuming, and team spirit and motivation over time is crucial. Branding is not short term, but rather is a long-term and permanent issue which must be continuously reinforced. *Managers' branding mentality* is the fifth and final intervening condition. Decisions on project branding should not be based on senior managers' individual tastes. Using an expert team and incorporating members' beliefs into branding is highly important. Knowledge of the market and customers is also an important issue.

4.5 Strategies

Strategies and actions are plans which help the branding process with regards to the implementation of these types of mega-projects. In the coding phase, 10 categories consisting of 30 concepts were determined.

First strategy is *event hallmarking*. The attractiveness and importance of events will lead to awareness and knowledge, as well as attracting a mass customer base. Putting on events means that an audience will be attracted. "Conducting events will help the progress, when many customers attend a project; it seems that an event is going on" (Advertising and branding manager of a mega-project). *Stakeholders' trust* is the Second strategy. In all stages of the brand lifecycle, building trust between stakeholders is one of the brand strategies. Of course, this differs in different stages of the brand life cycle. For instance, in the infrastructural phase trust has to be built

between investors, while during operation, trust between organization and customers is vital. Trust-building will help in the branding of these projects. "Trust is the most important factor in branding. I saw the same thing in Dubai and UAE, because of trust people stopped asking for formal documents" (Financial vice-manager of a mega-project).

The third strategy is *dynamic and holistic planning*. This refers to all phases of the project, from idealization and infrastructure to operation. When planning, operation must be considered first. Moreover, the dynamic identity of project branding prevents inflexibility and static planning. The master developer is in charge of presenting the total project plan, while also planning the current stages and predicting further developments in the next phases. The fourth element is *internal marketing*. These kinds of mega-projects are novel in Iran. Just a few managers are experienced in this area, so using managers with a track record is helpful. These types of projects require creative people to be hired and retained.

Fifth strategy of branding is providing a *complete, high-quality service package*. A destination has to incorporate family-friendly areas where all demands of family members are met and residential facilities are in place for people who want to stay for few days. A favorite experience might be created by adding intangible aspects to this package. Here, the branding mostly focuses on experience, rather than products and services, and marketing and branding focuses primarily on customer experience. "In these projects service quality is much more important than communications; essentially here the branding is around experience" (Consultant and manager of a mega-project).

The next and sixth strategy is *Marketing communications*. In order to reach goals, targeted marketing communications are needed, including: building the cultural aspects of a project experience and its different subprojects; creating awareness and informing about the project during its primary stages; and keeping the project at the front of people's minds. *Keeping the project alive* that is seventh strategy means that different subprojects with different benefits have to be employed to meet the needs of diverse stakeholders. The synergy

between these subprojects should not be forgotten; otherwise the project will not last in the long term. Eighth strategy is *destination marketing organization (DMO)* that is a separate organization for branding these projects. During interviews regarding the different stages of model development, the existence of such organizations was stressed. "An independent branding organization separate from owner and master developer should be established" (Superior consultant of a mega-project and former minister).

The ninth strategy is related to *using international consultants and operators*. During different preparation phases of the master plan, infrastructures, creating subprojects and operation, the use of professional consultants and other experienced project members are critical. A benchmarking system is needed to learn from successful projects even in neighboring countries, especially in Iran. Operations also need expertise and professional operators. This leads to higher-level events and consequently attracts more customers. At last, tenth strategy is *leveraging well-known brands in early phases*. Initially, the master developer is usually not well-known to investors. There are two ways in which to build trust in investors, banks, corporations, and other institutions: first, using well-known brands, and second, using an experienced managerial team. In the primary stages the brand is highly important for absorbing financial resources. Failing to create a favorable identity at this stage will end up in financial resources being unsuccessfully absorbed. Using well-known contractors and partners will strongly influence the branding by the master developer.

4.6 Consequences

Consequences include tangible and intangible results, which are created as a result of implementing the branding process for organizations, customers and society. At the coding stage of our research, four categories were identified as consequences.

The first consequence is *income generation*. Branding at the operation stage will lead to more tourists and customers and consequently more income. Branding at the primary stages also results in the generation of more financial resources. The impact of branding on in-

come comes through building awareness and trust in customers. *A new lifestyle* is the second consequence. Since these projects offer new activities and forms of entertainment, they may bring a new lifestyle to customers. "These projects should bring a high quality of life for people" (Chief financial officer of a mega-project). Finally, the third consequence is *a potential destination*. Branding will help people to accept the project more easily, and the project will then turn into a potential destination for customers. Thinking about fun will remind them of the project. Fourth, project development: branding will help with project development. From a high absorption of customers, the developed project will be profitable for owners.

ASSESSMENT

The validity and reliability of qualitative research is highly important, however it is not as important as quantitative research, because the main objective of this type of research is mental interpretation by the researcher in relation to human subjects. This does not mean that qualitative analyses are totally influenced by the premises, ideas and mental plans of the researcher, however; the probability of divergence from facts is high under this research type because qualitative researchers use systematic approaches when conducting interpretation. In qualitative research, it is highly important to demonstrate validity. There are some differences in terms of defining the reliability, internal validity and external validity of qualitative and quantitative research. Table 4 illustrates six strategies which have been employed to meet validity requirements.

Table 4: Strategies of increasing internal validity in grounded theory research

Strategy	Strategy description	Amount and form of applying strategy in this research
Different methods and data collecting resources	Using different methods and data in data collecting stage	Study and observing a branding process in a mega project in Iran, surveying other countries case studies, interview with high experienced experts in branding of these projects, experiences documentation of few founders of mega projects,

		interview with international consultants
Interviewees confirmation	Being acceptable to interviewees	Findings of this research were represented to four interviewees and their points were applied.
Researcher engagement in research	Long time presence and observation or repetitious observing of phenomenon	Data gathering period lasted for nine months. One of researchers has been working for years in the position of branding manager of a mega project.
Other experts opinion	Collecting and applying modifications and experts opinions in this area	This research was reviewed by three professors and researchers of branding
Being participatory	participation and collaboration of some participants in research process	One of the main participants collaborated in coding stage.
Researcher premises	Researcher theoretical clarification of premises, trends and orientations	At the first, all premises and orientations of research were clearly explained.

CONCLUSIONS

This research aimed to introduce a branding model for multipurpose mega-projects in entertainment, residential, tourism, and sport, in the context of Iran. A grounded theory approach was used in order to introduce the model, which was derived from coding processes and data from interviews with experts. In the final model, the process of branding as the core category and diverse causal, contextual and intervening conditions for branding these types of projects were presented. The final results of the research were shown in

Figure 2.

Contributions

One of the main contributions of this research is its subject which, instead of being focused on tourism destinations or places, considers mega-projects relating to entertainment, residential, tourism and sport in Iran. Furthermore, the local and native situations within Iran are considered. While other models mostly focus on ranking cities and destinations, one of the gaps that this research covers is a focus on mega-projects.

In past branding models, very little research has used the paradigmatic model of grounded theory in which causal, contextual and intervening conditions, a core category, strategies and consequences are all considered at the same time. Most research has only mentioned causal conditions and consequences. From this point of view, the current research is comprehensive. The methodology of the research is also unique. Using mixed method and grounded theory approaches can be considered novel within the branding arena.

This research tried to devise a model by which to clarify the branding of these projects in Iran – a developing country that has its own visions. The emergence of these types of projects is a new phenomenon in other developing countries, and little research has focused on this field. In introducing our model, we tried to use the experiences of experts who have been successful and have even had internationally prosperous project experiences. We coded these experiences in this research.

Constraints

Like most grounded theory based research, the findings of this study are based on the points of view and experiences of a small number of experts; this will restrict the generalizability of the findings. Scholars believe that the results of grounded theory based research can only be generalized to theoretical premises (analytical generalization), and that generalization to the whole of society (statistical generalization) is impossible. This research generalized a set of spe-

cial results to a number of wider premises, rather than to wider conditions and situations. Therefore, statistical generalization of the results faces several restrictions.

Qualitative research requires real and motivated experts. Unfortunately, like many other domestic studies, this research faced a shortage of real experts and opportunities for interacting with them and benefiting from their views (although we tried to use international experts' opinions, directly or indirectly). In some interviews with architecture and urbanism experts, there was also a problem in that their perception of branding was wrong, and their comments had to be adjusted by researcher. However, branding process has being considered in these types of projects in Iran, but it lacks maturity. Therefore, the views of some experts were based on their deficient experiences in these projects.

We have to accept that branding is a new issue in developing countries, and owners and founders have not previously perceived the necessity of it. For this reason, even in some of the interviews it was obvious that some experts did not have an intact perception of branding. The area for these kinds of mega-projects is also novel in developing countries. Unfortunately, governmental and semi-governmental institutions that are responsible for these areas and their promotion know little about tourism, and almost nothing about branding. Thus, this research can be considered a good starting point in this subject.

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