



A communication synergy between place branding and local entrepreneurship activities in Pulau Langkawi

*Sabrina Mohd Rashid

Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia

sabrina@uum.edu.my

Norsiah Abdul Hamid

Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

A brand comprises characteristics such as name, logo, positioning, brand association, and personality. Place branding is a specific tool that suggests a more hedonistic approach to improving the identity of places. A place must be identified, extracted, and orchestrated to constructively associate the place brand to the local activities. This research focuses on place branding and local entrepreneurship activities in terms of their involvement in entrepreneurship development as well as their utilisation of media and communication. While most of the highlights on place branding have been on tourism attractions, it is time to refocus on augmenting the communication synergy of the local entrepreneurs' involvement. This research begins with field research and semi-structured interviews with self-employed local people who have not been strategically exposed. The research focuses on the branding of their entrepreneurship activities. The researchers conducted prior field research to better understand the situation in Pulau Langkawi; thus, the findings of this research can have significant implications to assist the local entrepreneurs to better promote their entrepreneurship activities. A new branding identity for Pulau Langkawi is developed with the assistance of relevant organisations and people. The three main constructs in this research, i.e., organisation, local entrepreneurs, and local products, are thought to be interconnected to the media and communication synergy. Local participation that has endeavoured to essentially develop these clusters of entrepreneurs must realise the growth opportunities for current and new entrepreneurs, as well as small and medium-sized entrepreneurs, which can cultivate and broadcast the branding of the place, contrary to popular belief. Continuous efforts on incubating knowledge-based growth and development may specifically create an ideal communication synergy for all intents and purposes to promote and communicate the uniqueness of a place.

Keywords: **Place branding, brand identity, local entrepreneurship, social media, communication synergy**

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

A place has its identity; thus, many places brand themselves continuously. The intrinsic complexity of place branding has prompted many questions about how a place is being trademarked and communicated. In some places, clever promotional campaigns have been used to brand themselves: for example, Hershey, Pennsylvania, is known as the “Sweetest Place on Earth”; Arlington, Texas, the “Bowling Capital of the World”; and San Diego, California, the “City with Sol” (Kemp et al., 2012).

Branding for countries is also a fascinating concept to reflect each country’s identity, such as “Uniquely Singapore”, “Incredible India”, “Naturally Nepal”, “Thailand – Happiness on Earth”, and “Vietnam – The Hidden Charm” (Tasci, 2011). Malaysian states also have their promotional campaigns that have been established for a long time, for example, Penang, “*Pulau Mutiara* (Pearl of the Orient)”; Sabah, “*Negeri di Bawah Bayu* (Land Below the Wind)”; and Melaka, “*Bandaraya Bersejarah* (The Historic State)”. Pulau Langkawi (Langkawi Island) has launched various slogans and taglines to brand the island. Nine slogans (as an effort towards branding) have been assigned to Pulau Langkawi since 1974 (refer to Table 1).

Table 1. Slogans to brand Pulau Langkawi

Year	Slogan
1974	Islands of Legends
	Isle of Legends
	99 Magical Islands
1987	Duty Free Island Destination
2001	Langkawi Tourism City
2007	Langkawi Geopark
2008	Langkawi the Jewel of Kedah
2012	Naturally Langkawi
2022	Best Wey

The slogans in Table 1 demonstrate the various identities given to Pulau Langkawi. While the slogans primarily emphasise the tourism potential of Pulau Langkawi, many are not aware that Pulau Langkawi has inspired creative craft entrepreneurship. Moreover, in the Langkawi Tourism Blueprint Initiatives 2011–2015 (Langkawi Development Authority [LADA], 2023), three main enablers, namely the tourism academy, branding and marketing, and agriculture and fishery, are emphasised, in addition to six main products of Pulau Langkawi, i.e., Iconic Geopark, New-faced Cenang, Luxury Stay & Festive Northwest, Living Museum, MICE Bitara, and Accreditation Programme. Unfortunately, none of these initiatives focuses on the local creative craft production and entrepreneurship.

Undoubtedly, entrepreneurship and tourism have a big impact on how people use their leisure time. While there has been a remarkable emergence of luxury homestays, attractive coffee shops, and retailing stores that cater to tourists, there are also local entrepreneurs who have made a strong contribution to the tourism industry in Pulau Langkawi, but remain overlooked.

This research synthesises the existing knowledge relating to the communication synergy between branding and local entrepreneurship activities, thus providing a foundation for identity-building for local entrepreneurs. The study proposes a place

branding framework for local entrepreneurs to build an identity for their craft products, that will communicate more salient information about their creative work. The aim of the proposed communication synergy framework is to manifest that there is much more to Langkawi than just tourism activities.

This study answers the following question: How do communication synergy and local entrepreneurship activities contribute to place branding? To answer this question, the study focuses on Pulau Langkawi, an archipelago of 99 islands in the Andaman Sea. Findings highlight that entrepreneurship activities lack communication exposure, and most of the activities are shrouded behind tourism-associated activities. This is especially true for the creative craft entrepreneurship, whereby the demonstration of craft making can be a very impactful activity if it is well planned and organised to attract visitors and tourists. Communication synergy challenges have hindered the potential of broadening the craft industry on the island as one of the major tourist attractions. The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: first, a narrative review on place branding and entrepreneurship is given. The context of the study and the research method are then detailed. Finally, findings, followed by a discussion, conclusion, limitations, and opportunities for further research, are presented.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication synergy in place branding

Place branding, just like any product or service branding, needs an intricate association to formulate its very own identity to communicate effectively. “A set of brand associations enable a brand to develop a rich and clear brand identity” (Ghodeswar, 2008). Branding involves reducing the number of connotations and focusing on the core associations that an organisation, product, or service has, to avoid ambiguity during brand communication (Scandellius & Cohen, 2016). Places consistently struggle with their branding, and thus, the application of branding techniques to places is required in various geographical entities, such as countries, regions, cities, and towns (Hanna & Rowley, 2008, 2011, 2013).

Place brands, including branding of organisations, products, or services, are multidimensional, multifaceted constructs that should be treated differently in terms of how they broadcast or promote themselves. Place brands include a wide range of variables, such as architecture, natural resources, history, economic and demographic characteristics, as well as intangible (experiential) attributes that stem from the symbolic traits of a place (Zelenskaya & Elkanova, 2021). Hanna and Rowley (2008) stated five (place) brand dimensions: culture, industry, agriculture, heritage, and tourism. From Zelenskaya and Elkanova’s (2021) study, this research recognises place branding’s multidimensionality through the multiplicity of attributes of a place, and also through the complexity of the place branding process, involving economic activities and local entrepreneurship.

Brand identity is strongly related to consumer perception and visible elements, including brand name, logo/symbol, typeface, colour, shape and product and benefit descriptions used in advertising, packaging, product identification, publications, letterheads, and websites, either real or imagined (Zaichkowsky, 2010), which are relevant to place branding. Thus, the projection of brand identity is significant to communicate the brand’s personality (Vinyals-Mirabent et al., 2019) and place branding.

Place branding is more than its creation and campaigning as part of place management; it is also a reflection of the residents and their activities (Kalandides, 2012).

It is important to understand that place branding must ensure that brands exist in the minds of people, as branding comprises emotional, intellectual, psychological, and physical aspects. In short, place branding is an extension of the physical and social environment of a place (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2006).

Fundamental to place branding are the concepts of identity and image. The identity of a place is required, extracted, and composed to further provide the place brand with a constructive association, which will also expand the image and projection of the place. Identity, in this context, does not only discuss everything about the place, but includes a blend of diverse categories of identification. Once the identity of a place is acknowledged, it develops towards a potential image and a hope, as to how a place is perceived (Boisen et al., 2018) and communicated universally. Hanna and Rowley's strategic place brand management model (SPBM) (2011) was used to guide this research to attain its objective.

The role of entrepreneurship on an island

Entrepreneurship tends to add to a greater sense of place and authenticity, but it may also have a compelling consequence on local development. There are two schools of thoughts on entrepreneurship: first, there are studies that have captured whether or not entrepreneurship strategies influence brand development; and second, there are other studies which have focused on entrepreneurship strategies by government and industries to stimulate economic growth (Moyle et al., 2020). Further, Moyle et al. (2020) posited that entrepreneurship strategies and economic growth in a place have been considerably underexplored. In fact, place branding should be harnessed through entrepreneurship which can offer new directions for the revitalisation of the local economies and communities (Go et al., 2014). Islanders have historically relied upon the exploitation of primary resources, e.g., fisheries, agriculture, or forestry for their livelihood. However, for many islands, these economic avenues are today less viable, owing to changes in environmental protection policies/legislation, increased costs of transportation or production, resource depletion, changes to resource allocation, or a combination of these factors. In such contexts, many turn to tourism as a tool for economic development (Brida et al., 2020).

Creating a distinctive place branding is necessary to direct an audience's attention to a particular destination. Schultz (2002) suggested that building a brand should start internally before it is communicated to the public. The residents of the island (place) should be provided with clear brand knowledge to communicate the brand that they want to portray to the public. Vallaster and de Chernatony (2005, p. 187) agreed with Schultz that "the process of internal brand building advances when a clear brand vision creates tension between the actual and ideal work setting, forcing people to work together to reduce misunderstanding of internal brand building".

In some instances, the relative contribution of tourism to the local economy is more significant than tourism on the mainland (Booth et al., 2020). In this regard, in-depth discussions on the dynamic of entrepreneurship can expose unique openings and projections to entrepreneurial success in islands.

The case of Pulau Langkawi

The current scenario in Pulau Langkawi has called for participatory place branding among the residents to boost local entrepreneurship. This research focuses on the communication synergy of local entrepreneurship, as it is one of the main items that should be highlighted

on the island. A lot of emphasis has been given to the “Naturally Langkawi” branding, which also has seen UNESCO’s full endorsement of the Geopark in Pulau Langkawi (Jaafar et al., 2012; Mohamad & Ahmad, 2010; Mohd Yusof et al., 2014).

While attaining an UNESCO endorsement is a distinguished achievement for the island, a lot more needs to be done to develop local entrepreneurship activities. A resident and also an entrepreneur in Pulau Langkawi, Karina Bahrin, has raised her concerns with the residents’ lack of knowledge on entrepreneurship on the island (Jaafar et al., 2012). The arrival of foreign investors and developers may overwhelm the local activities and establishments as can be seen in parts of Pulau Langkawi, for example, Pantai Cenang. Bouchaud and Tan (2015) shared a thought-provoking view of Pulau Langkawi’s hope and way of life that is now being put to the test by the surge in tourism and related developments. Bouchaud and Tan (2015), after meeting the residents from various walks of life (retired people, entrepreneurs, residents, artists, nature guides, café owners, etc.), summarised their observations as follows:

1. For Pulau Langkawi to have creative folks, it is nothing new, but their reliance mostly on tourism to make a living goes back to two decades ago. As few as they seem now, they will hopefully gain confidence in promoting their products, grow their number of followers, and diversify over time.
2. For the healthy development of the local art and craft scene, outsiders need to continue to breathe new life into old concepts and stimulate innovation among the local more traditional creative folks, and broadcast them universally.
3. For Pulau Langkawi to retain her culture and lay claim to a certain “style”, strategic communication and sustainability have to connect all the dots. Up until recently, the local way of life has always been sustainable.

Thus, improving the quality of residents in Pulau Langkawi with a strategic communication approach is needed (Thelander & Cassinger, 2017). Enhancing local entrepreneurship activities provides a vital platform for entrepreneurship development through specific contexts related to their self-capability (Kolawole & Ajila, 2015). Big-scale research has been done on entrepreneurship development by the local community in Kilim, Pulau Langkawi (Jaafar et al., 2014). Their findings indicate that the residents need to have more participation in entrepreneurship development, especially in communicating their activities universally (Falkheimer, 2014). Therefore, it is encouraged that the locals enthusiastically participate in local entrepreneurial activities as a fresh approach towards the branding of Pulau Langkawi. This research found that local entrepreneurs have interesting business ideas which remain unknown to many, and thus, the need to endorse the unsung heroes among Pulau Langkawi’s entrepreneurs.

STRATEGIC PLACE BRAND MANAGEMENT (SPBM) MODEL

To strengthen this study, the strategic place brand management (SPBM) model (Hanna & Rowley, 2011) was used as the fundamental theory. Hanna and Rowley (2011 & 2013), reviewed previous models on place branding and found that a more comprehensive model is needed to support both practice and research in the place branding field, which is in line with this study.

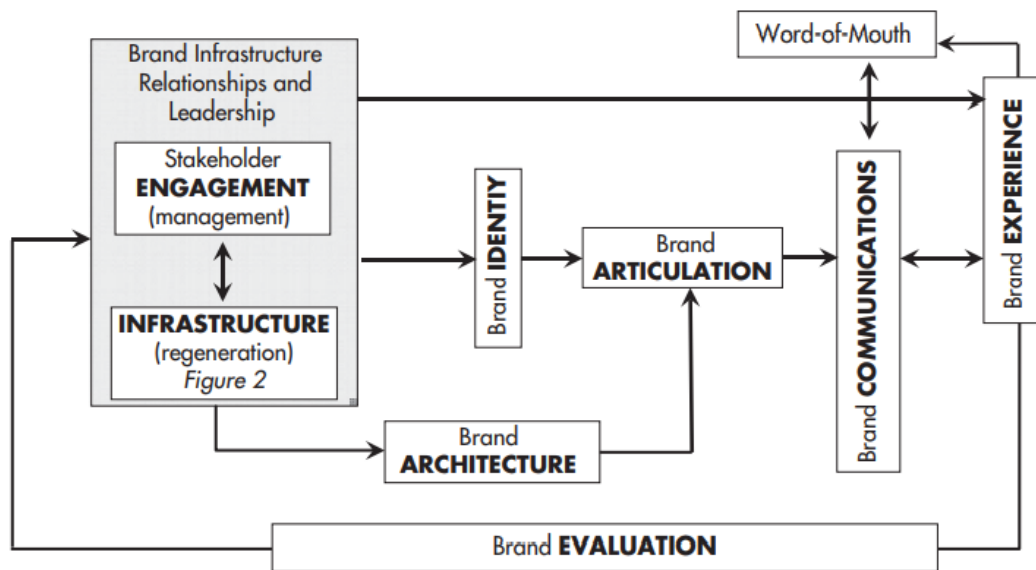


Figure 1. Strategic place brand management model (Hanna & Rowley, 2011)

Figure 1 illustrates the key components in place branding: brand evaluation, stakeholder engagement (management), infrastructure (regeneration), brand identity, brand architecture, brand articulation, marketing communications, brand experience, and word-of-mouth. Each component is interrelated, working from left to right. However, it can be seen that brand evaluation is placed as a continual process and created by multifaceted place interactions. Table 2 explains each component in the SPBM model (Hanna & Rowley, 2011).

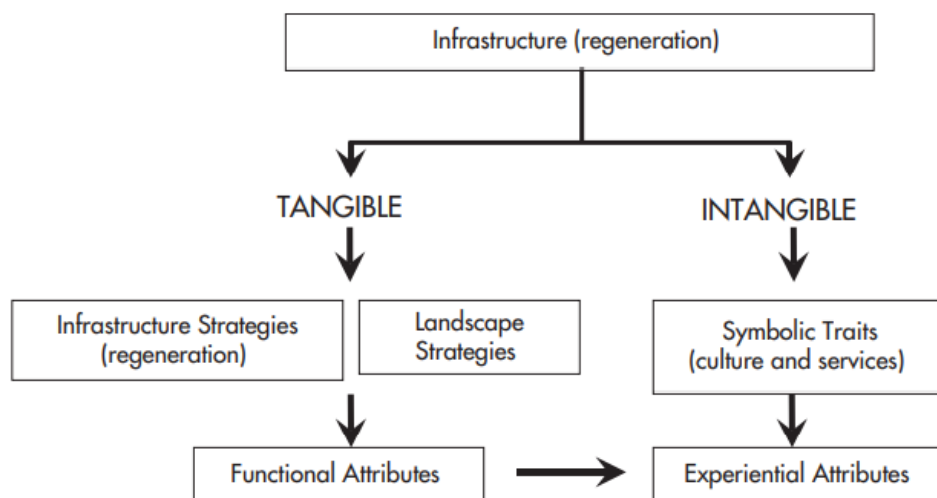
Table 2. Components of SPBM (Hanna & Rowley, 2011)

Brand evaluation	Brand evaluation refers to the progressions that are taken to gather comments on brand image and experience. Monitoring opportunities and satisfaction involve close association with stakeholders to ensure brand infrastructure meets and also exceeds expectations.
Stakeholder engagement	Stakeholder engagement (management) is the component that embraces the progressions, whereby stakeholders are acknowledged, their interests are raised, and interactions can happen. Place brand traits are not only shaped and influenced by brand managers and their organisations, but are the product of stakeholder networks and partnerships.
Infrastructure (regeneration)	Brand infrastructure (regeneration) is the component that signifies the existence, accessibility, and sufficiency of the functional (tangible) and experiential (intangible) place traits, and the likely need for their renovation and regeneration. Distribution of the brand experience involves investment in facilities and services to produce or improve the various features utilised by the place.
Brand identity	Brand identity is the component associated with the creation of the essence of the brand. Brand identity growth happens through the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses rooted in the place. The intensity of brand identity is affected by the attractiveness of the environment offering aesthetic pleasure through architecture, and a spectrum of parameters including culture, history, and the economy. Also, brand identity grows through the production of marketplace symbols (historic plaques, decorations, sculptures, benches, planters) and the enhancement of rituals (street parties, parades, ceremonies, sales events, artistic performances) influencing experience and what the place has come to be known for.

Table 2. (con't)

Brand architecture	Brand architecture is the component that emphasises the process of designing and managing brand portfolios. Places are composed of sub-brands linked with or owned by groups within the place. Such brands may be owned by local authorities, tourists, organisations, businesses (of all sizes), community services (such as schools), and groups.
Brand articulation	Brand articulation is the component that concentrates on the processes related to the expression of the brand through its verbal and visual identity through the choice and design of its place name, logo, colour palettes, and photographs.
Marketing communication	Brand communications is the component that concentrates on the activities linked to the communication of the brand identity. All of the discussed models consider brand communications to be an integral component of the place brand-management process.
Brand experience	Brand experience is the element in which the consumer engages with the brand. There is a requirement to consider consumers' general experiences with the brand, by embracing the service experience and sensory delights, based on sights, sounds, smells, and tastes.
Word-of-mouth	Word-of-mouth (WOM) is the component that includes the processes linked to the informal communication between 'consumers' of the brand experience. WOM offers a highly reliable means of encouragement since the communicator is not seen as having a vested interest.

The components of SPBM in Table 2 illustrate that it is possible that a strong communication synergy can enhance brand credibility, as well as expand the inclusive image (Mishod et al., 2022) of a place. Figure 2 presents the infrastructure components; the concern is with both the tangible and intangible traits of a brand. Physical and environmental infrastructure strategies, such as those connected to regeneration, are significant in delivering the practical traits of the place brand. There is also a necessity that the symbolic traits of a place play a role in the experiential attributes of the brand. The SPBM model, especially in terms of the regeneration trait, can conceptualise the place brand through its image and experience, to be of central significance to the physical environment and experience, and the key role that stakeholders can play in the brand-building process.

**Figure 2.** Infrastructure (Hanna & Rowley, 2011)

The SPBM model is proposed as a framework for contextualising place branding and informing and supporting place marketing and brand management as elaborated in Table 2. The focus of this research is on the infrastructure (regeneration) of a place (Figure 2). The infrastructure components consist of tangible (existence, accessibility, and sufficiency of the functions), and intangible (experiential) traits.

METHOD

This study adopted the qualitative approach. It focused on a combination of the progression of place branding and the local entrepreneurship activities in Pulau Langkawi. In other words, the researchers explored and attempted to understand the brand and the island through its daily routines and entrepreneurship activities.

Exploring and understanding place branding involves familiarisation, interaction, observation, and self-experience of the particular social setting. The qualitative approach chosen for this study is heavily based on Schutz's (1970) and Creswell's (2013) phenomenological study orientation, which has been described as a useful tool to explore Pulau Langkawi, as it focuses on the life of the locals and typification processes through which people make sense of their social reality. Similarly, Taylor and Bogdan (1998) emphasised choosing an appropriate method that is aligned with the nature of the research.

This research consisted of initial field research and interviews with the local entrepreneurs who have not been recognised and communicated with strategically, besides direct observations. The scope of the research is on the branding of the entrepreneurship activities that they have been dealing with. The interview questions were developed from the literature review and also from prior field research. Prior field research has been done by the same researchers to understand better the situation of Pulau Langkawi, and this research has significant implications to assist the locals in augmenting their local entrepreneurship activities.

Table 3. Phases of data collection

Phase 1	Initial field research was done to get to know the local entrepreneurship scene in Pulau Langkawi.
Phase 2	Five interviews were conducted. Two of the interviews were with organisations in Pulau Langkawi (O1 and O2), and three with active entrepreneurs in Pulau Langkawi (E1, E2, and E3).

Thematic content analysis is a descriptive presentation of qualitative data that was utilised in this research. The SPBM model supports in shaping the whole analysis and fabricating the intricacies of this research. The thematic analysis was based largely on the traits of the SPBM model as shown in Figure 2 earlier.

FINDINGS

An increasing number of cities, regions, and countries are in the quest of expanding their place positioning on a national or international level via place branding, and Pulau Langkawi is no exception. While Pulau Langkawi is renowned for its beautiful landscape, tourism activities, and duty-free advantages, there is still so much more to discover on this

legendary island. Among others, there should be an improved understanding on the place identity and communication synergy for the local entrepreneurs, as an intangible foundation for more holistic and integrated place branding, and not merely as a promotional activity. Thus, deeper intervention is required for fresh communication synergy among the local entrepreneurs to enhance their entrepreneurship levels and to be ultimately recognised.

The study explored the applicability of the SPBM components (Hanna & Rowley, 2011) in the process of developing a fresh synergy for the local entrepreneurs in Pulau Langkawi. The study ensured that all the components of the SPBM infrastructure were utilised in the data collection process.

From the researchers' observation in phase 1, which is the initial field research, entrepreneurs in Pulau Langkawi demonstrate a potential entrepreneurship establishment. They have ongoing entrepreneurial activities, and with continuous demand and supply, they appear to be contented with their performance and achievement; thus, there is no motivation to take their entrepreneurship further up the entrepreneurial ladder. From this field research, the researchers gained a better impression of the local entrepreneurship scene in Pulau Langkawi. For instance, the tourism-related entrepreneurs are more enthusiastic with taking their business further as compared to the indirect tourism-related entrepreneurs, for example, the creative craft and arts entrepreneurs. From the initial observations, the researchers are convinced that a deeper exploration is required to understand the situation better.

In phase 2, five semi-structured interviews were conducted, with two of them being with related organisations in Pulau Langkawi, and another three with local entrepreneurs. Referring to Figure 2, the themes selected for the interviews were based on the SPBM model. The brand infrastructure (regeneration) signifies the tangible and intangible traits that may assist in interpreting the transcribed interview data to be embodied in a structured way.

Infrastructure and landscape strategies

Researchers have found that physical allocation for entrepreneurs is critical. Participant O1 emphasised on assigning a larger space for local entrepreneurs for them to manage their creation and production with higher quality and distinction. Participant O1, also specifically suggested that tourist attraction venues, such as Dataran Lang and Jetty Point Complex (Pulau Langkawi) are strategic locations to be considered. Participant O2 agreed with Participant O1 on this matter; she argued that the current location to market local products is limited in terms of space, and thus, during the high peak season, or when demand is high, they have inadequate products in stock.

Sufficiency of products is important (Hanna & Rowley, 2011) for continuous sales. Thus, having the right storage to store all 16 products in their sales gallery is required. Participant O1 mentioned that there are also situations when there are products to be marketed, but somehow with the limited space that they have, it is difficult for them to display those products. Another subject matter that is significant to accentuate is the packaging of the products (Participants O1 & O2). Packaging, with the inclusion of the Pulau Langkawi brand on it, is essential to give the products greater mileage.

Participant O1 discussed the Pulau Langkawi Blueprint 2011-2015 which focuses on aspects such as product, infrastructure, and enablers, which have strengthened the current and future directions of Pulau Langkawi. It is Participant's O1's hope that the next blueprint for Pulau Langkawi will include the creation and development of more local products, as well as a working display space for promising entrepreneurs to showcase their creativity.

The entrepreneurs who participated in this research (E1, E2, and E3) agreed that space plays a big role in their entrepreneurship activities. Having an appropriate space and infrastructure may enhance their productivity and also sales. For example, Participant E3 is working on his products from his home, which is located very far away in a village, not easily accessible by tourists or the interested public. Hanna and Rowley (2011, 2013) agreed that existence, accessibility, and sufficiency are significant for a place to flourish and grow. On the other hand, Participants E1 and E2 were given a space to work on their products and also for tourists and the interested public to easily view how their products are made. However, these are in two different venues, which requires visitors to make separate trips to view the making of the respective products.

Symbolic traits

Symbolic traits, which consist of culture and service, may also signify the brand personality of a product and a place. Hanna and Rowley (2011, 2013) posited that arts and education are elements of culture, and thus, they are intangible, as with service. Participants O1 and O2 deliberated on this at length; they believed that the symbol of culture and the service of educating others is necessary to improve the understanding of a product by visitors, and subsequently, to experience the product, which will then enhance the experience of the place, as well as project the place as to how it should actually be. Activities like art demonstration, product promotion, and social media content (e.g., Facebook Live and TikTok reels), are added value for the local products, and also for the entrepreneurs (Participants O1 & O2) to promote the place and their products (Jothi et al., 2011; Voorveld, 2019). Participants O1 and O2 also emphasised on the administration and organisation of social media accounts to boost the promotion of the products. Additionally, the people factor is the main focus for intangible traits, as it may contribute to the place branding experience among the visitors.

Participants E1, E2, and E3, strongly contended that passion is critical when one is an entrepreneur, not only as the leader, but also as the employee. This is also what all three participants admitted of facing; they did not have the right employees with the skills to help them with production. The right attitude, interest, and willingness to work hard are a must to stay strong in this industry. Participant E1 has also trained his employees to acquire the necessary skills, as some of them only have the basic skills. For Participant E1, knowledge, and skills come hand-in-hand to strive in this field, not forgetting the experience, while Participants E2 and E3 agreed with Participant E1 on this.

Extension for the SPBM model

Elements that emerged from this research were added to the SPBM model. The findings from infrastructure and landscape strategies, and also from symbolic traits are summarised and demonstrated in Figure 3. The extension for the SPBM model is the output of this research as it provides the voice of the local entrepreneurs and the local authorities. While the emerging elements included in the extension are exclusively from Pulau Langkawi, the researchers are confident that they can be used for place branding based on local entrepreneurship in other places.

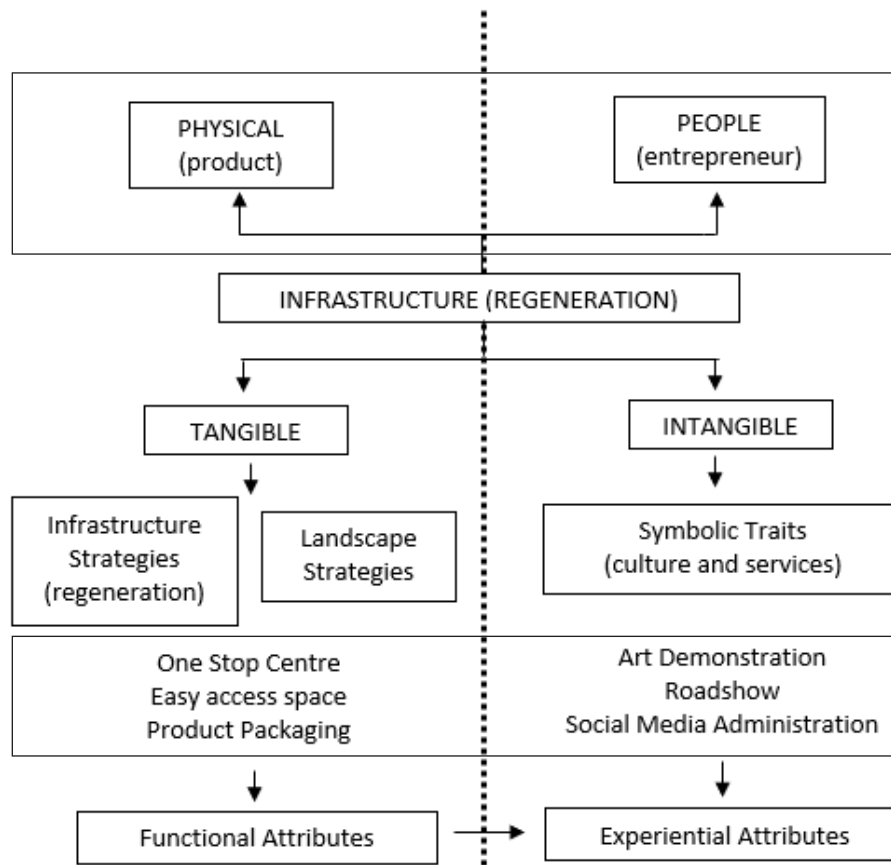


Figure 3. Extension of the SPBM model

The emerging elements in Figure 3 are highlighted with a box, at the top part of the figure, where researchers included the elements of “physical” and “people”. Physical refers to the local products by the local entrepreneurs. It is placed on the same side as the tangible item, as it is part of the infrastructure and landscape strategies. The element of People represents the local entrepreneurs; it is placed together with the intangible items. People (entrepreneurs) is part of the symbolic traits, because they are the ones with the identity, experience, and skills that mould the product into what it is meant to represent (e.g., the identity of the place).

Proposed communication synergy for place branding and local entrepreneurship

The proposed communication synergy mentioned in the earlier section is based on the voice of Pulau Langkawi locals. The three main constructs, organisation, local entrepreneur, and local product, are thought to be interconnected to synergy (Figure 4). For Pulau Langkawi, the Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) and PANORAMA Langkawi, are the main organisations dealing with more than 16 local entrepreneurs. Thus, conceivably, a call for more organisations to be on board is required to provide the infrastructure, as well as physical and virtual space, including consultants for the local entrepreneurs and their products. Local entrepreneurs are believed to have a strong passion, skills, and experience to be able to work with the organisations should they want to soar higher in their entrepreneurship journey, and also to be able to communicate their activities and products universally. As Participant O1 emphasised, attitude is important for the local

entrepreneurs to embark on this journey. As for the local products, to connect to place branding, elements of culture are necessary to provide the identity of the place, besides the quality and commercial value of the product. Consequently, Figure 4 answers the question of how communication synergy and local entrepreneurship activities contribute to place branding.

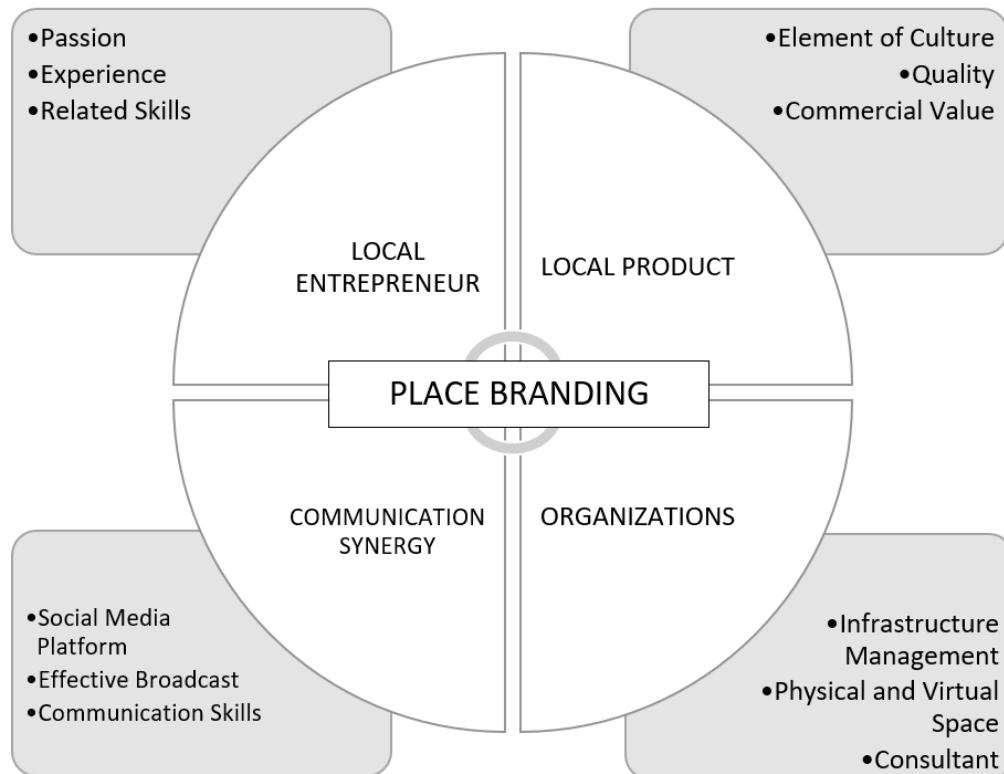


Figure 4. Proposed communication synergy for place branding and local entrepreneurship

Local participation (physical and people) that has endeavoured to develop these networks and clusters of entrepreneurs must realise the growth opportunities for current and new entrepreneurs, as well as small and medium-sized entrepreneurs, which in turn, can cultivate the branding of the place by creating brand awareness through social media (Ali et al., 2021; Mijan et al., 2020). Thus, continuous effort in incubating knowledge-based growth and development may create an ideal communication synergy to further promote place branding (Md Tahir et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

Place branding is increasingly getting the attention of relevant organisations (Shirvani Dastgerdi & De Luca, 2019). Pulau Langkawi aims to be a world-class island (LADA, 2016). However, the involvement of the local authorities, i.e., organisations, entrepreneurs, and products, is important in the branding process of a place, more so since Pulau Langkawi targets to provide educational tourism and geopark-themed tourism. Thus, the emphasis on communication synergy and involvement of local entrepreneurs is important for the purpose of enhancing place branding, since the essence of local products lies in the authentic skills and experience of the entrepreneurs. As for future research, exploration of

other islands or places would enrich the communication synergy variables proposed in this research.

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Sabrina Mohd Rashid (Dr)

is a senior lecturer at the Department of Multimedia Technology, School of Multimedia Technology and Communication (SMMTC), Universiti Utara Malaysia. Areas of expertise include brand identity, internal culture, and organisation identity.

Norsiah Abdul Hamid (Assoc Prof Dr)

is an associate professor at the School of Multimedia Technology and Communication (SMMTC), Universiti Utara Malaysia. Areas of expertise include media effects, media psychology, women's studies specifically on media, and knowledge society.
